

# **The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa**



UNIVERSITY *of the*  
WESTERN CAPE  
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**A dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History,  
University of the Western Cape, May 2004**

## DECLARATION

I, Ciraj Shahid Rassool, declare that **'The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa'** is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Ciraj Shahid Rassool  
6 May 2004



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation has been long in gestation, and as a result the debts I owe to people on four continents are indeed numerous. The research for this doctoral dissertation began indirectly in the United States in the late 1980s, where I completed an M.A. at Northwestern University. There I discovered how significant the bibliographic and archival knowledge of librarians and bibliographers has been in assisting researchers in the field of African Studies. The indefatigable Hans Panofsky (Northwestern) and the late Moore Crossey (Yale) were extremely helpful answering my questions about the paper trails of I.B. Tabata's U.S. travels. Hans gave me a room to work in for an entire year, which also housed the originals of the Carter-Karis Collection of South African political materials, and it is with the treasures contained inside these boxes that I was able to think about the history and political economy of archiving resistance and the meanings made in resistance archives for the first time. In addition, the late Dan Britz helped me with materials in exchange for my Afrikaans translations of his correspondence from South Africa that had sought in him a forgotten Boer soul in America.

The idea of the dissertation began with a suggestion by Francis Wilson at a dinner party at his and Lindy's home at the beginning of the 1990s, and its shape was further developed by conversations and discussions in Zimbabwe, Britain, the United States, and South Africa over the succeeding decade. I was an Oppenheimer Fellow in the Centre of African Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1991, where I learnt about the politics of culture while conducting interviews about the culture of politics. I went back to Britain again in 1994-5, this time to Cambridge, where, thanks to Patricia Hayes, I got access to a world of libraries, seminars and conversations that attuned me substantially to issues of cultural history and lives as productions. I went back to the United States in 1998 as a visiting lecturer in Southern African history at Yale, and this time was able to conduct more research, while immersed in the stimulating debates of the Agrarian Studies seminar and the forums of the Institute of African Studies.

In the US, I have benefited from various forms of assistance over many years. Tom Karis and George Houser responded to my requests for information. Bob Edgar obtained research materials for me. Deirdre Levinson Bergson gave me hospitality and taught me much about the Unity Movement and its activists. I also met with an ageing Gwendolen Carter shortly before she died, and held discussions about resistance history with Tom Karis and Gail Gerhart. At Northwestern in the late 1980s, John Rowe, Ivor Wilks, Karen Hansen and Ibrahim Abu Lughod encouraged me, while Sarah Maza taught me more than I was aware of then.

At Yale in the late 1990s, Jim Scott and David Apter provided much stimulation in enriching my understandings of the 'culture of politics'. In 2002, I was enormously fortunate to benefit from the stimulating environment of the Centre for the Study of Public Scholarship at Emory University, where I spent a semester as a Rockefeller Fellow in the Program on the Institutions of Public Culture. All the participants, faculty, fellows, administrative staff and students contributed in various ways to the progress of this project. This stimulation gave me the final, vital push that enabled me to complete the dissertation. For this, I owe an enormous debt especially to Cory Kratz and Ivan Karp for their scholarly generosity, and in enriching the intellectual quality of my research. I continue to benefit from ongoing contact and engagement with them.

In Britain, I benefited from various forms of assistance from Doreen and Michael Muskett, Norman Traub and his family, Livingstone Mqotsi, Baruch Hirson, Hillel Ticktin and Jeff Rudin. I had fruitful discussions with Lionel Cliffe about independent Tanzania and Zambia in the 1960s, and with Shula Marks and John Lonsdale about history and biography. In Harare, Zimbabwe, Gordon Naidoo, Shiraz Ramji, Andrew Morrison and Amina Hughes provided logistical support, while Alie and Ursula Fataar generously answered my questions.

It was also in Harare where I first met my late great aunt, Jane Gool - then still in exile - shortly after her partner, I.B. Tabata had died. Aunty Jane and her sister Aunty Minnie were always very supportive of my research, and answered all my questions, even when they were complicated ones. For many years, it was difficult for me to write of matters of the personal and political for fear that my conclusions might cause any hurt, or might be deemed to be disrespectful. I trust that I have managed to avoid doing this without censoring myself.

I owe enormous debts to librarians, archivists and curators at a number of archives and museums in South Africa. Here I wish to thank Leonie Twentyman-Jones, Lesley Hart, Jill Gribble and Yasmin Mohamed of Manuscripts and Archives at UCT, Cecilia Blight and Sandy Rowoldt of Cory Library at Rhodes, Michelle Pickover at the Cullen Library at Wits, Razia Saleh of SAHA and Eric Itzkin at MuseumAfrica. In the Eastern Cape, a number of people were helpful to me in various ways. In Lesseyton, Bailey and the Queenstown area more generally, Ayanda Bashe assisted me with fieldwork, while Magdalene and Malibongwe Tabata gave their time generously. In Qumbu, Cadoc Kobus answered my questions as directly as he could. I also wish to thank Pat Fahrenfort for all her assistance with transcribing of interviews.

Formally, I benefited from financial and institutional support from a range of sources. The University of the Western Cape granted me research leave and gave me research support. CODESRIA gave me a small research grant. I have benefited from research support from the Project on Public Pasts (POPP) and the Visual History Project, two NRF-funded research projects in UWC's History Department. I also wish to acknowledge the Programme on the Institutions of Public Culture, whose

committee members selected me to take up a Rockefeller Fellowship to the Center for the Study of Public Scholarship at Emory University. I alone, however, am responsible for the research findings and conclusions contained in this dissertation.

At UWC over many years, I benefited from various forms of support and assistance from Colin Bundy (who was my original supervisor), Peter Kallaway, David Bunn, Andrew Nash, Peter Vale, Arnold Temu, André Odendaal and John Hendricks. At the District Six Museum, which tries to find new ways of reflecting on Cape Town's pasts, I have worked closely with and have learnt much from many colleagues, especially Valmont Layne, Crain Soudien, Peggy Delport, Lucien le Grange, Stan Abrahams, Terence Fredericks, Vincent Kolbe, Anwah Nagia, Sandra Prosalendis, Tina Smith and Jos Thorne. I have benefited particularly from ongoing discussions and exchanges with Irwin Combrinck, whose knowledge of Cape Town's resistance history is indeed encyclopaedic. I continue to be inspired by the Museum's beauty and complexity.

During the time of the production of this dissertation, I have been a full-time academic in History at UWC, fully immersed in programmes of teaching and research, in all of its different phases and components over more than a decade. I have benefited enormously from my colleagues and students in the stimulating and challenging environment of the History Department. My own personal development as a historian owes much to the myriad of conversations, seminar exchanges and collaborative work with my colleagues, particularly Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley, Patricia Hayes, Martin Legassick (who finished the supervision of this dissertation), Andrew Bank, Premesh Lalu and Nicky Rousseau. Andrew Bank and Leslie Witz also kindly did extra teaching and other work to give me more time to write. All my colleagues have covered for me in many ways over a long time.

My exchanges and collaborations with my colleagues occurred in the cut and thrust of undergraduate and postgraduate history teaching in settings ranging from the People's History Programme in the late 1980s and early 1990s to the more recent programmes in Public History, Visual History and Museum Studies. They also took place in the forums of the South African and Contemporary History Seminar, where I continue to learn a great deal. These discussions and exchanges bore enormous methodological fruit as a number of us began to rethink the conventions of resistance history at the same time as apartheid gave way to democracy. While I take responsibility for my own methodological formulations and approaches, I acknowledge an enormous debt to my colleagues, particularly Leslie Witz and Gary Minkley with whom I have worked most closely.

A long list of friends, colleagues, and political and cultural activists have provided support, assistance, advice and encouragement in various ways, often without them knowing it, including Bridget Thompson, Stanley Hermans, Tina Smith, Michael Hands, Tina Schouw, Paul Grendon, David de Jong, Bupendra Makan, Donna Pankhurst, Jon Lunn, Suzan Quilliam, Giorgio Miescher, Lorena Rizzo, Dag

Henrichsen, Wolfram Hartmann, Livia Nomvuyo Tyam, Dan Yon, Josi Frater, Paul Landau, Rob Gordon, Livio Sansone, Birgitta Svensson, Helen Bradford, Christopher Saunders, Shamil Jeppie, Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, Suzie Newton-King, Terri Barnes, Dave Scher, Madeleine Fullard, Paul Johnson, Carolyn Hamilton, Omar Badsha, Bogumil Jewsiewicki, Allison Drew, Selim Gool, Balasubramanyam Chandramohan, Neville Alexander, Luli Callinicos, Pumla Madiba, Dumisani Sibayi, Lesley Townsend, Sifiso Ndlovu, Yazir Henri, Zayd Minty, Luvuyo Dondolo, Marcus Solomon, Ute Lehman, Gesine Kruger, Eve Bertelsen, Mahmood Mamdani, Noëleen Murray, Deirdre Prins, Noel Solani, André Marais, Gwen Wilcox, Roger Galant, Wonga Mancoba, Benita Parry, Phyllis Ntantala Jordan and R.O. Dudley. During the 1980s, I was educated in the analysis of social texts in clandestine reading groups. I owe enormous debts to my comrades of old, who taught me to think and to read. They know who they are.

Over the years, I have had support and encouragement from my sisters and brothers, Fazilét, Michail, Denley and Alia, other members of my family, Nasim and Joe Rassool, Reza and Ruth Rassool, Joan and Wyness Jardine, Russell Bell, Kay, Feyruz and Zarina Rassool, Zenariah Barends, and family friends, the Edelbergs. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my partner and colleague Patricia Hayes for her patience and sacrifices over many years, for her wisdom and generosity and for supporting me unstintingly without foregoing rigorous criticism. And I should not forget my chief companion and muse, Bart, who often gave up more important duties and desires to be at my side.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Fazil Rassool and Biddy Crowe Rassool, who nurtured in me an enquiring mind, and to the memory of my grandfather, Daniel Michael Crowe (security surveillance file number 888), who was a member of the Communist Party, and who first stimulated my imagination about the cultural history of radical politics.

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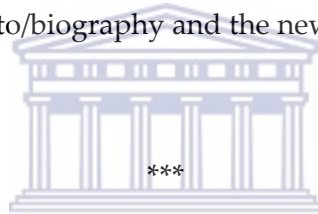
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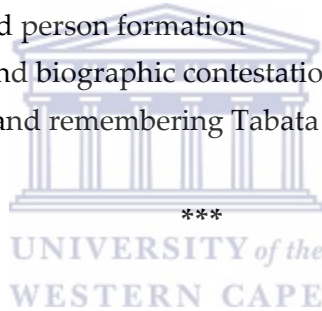
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## ABBREVIATIONS

AAC	All-African Convention
ADC	Alexander Defense Committee
ALC	African Liberation Committee (of the OAU)
ANC	African National Congress
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
Anti-CAD	Anti-Coloured Affairs Department
APDUSA	African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa
APLA	Azanian People's Liberation Army
ASI	African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
CAMP	Comparative Africana Microform Project
CATA	Cape African Teachers' Association
CONTRALESA	Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPR	Certified Personnel Register
CPSU	Cape Peninsula Students' Union
DACST	Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (1994-2004)
IDAF	International Defence and Aid Fund
IJR	Institute for Justice and Reconciliation
FI	Fourth International
FIOSA	Fourth International Organisation of South Africa
FLN	Front de la Libération National, l'Algérie (National Liberation Front, Algeria)
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HUC	Head Unity Committee of the NEUM
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
IDAF	International Defence and Aid Fund
LEF	Langa Educational Fellowship
MK	uMkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), military wing of the ANC
NAHECS	National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre, University of Fort Hare
NEF	New Era Fellowship
NEUM	Non European Unity Movement

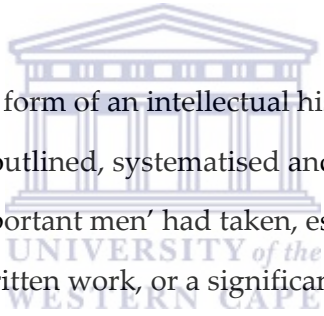
NLF	National Liberation Front
NMC	National Monuments Council
NMF	Nelson Mandela Foundation
NUM	New Unity Movement
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
ODP	Oral Documentation Project (African Studies Institute, Wits)
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
PPP	Prometheus Printers and Publishers
RIM	Robben Island Museum
SABC	South African Broadcast Corporation
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADET	South African Democracy Education Trust
SADF	South African Defence Force (of the apartheid state)
SAHO	South African History Online
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resources Agency
SANDF	South African National Defence Force (post-1994)
SBF	Steve Biko Foundation
SDS	Socialist Students Union (Germany)
SML	Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University
SOYA	Society of Young Africa
TLSA	Teachers' League of South Africa
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
UMSA	Unity Movement of South Africa
UWC	University of the Western Cape
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
WPSA	Workers' Party of South Africa
YCCC	Yu Chi Chan Club
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZBA	Zoutpansberg Balemi Association

## INTRODUCTION

The research for this dissertation started off as an exercise in political history. Amid a resurgence of South African political biography both inside and outside the academy in the 1990s, this study set out to research Isaac Bangani Tabata's life as an exercise in political biography and resistance history. In its original conception, it aimed to recover I.B. Tabata as a means of addressing serious shortcomings in a historiography of resistance that had paid little attention to the Unity Movement. Tabata had passed away shortly before the project began, and the main research challenges seemed to be largely empirical and logistical. The early 1990s was a time of political change. Political movements were unbanned. Exiles were starting to return. In some quarters, South African resistance history was beginning to take on a triumphal tone of political victory and rebirth in the wake of Nelson Mandela's walk to freedom at Victor Verster prison in 1990. This also marked a further moment in which historical research was framed as the recovery of hidden or neglected pasts, as researchers created gaps in order to fill them. In the early to mid-1990s, these histories of resistance began to be connected to a longer narrative of reconciliation and reconstruction.

While it seemed difficult to connect the trajectory of Tabata's life into a liberation movement's triumphal narrative, or to an extended history of reconciliation, I could certainly attempt to fill Tabata's historiographical gap with a chronological account of his political life. It seemed possible to benefit from research opportunities that the period of return and negotiation had opened up. Indeed, it seemed that the logistical problems of gaining access to archives of liberation movements in general, and to sources and archives associated with Tabata and the Unity Movement in particular were fast easing. It might even be possible to have access to Tabata's political colleagues who would be able to impart their memories and assessments. Moreover, in the case of I.B. Tabata, it helped that an archival collection in his name and that of his movement had just been installed at the University of Cape Town as part of the general process of 'return'.

My own work at the time drew on research I did for a Masters degree, and was geared towards disaggregating lines of affinity and disagreement in South African Trotskyism in the 1930s and 1940s, whose clandestine formations seemed to underpin much of what was known about the Unity Movement. I was also interested in the Unity Movement and Trotskyist discussion clubs as sites in which analyses of South African history had emerged. The tasks of a dissertation about Tabata seemed fairly straightforward. A study of Tabata's life and work would be an exercise in resistance history. This would be an assessment of his public and clandestine political career as well as of his writings. The biography would be - as many would have expected - an examination of a resistance project, part socialist, part nationalist, in the form of the All African Convention (AAC) and the Unity Movement. It would have I.B. Tabata in the leading role, with all the rest standing as the supporting cast of political followers, comrades and opponents.

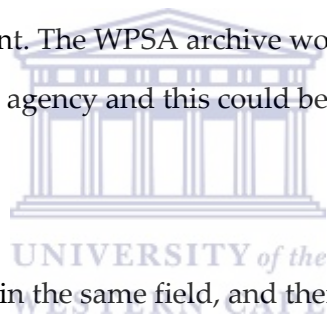


This study could also take the form of an intellectual history, in which Tabata's political ideas and analyses would be outlined, systematised and evaluated. This was one of the forms that biographies of 'important men' had taken, especially when they had produced a large corpus of written work, or a significant archival record of their intellectual or political career had been created. Intellectual biographies had also been written of political leaders associated with an entire body of political theory or the ideas of a political movement. This would be an opportunity to evaluate Tabata's analysis of the agrarian question, his emphases on political unity, his writings on the principled strategy of boycott, his study of Bantu education. It would also be an opportunity to appraise the positions he had taken at the time of the Unity Movement split in the late 1950s, to reveal information about the setting up of an exiled presence from the 1960s, tracing his influence and impact on the political landscape over time.

Moreover, this would be an opportunity to discover the roots of Tabata's radical politicisation, the origins of his political ideas and the nature of his influences. Was it Bulhoek, where a massacre had occurred not far from where Tabata was brought up? Was it Fort Hare, where he had studied? Did his ideas emerge out of conditions of rural

transformation in the Eastern Cape? It seemed possible to establish a coherence and systematic sense of Tabata's political thought, and to trace its germination, development and maturation. All that was needed was access to the appropriate archives and sources, which had been previously neglected or out of bounds.

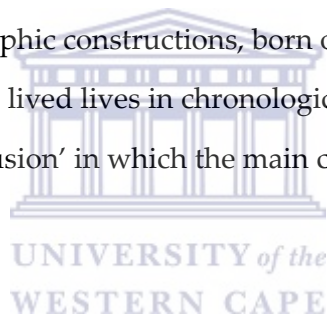
I suspected that the answers lay in the Trotskyist formations in Cape Town in the 1930s and 1940s, especially in the Worker's Party of South Africa and its public debating forum, the Spartacus Club, with which Tabata had been associated. Answers also seemingly lay in his association with his fellow Trotskyists, Jane and Goolam Gool. I had just taken the initiative to facilitate the acquisition of a portion of the WPSA archive for the Mayibuye Centre at UWC, and had access to another portion of the archive that was in other hands. It seemed that many of the answers to questions about origins and causation, and the 'making' of I.B. Tabata, were going to be found in his covert Trotskyist political engagement. The WPSA archive would provide documentary evidence of hidden Trotskyist agency and this could be supplemented by interviews with Tabata's comrades.



Other scholars were working in the same field, and there was some communication amongst us. I corresponded and met with Baruch Hirson and Allison Drew, both of whom had done substantial documentary collection and writing on South African Trotskyism. We shared our insights with each other, as well as our knowledge of the sources. Both Hirson and Drew were doing biographical research as part of the broad project of uncovering as much as possible about the history of South African Trotskyism, including the politics of the Unity Movement and its activists such as Tabata. There was no need to compete with each other in the empirical field of South African Trotskyist and Unity Movement history. After all, I had defined my topic in biographical ways around Tabata. During the 1990s, both Hirson and Drew kept in touch with me, keen to discover the outcome of my research. What new facts and insights about Tabata's life had I discovered? One major publication on South African Trotskyism, which Hirson

put together, announced that “a full-length biography” of Tabata was being “prepared by Ciraj Rassool in Cape Town”.<sup>1</sup>

As my research began, and I started to rethink South African historiography with an eye on biography, I realised how the fields of resistance history and political biography in South Africa seemed dead set against the consideration of theoretical issues of the relationship between biography and history, and individual and society, and of issues of narrative, subjectivity and discourse. This did not mean that there weren't theoretical propositions that underpinned the research of historians of South African resistance politics. The history of a life tended to be approached as a linear human career formed by an ordered sequence of acts, events and works, with individuals characterised by stability, autonomy, self-determination and rational choice. At best, individuals were viewed as units of social forms, with life histories as prisms for the study of social processes. These linear biographic constructions, born out of realist projects, where subjects were thought to have lived lives in chronological narratives, served to perpetuate a 'biographical illusion' in which the main challenges of the historian were deemed to be empirical.



The latest doctoral studies at the time in South African political biography, those by Steven Gish on A.B. Xuma and Catherine Higgs on D.D.T. Jabavu, reproduced these documentary, positivist approaches to the study of lives, and their projects seemed purely directed towards establishing the chronological narrative of a life and pursuing a notion of its recovery into the historical record. More generally, histories of resistance continued to bear the conventional hallmarks of individualism, linearity, order and coherence, and life histories produced within social history continued to document lives in realist frames of recovery. These methodological approaches emerged in the domain of public history as well, as life histories of forgotten or suppressed pasts were recovered through a variety of mediums and heritage projects. The process of democratisation of

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<sup>1</sup> Baruch Hirson, 'Profiles of Some South African Trotskyists', *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1993, p 94.



South African society provided the impetus for an explosion of audiovisual projects and heritage initiatives to recover the truth of real lives of political leaders as lessons of democracy, leadership and the triumph of the human spirit. Here Nelson Mandela's epic life history, framed as a 'long walk to freedom', came to stand for the nation's past.

In this dissertation, no all-embracing narration of Tabata's life as a political giant or significant intellectual has been constructed. Instead, this study has sought to transcend the realist paradigm as well as the documentary impulse to discover the hidden chronological narrative of a life or to expose its concealed moral frailties. Instead of a biography of I.B. Tabata driven by empirical demands, I have attempted to approach the individual and biography in a much more theoretically informed way around questions of narrative, the relationship between subjects and discursive practices, and the narrative worlds into which people are born. I have sought to understand the complex relationship between life and narrative, the dialogue between biographical processes and autobiographical traces, and the narrative worlds of institutions such as political formations, which have given rise to storied lives. Indeed what started off as a study of political history became a study of the cultural history of politics as well as the politics of historical production. What began as a biography of Tabata became a much broader encounter with the cultural politics of biography in the academy and the public domain, drawing where possible on those theoretical insights which might produce a much more nuanced study of biographic formation.

In this dissertation, I have extended David William Cohen's approach to the production of history to present a case for examining processes of biographic production. This focus argues for attention to be given to biographical relations and to an understanding of conditions of biographical production. It is critical to understand different forms of biographical mediation as well as the uses to which biographies have been put. It is necessary to include in this approach an appreciation of multiple and contending biographical narrations, as well as different genres, mediums and formats in which biographic narratives have been produced. It is the genealogies of these biographic

productions that need to be understood, including their continuities and narrative ruptures.

In presenting these arguments, this dissertation presents a case for transcending approaches to historical studies that rely on distinctions and hierarchies between history and source, as well as history and heritage. It suggests that biographical narratives have been produced inside and outside the academy, through written and spoken words, through images and exhibitions, through archival collections and memorials, through funeral practices and commemorative occasions. The purposes of biographic production at different times have included building liberation movements and political solidarity, and fostering the development of new national identities.

This dissertation is divided into two parts, each with four chapters. Part One undertakes an examination of theoretical and methodological questions about biography and history in general as well as in South Africa. Part Two extends the theoretical and methodological insights about biographic production to an understanding of the production and contestation of I.B. Tabata's biography. Chapter One examines biography's philosophical and disciplinary history as a knowledge form, and the constitutive elements of conventional biography. In looking at the limited ways that historians have sought to transcend individualism with studies of social processes, this chapter argues that some of the more productive insights about biography and narrative have occurred in literary studies, such as the argument against the distinction between biography and autobiography as well as the idea that biographic narration occurs not only subsequent to, but within life itself. Building upon these insights, the chapter ends by arguing for an approach to biography employing the concept of the production of history.

Chapter Two examines the main forms that biography has taken in published form outside the academy: as studies that have constructed biographic greatness as lessons of history or as its converse, public exposés of hidden truths of moral deviation and

manifest dishonesty. Through a case study of Frida Kahlo, this chapter also examines the cultural politics of biography's intersection with the making of celebrity as her life was appropriated within the Hollywood biopic. This chapter also studies the entry of biography into symbolic topographies and landscapes of heritage, through the memorial complex and the Heroes' Acre, and argues that in spite of the biographic contests of memory that have emerged, the most productive approaches to biography in the public domain have occurred through museum exhibitions, which have explored the relationship between biography and image making, as well as lives as cultural productions.

Chapters Three and Four focus on the features of resistance history and political biography in the academy and the public domain in South Africa. Chapter Three examines the conventional biographic research prominent in resistance studies conducted within the field of South African documentary history, associated with and inspired by the work of Tom Karis and Gwendolen Carter. It also examines the approaches to life history on the part of South African social historians who have emphasised the lives of local leaders, and have focused on lives of ordinary people as units of collective experience and as prisms of social processes. Both documentary historians and social historians sought to narrate recovered pasts into realist narratives of the nation, based upon conventional hierarchies of source and history. Biographies of leaders and ordinary people were created as ready-made stories of the nation in microcosm, with people placed into pre-ordained categories of resistance, without any attention given to processes of subject construction or narratives of life.

What occurred in this research was a 'double' or 'compound modernism', involving an encounter between modernist historical methods and the modernist imaginaries of political institutions and national or local leaders, or individuals understood as bearers of pre-determined group identities. Some studies, however, began to pose questions about life history, symbolism and identity and the terrain of resistance itself. Clifton Crais has argued for a focus on the subaltern through a culturalist understanding of the

political.<sup>2</sup> However, this chapter suggests that it is also necessary to address how histories of secular modernist politics can be reconceptualised in cultural terms beyond the framings of documentary and social history. It suggests that this can be achieved by focusing on the modernist political formation as an institution of knowledge production, one aspect of which has involved the evolution of conceptions of personhood and the narration, dissemination and contestation of biographies of political leaders as part of political agitation and mobilisation.

Chapter Four examines how the individual and biography took on renewed centrality in the South African public arena in the mid-1990s, as celebratory biographic narratives were constructed in almost every sphere of public culture and through virtually every medium of historical representation. This included the domains of museums and national heritage as resistance lives, especially of leaders, formed a new focus of national heritage as lessons of the past. Political funerals became arenas for official biographic construction while their ceremonies and protocols also became spaces of tension between family and nation, as well as over biography's narrative terms. Modes of biographic narration also became incorporated into the lives that people lived through rituals of governance, political transformation and public policy, as biographic narrative became intertwined with people's lives.

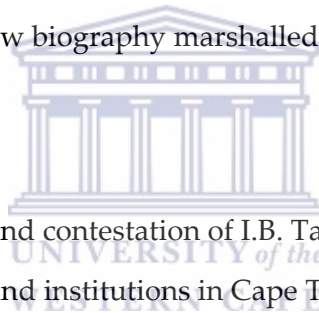
In this public biographic focus, Nelson Mandela was singled out for special attention across a range of mediums and institutions of national heritage, as his 'long walk to freedom' became the key trope for the South Africa's history, narrated as the triumph of reconciliation. The chapter examines the genealogy of biographic attention given to Mandela from the early 1960s when he was chosen as the personification of the South African struggle. It also studies the settings for biographical production in a lineage of institutions that included the International Defence and Aid Fund in exile. This

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<sup>2</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

genealogy of biographic mediation was bequeathed to the Mayibuye Centre in the early 1990s and was in turn inherited by the Robben Island Museum.

Chapter Four ends by analysing the rise of foundations such as the Nelson Mandela Foundation as institutions both of legacy management and biographical production. It argues that the preservation of Mandela's memory required ongoing critical biographic work, not its imposition through public landmarks and not a concentration on image management and brand awareness. As with the entry of biography into the realm of memory in other parts of the world, in South Africa the most challenging methodological approaches which have transcended frames of documentary realism and triumphant celebration have been in museum exhibitions. At both the Hector Pieterse Museum in Gauteng and at the District Six Museum in Cape Town, attention was paid to issues of knowledge production and mediation in the work of biographic representation in ways that saw biography marshalled in the process of developing a critical citizenship.



The focus on the production and contestation of I.B. Tabata's biography in Part Two begins with a survey of sites and institutions in Cape Town and the Eastern Cape where his life was marked, commemorated or narrated. It also examines the limitations of approaches to Tabata's life and politics in the documentary histories that have focused on the Unity Movement, especially in the work of Allison Drew, Baruch Hirson and Robin Kayser. These shortcomings arose from a methodological preoccupation with documents as seemingly transparent windows upon political policies and with uncovering real lives of political leadership. In the cases of both Drew and Hirson, their projects of empirical recovery were connected to political evaluations of the social analyses and political strategies of socialist activists, in order to draw lessons from the storehouse of the past. Robin Kayser mined the Tabata Collection as merely a repository of facts of resistance, to enable records to be set straight. In the process, he overlooked prior processes of narration and authorship, and indeed the mediated nature and storied character of the Tabata archive. The challenge remained of how it might be possible to

approach the study of modernist political formations in ways that transcended the equally modernist historical methods of institutional and social history.

This challenge is taken up in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, which consist of a sustained study of the production and contestation of I.B. Tabata's biography. Chapter Six attempts to historicise Tabata's biography, which can be understood as having undergone a transition from biographic denial and a stress on collective leadership, to biographic narration under conditions of repression. This process culminated in the embrace of biography as an element of a politics of presidentialism, in which Tabata's biography became a means of projecting the movement in exile. While this transition from collectivity and reticence to individuation and biography was evident in photographic images, it was Tabata's work of writing and authorship, characterised by a process of individuation, which constituted a biographic threshold. The most significant relationship through which Tabata became a writer and author was that with Dora Taylor.

This was also the relationship through which Tabata acquired a biography. Indeed, it can be argued that it was Dora Taylor who was the primary author of Tabata's biographic narrative. It is Tabata's complex relationship with Dora Taylor for forty years, characterised by mutuality, devotion and desire, that are the concerns of Chapter Seven. This was an ongoing relationship that unfolded in a borderland between the public and the private domains. It was a relationship that spanned assistance with political agitation through writing, and incorporated mutual cultural interests and inevitably a love relationship. In return, Tabata supported Taylor's efforts at literary and historical writing, and assisted in the attempts to have these published. What began as a working relationship of party members grew into a vital intellectual and emotional partnership which went through different phases in South Africa and overseas, and lasted until Taylor's death in England in the mid-1970s. It was out of a relationship of utter devotion and selflessness that Dora Taylor produced the biographic narrations of Tabata that fed a politics of presidentialism. Perhaps the most significant biographical

tribute to Tabata that Taylor constructed was the archival collection that entered the University of Cape Town from 1989.

The final chapter examines the relations of paternalism and patronage which characterised the Unity Movement's political formations as they emerged in the 1940s and 1950s. These formations, in some ways, resembled a family, but more so a school. While schools have been enabling institutions, they have also been institutions of discipline and constraint. This certainly was the case with the Unity Movement, whose forums of knowledge formation were also structures of person formation. In this educational structure, Tabata's biography of leadership was narrated as historical lesson, and as a model to be followed.

The contests and challenges over I.B. Tabata's leadership that erupted in the movement in South Africa in the 1950s and in Lusaka in the 1960s emerged out of these ambiguities and contradictions. This chapter examines the internal dissent that gave rise to contests of Tabata's biography. Tabata's biography had become a form of authority, turned into lessons of leadership, and it was challenged for the modes of authoritarianism and deception it represented. The chapter ends by studying the memory contests between different factions of the Unity Movement that occurred on Tabata's death and those that unfolded at his funeral. Here, secular eulogies of Tabata's life were made to accommodate Christian narrations, as a severely weakened political movement was unable to contain the narrative boundaries of Tabata's biography.

The dissertation ends with a short postscript on historical practice and looks at my own practice as a historian in the academy and the public domain. Based on my experience in a range of sites in which histories and biographies have been produced, I go on to make a case for methodological and theoretical attention to be given to the construction of lives and to the study of relations and conditions of production as a means by which biography can be marshalled to create a domain of critical citizenship. Herein, I suggest, lie some of history's possibilities of transcending modernism.

**PART ONE**

**BIOGRAPHY, HISTORY AND SOUTH AFRICA:  
THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS**



UNIVERSITY *of the*  
WESTERN CAPE



## CHAPTER ONE

# AUTO/BIOGRAPHY, NARRATIVE AND THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORY

The methodological objective of this thesis is to produce an approach to biography which seeks a theory of discursive practice rather than a theory of the knowing subject. This approach is one that moves away from an “unmediated and transparent notion of the subject or identity as the centred author of social practice”.<sup>1</sup> In this paradigm, the subject is not abolished or abandoned, but, acquires a decentred or displaced position. In such an attempt to “rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices”, the subject of identity recurs as “the question of *identification*”.<sup>2</sup>

This enquiry will enable us to create a framework which transcends a dualist understanding of the relationship between the individual and social processes, to open up ways of understanding life histories as productions. This would mean going beyond conventional, untheorised approaches to life history as chronological narrative, where the major research challenges are understood as archival and empirical. It is important to open up alternative approaches to biography that challenge history’s resistance to theory, and pose questions about narration and self-narration, gender and biography’s relationship with autobiography. Only then would it be possible to develop more complex understandings about “the lives people live and the way they tell them”.<sup>3</sup> This emphasis on narration is also concerned with the multiple genres, locations and formats through which lives have been presented and represented, through oral narrative,

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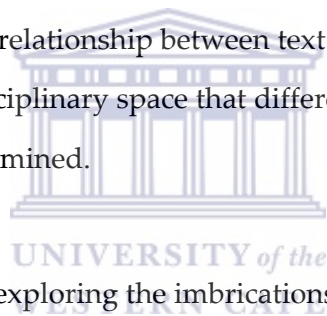
<sup>1</sup>Stuart Hall, ‘Introduction: Who Needs Identity?’, in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, eds, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), p 2.

<sup>2</sup>Stuart Hall, ‘Introduction: Who Needs Identity?’, p 2.

<sup>3</sup>Vincent Crapanzano, ‘“Self”-Centering Narratives’, in Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, eds, *Natural Histories of Discourse* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996), p 106.

academic text and public historical production. These productions of lives may be built on genealogies of prior constructions, and may indeed be the subject of intense contestation and dispute.

For this study, biography, 'documents of life' and the representation of lives in politics can be seen as ways of confronting the theoretical and methodological questions raised by breaching history's boundary with disciplines like literature and anthropology. In this interdisciplinary setting of cultural studies, archival sources - both public and private - and oral sources are also considered as texts. More than simply a storage system for data or remembrances about hidden or undiscovered pasts, these texts are important for the meanings they contain, their relation with the world that produced them and the processes and relations that went into their production. They constitute "a laboratory on a manageable scale in which to experiment with the problems of interpretation inherent in the relationship between text and its makers".<sup>4</sup> It is through cultural studies as a cross-disciplinary space that different forms of expressive activity and representation can be examined.



Biography offers a forum for exploring the imbrications between self and culture, the intervention of culture or *mentalite* between writer and text and the relations of production involved in the production of such texts. In such a textual analysis, culture mediates between a person and his or her world and can be seen as defining "the words, the gestures, the units of meaning, the patterns of arrangement, through which people ... package their experience ... in consciousness and memory ... and in text".<sup>5</sup> To simply read meanings off words in a documentary fashion is to close down virtually the whole area of identity formation and the possibility of understanding the complex ways in which identities are shaped and produced through experience, memory, language and narrative. In this plane of culture and identity, the production of self, the practices of

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<sup>4</sup>Elizabeth S Cohen, 'Court Testimony from the Past: Self and Culture in the Making of Text', in Marlene Kadar, ed, *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1992), p 86.

<sup>5</sup>Elizabeth S Cohen, 'Court Testimony from the Past', p 86.

self-constitution and the “stylisation of daily life” through an “aesthetic of existence”, are key processes. It is in these “forms and modalities of the relation to self” that the individual “constitutes and recognises himself *qua* subject”.<sup>6</sup>

The deployment of such a concept of identity in a biographical project enables one to move away from the idea of the intrinsic and ready-made, stable and fixed self, “unfolding from beginning to end though all the vicissitudes of history without change”.<sup>7</sup> It also enables us to challenge essentialist identities created through a voluntarist notion of agency which is seen as intrinsic to the subject, in Rosalind O’Hanlon’s terms, “the virile figure of the subject-agent”.<sup>8</sup>

In the narrativisation of the self, identities need to be understood as constituted within and through representation and, as Stuart Hall puts it, as “produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies”.<sup>9</sup> Following Lawrence Grossberg, it is the processes by which each plane of identification and belonging - the subject, the self and the agent - is produced and then “articulated into structures of individuality” that need to be understood.<sup>10</sup> In the process of becoming, such identities emerge out of the productive use of the resources of language, culture and history in the articulation of subject to discursive formation. These identities, while not corresponding exactly to agency, may influence and be articulated to questions of power and the possibilities of agency. The question of agency, as a vector of identification, involves the possibilities of moving into “particular sites of activity and power”. These temporary points of identification and belonging are “strategic installations” for “fields of activity ... on socially constructed territory”. They entail the articulation of maps of subjectivity and identity into specific

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<sup>6</sup>See Stuart Hall’s discussion of Foucault’s approach to subjectivity and cultural identity in his article ‘Introduction: Who Needs Identity?’, pp 1-17; see also Vincent Crapanzano, “‘Self’-Centering Narratives’, pp 106-113.

<sup>7</sup>Stuart Hall, ‘Introduction: Who Needs Identity?’, p 3.

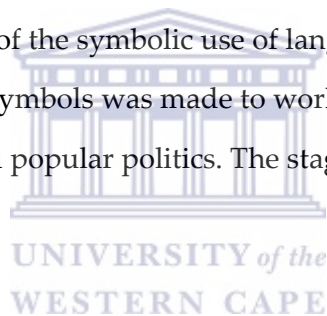
<sup>8</sup>Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘Recovering the Subject: *Subaltern Studies* and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 22, 1988.

<sup>9</sup>Stuart Hall, ‘Introduction: Who Needs Identity?’, pp 3-5.

<sup>10</sup>Lawrence Grossberg, ‘Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is?’, in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, eds, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, p 98.

spaces and places, and enable empowerment “at particular sites, along particular vectors”.<sup>11</sup>

The approach thus adopted to the subject and to political history is a discursive one, suggesting that identities are made through performance, and that through the use of dramaturgical metaphors, the social process and political life can be viewed as drama, with people engaging in social and political interaction in some sense, actors.<sup>12</sup> But this is not an approach which sees performance as posing, and which is linked to some concept of ‘authentic self’, as is the case with James Scott’s work on the ‘arts of resistance’.<sup>13</sup> It is a notion of performance, which opens up the issues of communicative practices in the production and dissemination of ideology and the “grammatical complexity” of language beyond its referential aspects as well as its production in face-to-face interaction.<sup>14</sup> It also enables us to understand that the production of a rhetoric of political expression made up of the symbolic use of language and imagery and the spread of certain rituals and symbols was made to work through the dramatic construction of public life and popular politics. The staging of processes of social



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<sup>11</sup>See Lawrence Grossberg's discussion of agency, self and subject in his article, 'Identity and Cultural Studies', especially pp 97-102. See also the discussion of power, the subaltern and agency in Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Recovering the Subject', and the examination of the representation, recreation and embodiment of agency and personhood in Corinne A Kratz, 'Forging Unions and Negotiating Ambivalence: Personhood and Complex Agency in Okiek Marriage Arrangement', in Ivan Karp and D.A. Masolo, eds, *African Philosophy as Cultural Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup>See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959) for a discussion of performance as the 'basic stuff of everyday life'. Different genres or types of cultural and social performance have their own style, goals and rhetoric.

<sup>13</sup>See James Scott's book, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). For Scott, acting and performance involved the presentation of a mask on the part of the subordinate. In public, the subordinate masked their feelings of suppressed rage through 'command performances'. This suppressed rage was redirected through a hidden transcript beyond the surveillance and interference of the powerful, with the intention to create independence and solidarity. See also the critical discussion of this book by Susan Gal, 'Language and the "Arts of Resistance"', *Cultural Anthropology*, 10, 3, 1995.

<sup>14</sup>See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991; first published, 1983) for an example of the creation of communities (in the form of nations) - whose members will never know or interact with each other - through imagination made possible through mediation by the artefacts of print capitalism, the regional newspaper and the novel.

intercourse entailed in this metaphor of dramatisation is, according to David Chaney, an essential element of modernity.<sup>15</sup>

This chapter examines the career of biography as a method of research and field of enquiry in the social sciences, history as well as literature. It also looks at the way these disciplines have treated the individual as object of study. For much of its existence, the discipline of history has tended to rely on a rather untheorised category of the individual, with biography occupying an ambiguous position. While questions of personhood and individual-society relations have been key topics in sociology and anthropology, substantial theoretical engagement has been quite limited. But it is mainly within literary studies that the limitations of conventional biography, which constructed linear masculine lives as authentic selves, have begun to be addressed. This has resulted in the category of the 'subject' being opened up. While this chapter addresses the disciplinary worlds of biography in the academy, it is important to note that these disciplinary distinctions have specific histories of being created and reproduced, as well as of being resisted. Indeed, beyond discreet disciplines, academic work also occurs in relation to methodological paradigms and networks. It is also important to note that from time to time, these critical approaches to subjectivity have raised their heads in the public domain as well.<sup>16</sup>

Across the disciplines of history and sociology, mainly from the 1970s, an increasing emphasis on collective identities saw biography take shape as a mechanism through which individuals were viewed as units of social forms, with life histories as prisms for the study of social processes. However, these studies paid little theoretical and analytical attention to the narration of lives and to the relationship between subjects and discursive practices. In addressing insights developed within literary studies, this chapter suggests

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<sup>15</sup>David Chaney, *Fictions of Collective Life: Public Drama in Late Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Fields of study have modes of existence outside the academy, and biography continues to be a key genre through which the public encounters accounts of the past populated by politicians and celebrities. Beyond the academy and sometimes intersecting with it, historical depiction has also seen biography take the form of visual studies, museum displays, exhibitions and film. See Chapter Two.

that biography can develop ways of going beyond untheorised chronological narrative procedures and take seriously the existence of multiple narrations of lives.

### *The individual and biography in the Social Sciences and History*

Biographical material and the problem of the individual's place in society have featured in the social sciences and humanities in a number of disciplinary settings. Sociologists and anthropologists, literary theorists as well as historians have engaged in biography as a knowledge genre and in the production of meaning through biography. The 'biographical method' was in use in the field of sociology as early as the second decade of the twentieth century with the publication of the monumental 2,200-page study of a Polish émigré to Chicago by Thomas and Znaniecki.<sup>17</sup> While this study was concerned with wider issues of social theory - individualisation, community and social change – it gave consideration to the methodological question of the relationship between the individual and the social and made "the most thoroughgoing use of personal documents to be found in the social sciences".<sup>18</sup> For Thomas and Znaniecki, the basis of their approach was that "the cause of a social or individual phenomenon is never another social or individual phenomenon alone, but always a combination of a social and an individual phenomenon".<sup>19</sup>

Many of the monographs produced by the 'Chicago School' of sociology in the 1920s and 1930s went on to make extensive use of biographical material and at that time, it seemed as if 'documents of life' and the case study approach would become central sociological resources. It was life history and biography, which were seen to grasp "the sense of reality that people have about their own world". However, from the end of the

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<sup>17</sup>William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (New York: Dover, 1958; first published in five volumes between 1918 and 1920). For a general discussion of the career of biography and approaches to 'life history' in sociology and the social sciences, see various studies (especially those by Martin Kohli and Paul Thompson) in Daniel Bertaux (ed), *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981). See also Ken Plummer, *Documents of Life: An Introduction to the Problems and Literature of a Humanistic Method* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1983).

<sup>18</sup>Ken Plummer, *Documents of Life*, p 41.

<sup>19</sup>William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant*, p 44.



1930s, with decreasing institutional legitimation and declining intellectual stature as a result of charges that it was 'too subjective' and 'unscientific', life history research, as a "seemingly individualist method" eventually came to occupy a marginal research position alongside quantitative and survey methods as well as social theory in the field of sociology, "a discipline that was fundamentally collectivist".<sup>20</sup>

Biography has featured in the discipline of anthropology as well.<sup>21</sup> One form that anthropological writing has taken has been the life history, an "extensive record" of a person's life told to and recorded by another, who then edits and writes the life, even in the form of the autobiography.<sup>22</sup> The beginnings of rigorous anthropological biography are seen to lie with Paul Radin's study of a Native American life published in 1926. Subsequent studies by Dyk (1938), Ford (1941) and Simmons (1942) also used biography as a means to study Native American culture and the problems of 'acculturation' while Oscar Lewis's work on life history (1961) focused on the family in Mexico.<sup>23</sup> Life histories, conceived in this framework, came to be seen as important in illustrating or portraying culture or some aspect of culture change.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of the popularity of some of the above biographical studies, as with sociology, life history has occupied an ambiguous place in anthropology and has been on the periphery of the discipline. The life history was seen as "more 'literary' than 'scientific'" and "saccharine in its sentimentality". According to Crapanzano, the ability of the life history to mediate the tension between the "intimate" field experience and the

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<sup>20</sup>Ken Plummer, *Documents of Life*, pp 57-59.

<sup>21</sup>For a discussion of biographies written in the field of anthropology, see Lewis L Langness and Gelya Frank, *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography* (Novato, California: Chandler and Sharp, 1981), and Lawrence C Watson and Maria-Barbara Watson-Franke, *Interpreting Life Histories: An Anthropological Inquiry* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1985); see also Vincent Crapanzano, 'Life-Histories', *American Anthropologist*, 86, 1984 for a critical discussion of anthropological biography.

<sup>22</sup>See for example Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>23</sup>Paul Radin, *Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of an American Indian* (New York: D Appleton & Co, 1926), Walter Dyk, *Son of Old Man Hat* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1938), C.S. Ford, *Smoke From Their Fires* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1941), Leo Simmons, *Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian* (New Haven: Yale University, Institute of Human Relations, 1942); Oscar Lewis, *Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Randon House, 1961).

<sup>24</sup>Lewis L Langness and Gelya Frank, *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography*, p 24.

“essentially impersonal” process of ethnographic analysis and presentation was not very successful. As a commemoration of the field experience, the life history often tended to read as an exercise in sentimentality, “a memorial to an informant-become-(distant-) friend”.<sup>25</sup>

In this ambiguous, subordinate position, as a research method, rather than a study, life histories have also been elicited through fieldwork as a strategy of data collection for more thematic studies or for accounts of social processes. In this mould, life histories in the form of case studies rarely involved the consideration of theoretical and methodological issues related to representation, generalisation and typicality. In these conceptual shortcomings, the criteria for social location or for deciding what was the ‘typical’ individual, or ‘illustrative’ of culture, were rarely spelled out. And the complex issues involved in the ‘translation’ of oral text into written life history also went largely unexplored.<sup>26</sup>

The publication in the early 1980s of the life story and diaries of Ignacio Bizarro Ujpan, a Tzutuhil Maya Indian from the Lake Atitlan region, edited by James Sexton, and Marjorie Shostak’s portrait of the !Kung woman Nisa tended to demonstrate these methodological and conceptual problems.<sup>27</sup> Behind the notions of being ‘typical’, something that both studies work with, is a view of culture, society and the individual that is “peculiarly homogeneous”.<sup>28</sup> In the notes to his text, Sexton describes Ujpan as “both alike and different from his countrymen with regard to socioeconomic and

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<sup>25</sup>Vincent Crapanzano, ‘Life-Histories’, p 954.

<sup>26</sup>See the criticisms developed by Crapanzano in ‘Life-Histories’; see also Corinne A Kratz, ‘Conversations and Lives’, in Luise White, Stephan F Miescher and David William Cohen (eds), *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001) for a highly suggestive examination of the complexities of these translations and transactions.

<sup>27</sup>James D Sexton (ed), *Son of Tecum Uman: A Maya Indian Tells His Life Story* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1981); Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*. Shostak’s sequel to *Nisa*, written after she had been diagnosed with cancer, was published posthumously in 2000; see Marjorie Shostak, *Return to Nisa* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>28</sup>Vincent Crapanzano, ‘Life-Histories’, p 954.



psychological characteristics” while in the principal text, Sexton's cultural and social descriptions have a more important place.<sup>29</sup>

*Nisa* has widely been seen as innovative in its use of life history and as an important example of polyphonic experimentation in ethnographic writing.<sup>30</sup> With this biographical project, there seems to have been a large degree of reflexivity, an understanding of the peculiarities of an interview as an interaction between two people, each with “unique personality traits and interests at a particular time of life” and the recognition on the part of Shostak that as an interpreter, and through the ethnographic relationship, she had been an active participant in the shaping of the personal narrative. There was also an attempt to broaden the research base by interviewing a wider range of women in order to compare Nisa’s experiences. Indeed in a self-assessment by Shostak, she described her work an attempt to understand “what it meant to be a woman in the !Kung culture” through the medium of life history and personal narrative.<sup>31</sup>

In spite of all this methodological awareness, Shostak’s account of Nisa's life has been criticised as a deeply flawed, very conventional work in which the individual is used principally as “the token of a type”.<sup>32</sup> The !Kung are presented as “one of the last remaining gatherer-hunter societies”, survivors of a prior age, isolated, traditional and racially distinct, with quite a recent experience of “culture change”. In an exoticised portrait of ‘the other’, Shostak enters into a world seemingly frozen in time in order to listen to women’s voices, which may reveal “what their lives had been like for generations, possibly even for thousands of years”.<sup>33</sup> This uncritically primordial account of !Kung social life was influenced mainly by the anthropological work of

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<sup>29</sup>Vincent Crapanzano, ‘Life-Histories’, p 954-955.

<sup>30</sup>See for example George E Marcus and Michael M J Fisher, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp 58-59; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), p 42.

<sup>31</sup>Marjorie Shostak, “‘What the Wind Won't Take Away’: The Genesis of *Nisa - The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*”, in Personal Narratives Group (eds), *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp 228-240.

<sup>32</sup>See the critique by Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, ‘Beyond “Culture”: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 7, 1, 1992, especially pp 14-16.

<sup>33</sup>Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa*, pp 4-6.

Richard Lee and the Harvard Kalahari Project, in which the !Kung were constructed as "egalitarian, with minimal differentials in wealth, ... with no formal status hierarchies", with hunting and gathering seen as "tradition".<sup>34</sup> What we have in this biographical project is little by way of theory and analysis, but a large degree of ethnographic background, which serves to locate the informants in 'their culture'. This culture, however, is the construct of anthropology, with the life history constrained within it as the victim of its determinants.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast, Corinne Kratz has reflected on the theoretical and methodological implications of her own ethnographic practice in a project on Okiek life histories in Kenya, insisting on a critical practice of oral history. Kratz was interested to understand the shift in genre that occurs when a life story is drawn away from its moment of production in a conversational setting which has its own "communicative repertoires and conventions of interaction".<sup>36</sup> As a "conversational hybrid",<sup>37</sup> life stories emerge, she argues, out of the communicative negotiation that takes place across "several levels of privilege that characterise the ethnographic encounter".<sup>38</sup>

These conversations, Kratz suggests, reflect "shifts of form and tone", include forms of personal narrative, and contain reflexive moments in the form of interruptions, codas and bridges. Included in these encounters across levels of unequal power are negotiations over "topic, form, turn-taking, and even how to start and stop the story". It is in these processes of negotiation that the life history is "contextualised and

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<sup>34</sup>Marjorie Shostak, "What the Wind Won't Take Away", pp 228-9; see Richard Lee and Irven DeVore, *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976) and Richard Lee, *The !Kung San* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979); see also the sustained critique of this approach in Edwin Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989).

<sup>35</sup>Another line of criticism of *Nisa* has focussed on its "feminist" constructions of universal women.

<sup>36</sup> Corinne A Kratz, 'Conversations and Lives', p 129.

<sup>37</sup> Corinne A Kratz, 'Conversations and Lives', p 136.

<sup>38</sup> Susan Gal, 'Between Speech and Silence: The Problematics of Research on Language and Gender', in Michaela di Leonardo (ed), *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era*, cited in Corinne Kratz, 'Conversations and Lives', p 136.

entextualised in diverse ways”, creating a context that would facilitate or even hinder “later extraction, rearrangement, and re-presentation”.<sup>39</sup>

Here we have an approach, which moves beyond a framework of seamlessness and authentic voice, demanding an examination of the “character of life history/story as verbal communication”, and an approach to lives as “method, testimony and creative process”.<sup>40</sup> For Kratz, the entire “structure of the overall exchange” should be reflected on in order to understand “what any life history/story is and how it came to be told as it was”.<sup>41</sup> Reflexive possibilities along lines as suggested by Kratz have begun to emerge from within the discipline of anthropology, as an outgrowth of earlier intonations of a concern for reflexivity and textual attention to ethnographic production.

Such theoretical attention to lives and their production has rarely been achieved within the disciplinary boundaries of history. One of the supposedly great issues of historiography concerns the problem of the individual in history and the place of the individual, and even ‘the great man’, in historical explanation. It is this question that has influenced the place of biography in the discipline of history. As E.H. Carr framed the problem in his enduringly famous 1961 Cambridge lectures: what has been “the weight of the individual and social elements on both sides of the equation?”<sup>42</sup> And related to this: “Is the object of the historian’s inquiry the behaviour of individuals or the action of social forces?”<sup>43</sup>

Carr has surveyed the “long pedigree” of the view that it is the “character and behaviour of individuals” that matters in history rather than “vast impersonal forces”, and that “history is the biography of great men”. This genealogy is traced back to the ancient Greeks who attributed responsibility for the achievements of the past to the

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<sup>39</sup> Corinne Kratz, ‘Conversations and Lives’, pp 136-138.

<sup>40</sup> Corinne Kratz, ‘Conversations and Lives’, pp 129-130.

<sup>41</sup> Corinne Kratz, ‘Conversations and Lives’ (revised draft), quoted from passages erroneously omitted from the published version on p138, paragraph 2.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p 35.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?*, p 44.

names of “eponymous heroes” while during the Renaissance, it was Plutarch, the “biographer-moralist” who was influential and popular. Even in more recent times, the mid-twentieth century, the “mass murder of historical characters” and their treatment as “puppets of social and economic forces” have been a cause for concern (perhaps tongue-in-cheek) by certain historians.<sup>44</sup> More seriously, Carr goes on to cite a range of scholarly studies conducted in the mid-twentieth century that explained, among other social phenomena, the breakdown of the Elizabethan system and the seventeenth century English revolution by recourse to the behaviour and capacity of individual men. He also considers what this line of historical explanation would mean for studies of the origins of communism and even the causes of the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>45</sup>

In modern historiography, it is those studies of the history of political institutions, statesmanship, government, diplomacy and the ‘craft’ of high politics, which have tended to stress the issue of leadership and the personal qualities of individual greatness. The emphasis on history as politics, and the preoccupation with the state within the framework of national history and diplomatic history formed the basis of the traditional Rankean paradigm of history done by ‘real’ historians, ‘history from above’. In this view of the territory of history, as articulated by Regius Professor of History at Cambridge, Sir John Seeley, “History is past politics: politics is present history”.<sup>46</sup> History was seen as a narrative of events, an account of what ‘actually happened’, based on official records, emanating from governments and preserved in archives.

In these accounts of the past, historical explanation was framed in terms of the deeds of great men and conscious intention.<sup>47</sup> The lives of the many were affected by the actions of the few, “the politically involved, despots or democracies, war lords or city fathers”.

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<sup>44</sup>Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?*, pp 44-45.

<sup>45</sup>Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?*, p 46.

<sup>46</sup>Peter Burke, ‘Overture: the New History, its Past and its Future’, in Peter Burke (ed), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p 3. Note that Arthur Marwick attributes this aphorism to the late nineteenth century Regius Chair of Modern History at Oxford, Edward Augustus Freeman. See Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History* (London: MacMillan, 1970), p 47.

<sup>47</sup>For a sympathetic discussion of this approach to historical studies, see Geoffrey R Elton, *Political History: Principles and Practice* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1970), especially chapter 2.

While all mankind may be the subject matter of history, “only some men [were] its agents”.<sup>48</sup> These histories were premised on the intrinsic importance of “the great creative thinkers, the makers of foreign policy, and the statesmen who promoted or resisted constitutional change”.<sup>49</sup> In a restatement and defence of the value of narrative political history ‘from above’ and an implicitly male-centred, ‘great man’ approach to history, Geoffrey Elton has argued:

Historians who deny that greatness in politics can exist, who refuse to find overwhelming personalities in history and cannot ever admire greatness in affairs, ought to look into their own hearts. Men who do not recognise and respect greatness have no business to write history. Naturally, greatness does not equal goodness, and goodness is worth finding too: but impersonal forces are the refuge of the feeble.<sup>50</sup>

Beyond the mere emphasis on the individual as a unit of history, Arthur Marwick has referred to the necessity of biography to the study of the past, claiming that without the biographies that have been produced of Christopher Columbus, Martin Luther, George Washington and Joseph Stalin, “vast areas of history would remain totally obscure”. For Marwick, writing in the early 1970s, Alan Bullock’s biography of Hitler was “one of the most important and authoritative works in the entire bibliography of twentieth-century British historiography”, while David Marquand and Martin Gilbert were to be assured of important places in British historiography with their biographical work on Ramsay MacDonald and Winston Churchill respectively. The biography of Disraeli published in 1966 by Oxford don, Robert Blake, one of the few academic historians to devote a substantial part of his career to the field of political biography, was referred to by Marwick as “one of the great publishing events of [that] decade”.<sup>51</sup>

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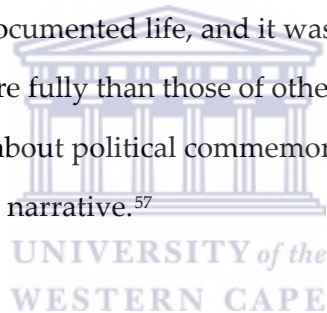
<sup>48</sup>Geoffrey R Elton, *Political History*, p 68.

<sup>49</sup>John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London: Longman, 1984), p 71.

<sup>50</sup>Geoffrey R Elton, *Political History*, p 71.

<sup>51</sup>Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History*, pp 203-204. The works referred to here by Marwick, mostly published after he cited them are: David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1977 (903 pages); Martin Gilbert, *Finest Hour: Winston Churchill, 1939-1941*, London: Heinemann, 1983 (1308 pages) and *Never Despair: Winston Churchill, 1945-1965*, London: Heinemann, 1988 (1438 pages); Alan Bullock, *Hitler: a Study in Tyranny*, London: Odhams Press, 1952 (776 pp), completely revised and

Indeed, when given the opportunity to discuss the problems of interpretation in biography, Robert Blake presented a defence of traditional biography's elitist interest in great lives, but now taken beyond a narrow conception of politics.<sup>52</sup> For him, the biographer was neither concerned with the "common man", nor with the "statistically average man". To do this would be a "dismal project" and "anything more boring would be hard to conceive".<sup>53</sup> Biographers were interested in "people who have risen high in the world of art, science, business, learning, law or politics, who have done something, who have counted in public esteem, either in their own time or posthumously".<sup>54</sup> Emily Apter has referred to historical biographies of this kind, of "legendary men and women", as cliography.<sup>55</sup> Such studies were about "men and women of achievement" (usually in politics) and the quest to discover the source of their duty, ambition and determination to achieve.<sup>56</sup> These histories rested on the existence of the well-documented life, and it was the lives of statesmen that tended to be documented more fully than those of other categories of people. Cliography was thus mainly about political commemoration and took the predominant form of political narrative.<sup>57</sup>



In spite of the strident, liturgical views of history on the part of Elton and Blake, conventional, 'great man' biographies as a form of history, with the individual 'great

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republished by Penguin Books, Harmondsworth in 1962 (848 pages); Robert Blake, *Disraeli*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966 (819 pages). The extraordinary magnitude of these works reinforces the conception of biography as a genre for the study of great, magisterial lives - the Grand Biography befitting the Big Leader.

<sup>52</sup>Robert Blake was also a historian of the British Conservative Party and later, a biographer of Churchill. See Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1970 and Robert Blake and William Roger Louis (eds), *Churchill*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

<sup>53</sup>Robert Blake, 'The Art of Biography', in Eric Homberger and John Charmley (eds), *The Troubled Face of Biography*, London: MacMillan Press, 1988, p 81.

<sup>54</sup>Robert Blake, 'The Art of Biography', p 81.

<sup>55</sup>Emily Apter, *Feminising the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, p xi.

<sup>56</sup>Robert Blake, 'The Art of Biography', p 81.

<sup>57</sup> This 'cliographic' approach which focuses on "historical personalities" and "prominent political figures" as a means of understanding the history of "personality, power, and politics" continues to appear on the lists of academic publishers; see for example, Anthony R DeLuca, *Gandhi, Mao, Mandela, and Gorbachev: Studies in Personality, Power, and Politics* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000).



life' and career as the focus have had a "troubled face" in academic historical studies. Indeed, by the early 1980s, this genre - at least in England - seemed to have withered away.<sup>58</sup> Writing of English historiography at this time, David Cannadine was moved to pronounce that "there are no longer biographies of great men, because there are no longer great men to biography".<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the only way for a politician to ensure the "much-coveted life after death" entailed by biography was to write it himself, and even better, to own a publishing company as well.<sup>60</sup>

More than this, such histories have tended to lack scholarly legitimacy in the eyes of many historians in the academy because they have been seen as a mode which was unable to present social complexity and which encouraged "a simplified, linear interpretation of events".<sup>61</sup> The historian, Maurice Cowling, for example, has criticised biography as misleading in its capacity to explain political phenomena:

Its refraction is partial in relation to the system. It abstracts a man whose public action should not be abstracted. It implies linear connections between one situation and the next. In fact connections were not linear. The system was a circular relationship: a shift in one element changed the position of all the others in relation to the rest.<sup>62</sup>

Because of such a tendency to produce a linear narrative, many historians, especially in Britain, believed that biography had no place in serious historical scholarship. Biographers, it was assumed, didn't even count as 'proper historians' doing 'serious history'. The range of questions that they posed about the past was seen as limited in their complexity, and thus such biographical research was seen as having limited academic value. Nevertheless, in the public domain, biography as a genre of historical knowledge seems to have thrived. Public biographical treatments have ranged from leadership lessons and exposé texts circulated in the publishing world,

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<sup>58</sup>Eric Homberger and John Charmley (eds), *The Troubled Face of Biography*, London: MacMillan Press, 1988.

<sup>59</sup>David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past*, London: Collins, 1989, p 286. The chapter from which the quotation is taken was first published in 1982.

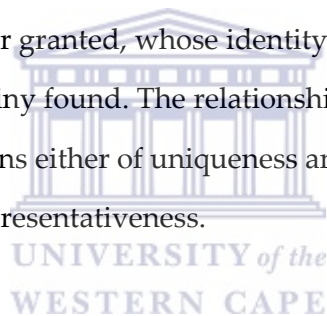
<sup>60</sup>David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past*, p 286.

<sup>61</sup>John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p 72.

<sup>62</sup>Cited in John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, pp 72-3.

to the biographic constructions and contests over meaning that have characterised the domain of memorials and exhibitions.<sup>63</sup>

In most approaches to biography that can broadly be labelled 'traditional' or conventional, the emphasis had been on stable individuality, self-determination, rational choice and the "autonomous, acting individual".<sup>64</sup> Up to the 1970s and 1980s, the career of biography within the disciplines of sociology, anthropology as well as in history was largely one devoid of reflexive, theoretical explanation and analytical investigation of subjectivity and the production of lives. It is not surprising that biography occupied an ambiguous place within the social sciences and history, and that its most prominent forms of expression have been in the public domain as lives of greatness or as exposé texts, which sought the truth of real lives. Behind these biographical efforts lay an untheorised category of the individual whose existence was largely taken for granted, whose identity was given, and just needed to be grown into and the destiny found. The relationship of the individual with the social was read through notions either of uniqueness and natural greatness or, as we shall see, of typicality and representativeness.



### *Conventional biography and the 'biographical illusion'*

Conventional biography consisted of identification with and celebration of achievement, and sought to plot the growth and development of the awareness and power of the 'biographee', celebrating the assumed consistency and coherence of character and selfhood. It focussed on events rather than experience.<sup>65</sup> Selected moments deemed to be significant - usually centred on achievement - were arranged in some chronological order, following the linear trajectory of the individual's development. In a search for origins and processes of causation, foundational moments in the formation of aspects of the individual's life were sought. These were narrated into a plot of progress and

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<sup>63</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>64</sup>Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff, 'Introduction: The Seductions of Biography', in Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff (eds), *The Seductions of Biography*, New York and London, 1996, pp 2-4.

<sup>65</sup>The area of psycho-biography is perhaps an exception.



development, a “narrative of internal homogeneity and cross-temporal consistency” constructed with a “Cartesian self-transparency”.<sup>66</sup> Lives were presumed to be structured by “objective life markers”, reflecting key, critical points about the life in question. Through these markers, the lives of ‘real’ persons could be “mapped, charted and given meaning”.<sup>67</sup>

Another feature of the conventional biography was that it presumed that there was a ‘real person’ who lived a life, who was born, perhaps died, and who may have influenced others. This ‘real person’ was a ‘real subject’, and as such, could be written about. The presentation of lives was presumed to be objective, truthful and factually correct, with lives as lived able to be told with reference to objective, verifiable dates.<sup>68</sup> In this realist project, the individual was produced as authentic self, with an identity able to generate, in Cartesian fashion, its own unique vision of the world: ‘I think, therefore I am’. The resultant linear biographical product stood as ‘the truth’ about the ‘real’ individual’s life.<sup>69</sup>

Mary Evans has gone further to argue that the pattern of the conventional, traditional biography was also a masculinist one. Evans was concerned with issues of gender in relation to biography, “if women and men write the same kind of biographies and if female and male subjects are examined in the same way”.<sup>70</sup> It was male forms of biography, written by both men and women, which had been organised along strictly chronological patterns. The subject was usually introduced in the context of their original family, from which the person emerged “to take his or her place on the stage of adult life”. The path to adulthood and public achievement was ordered so that the

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<sup>66</sup>K Anthony Appiah, ‘Mass Media, Biography, Cultural Memory: Introduction’, in Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff (eds), *The Seductions of Biography*, pp 10-11.

<sup>67</sup>Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Biography* (Sage University Paper Series on Qualitative Research Methods, No 17) Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1989, pp 17-19.

<sup>68</sup>Norman K Denzin, *Interpretive Biography*, pp 21-23.

<sup>69</sup>For a rather conservative defence of traditional or conventional biography and its realist concern for the ‘truth’ of people’s lives, see Eric Homberger and John Charmley, eds, *The Troubled Face of Biography*, based on a 1985 conference on ‘Modern Biography’ held in Britain.

<sup>70</sup>Mary Evans, ‘Masculine and Feminine Biography’, in David Ellis (ed), *Imitating Art*, p 108.

subject was taken to pass through a stage of 'apprenticeship' (adolescence, education, early influences), which foreshadowed the achievements to come.

Life, consisting of work in the public world, was perceived as a career, constructed as a path of progress and achievement and the production of 'works' and 'products'. Male biography tended to construct lives of "supposedly rational, adult human beings", and, according to Evans, was "frightened by affectivity" and "terrified of considering the impact of the irrational". The 'personal' was perceived as a separate space, with very little of this work sensitive to the personal lives of their subjects. This compartmentalising mode rejected analytical consideration of "the impact, and indeed the relationship, of the emotional to the rational world".<sup>71</sup> For conventional male biography, "the connection between the private and the public remains an idea which is problematic, because of its subversive and destabilising implications".<sup>72</sup>

To question the imposed boundary between the private and the public would not only undermine the compartmentalised view of human existence, it would also question the implicit belief that social choice and social action were products of rational ideas and beliefs. This assumption of conventional, masculinist (and heterosexist) life history that individuals are in control of their own destiny, as autonomous, intellectual agents, uncoerced by cultural or historical circumstances, of the human career as an ordered sequence of acts, events and works, has been referred to by Bourdieu as the 'biographical illusion', a modernist fantasy about society and selfhood.<sup>73</sup>

Any coherence that a life has, then, is imposed by the larger culture, by the researcher, and by the subject's belief, retrospectively (and even prospectively), that his or her life should have such coherence. This position follows Bourdieu's general argument that

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<sup>71</sup>Mary Evans, 'Masculine and Feminine Biography', pp 109-115.

<sup>72</sup>Mary Evans, 'Masculine and Feminine Biography', p 110. 'Feminine' biography, on the other hand, is not frightened by affectivity and the impact of the supposedly 'irrational', and questions the view of existence and experience as compartmentalised in public and private spheres.

<sup>73</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, *The Biographical Illusion* (Working Papers and proceedings of the Centre for psychosocial studies, no 14), Chicago, Centre for Psychosocial Studies, 1987.

denies the centrality of the subject in both theory and in everyday life.<sup>74</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, for their part, worry that, in the main, social science persists in treating biography as a “neutral, transparent window into history”. In so doing it serves to perpetuate the ‘biographical illusion’: to regard persons and performances “in the Promethean mode”, to “find the motors of the past and the present in rational individualism”, and to pay little heed to the social and cultural forms that “silently shape and constrain human action”.<sup>75</sup>

In spite of such criticisms, which point to the limitations of much of conventional biography, Rhiel and Suchoff have shown how seductive the lure of its codes and conventions have been, even for those (in the United States) wanting to destabilise mainstream culture by telling the stories of ‘different’ lives, instead of those of great, white men. In attempting to challenge the status quo, these “new biographers” - some driven by feminist perspectives or postcolonial thinking - make use of “seductively traditional modes of self-telling” in articulating life stories of cultural difference. Rhiel and Suchoff suggest that these attempts to enable new identities to be heard may instead exercise a neutralising or constraining force as well. The new subjects who speak may lose “resistant cultural particularity” under the powerful conventions of traditional biography.<sup>76</sup>

### ***Biography's history***

Biography also has a history. It is within literary studies that biography, seen as a genre in its own right rather than merely a research method, has been better historicised. Biography in the modern form emerged in the eighteenth century with the development of the notion of the independent individual. In the nineteenth century, biography had a predominantly eulogistic, ‘obituary’ function, with much of biography the product of vanity. It was at this time that the concepts of ‘career’ and ‘life-course’ took root as

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<sup>74</sup>Norman K Denzin, *Interpretive Biography*, p 61.

<sup>75</sup>Jean and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, Boulder: Westview, 1993, p 26.

<sup>76</sup>Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff, ‘Introduction: The Seductions of Biography’, in Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff, eds, *The Seductions of Biography*, pp 1-3.

nineteenth century concepts alongside notions of genius, inherited ability, and genetic purity. There was a repudiation of the mass, with eugenics and ideas about the measure of personality forming the basis of the rise of biographies of 'great men'. Under the influence of trends in late-nineteenth century psychology, the study of biography became synonymous with the study of human nature. The work of Leslie Stephen, Victorian biographer, essayist and critic, who edited the British *Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB) between 1885 and 1900 and Sidney Lee, his assistant (who became sole editor from 1891) were key examples of this approach. Put together as collective biography, this formed the basis of the study of society. Sidney Lee was concerned to measure personality on a scale in order to distinguish those suitable for "biographical immortalisation" and those not.<sup>77</sup>

As late as 1911, Sydney Lee declared that "the life of a nonentity or a mediocrity, however skilfully contrived, conflicts with primary biographic principles".<sup>78</sup> In this 'Great Man' approach to the study of society and the past, 'complete' careers (hence dead great men) of measured magnitude and "biographic fitness" saw the repudiation of the crowd and the mass as objects of study. For Stephen, biography was a "servant to history", while Lee looked forward to the consolidation of biography as an autonomous genre. Victorian biography of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, according to Richard Altick, was "the literary emblem par excellence of Victorianism". It was also a product "faithful to the old era's habit of misapplied and exaggerated hero worship, with all its attendant hypocrisy and evasiveness".<sup>79</sup>

In Britain in the early twentieth century, the literary 'moderns' attempted to mark their absolute difference from their Victorian predecessors and what they saw as the failings of Victorian biography. For this 'New Biography of the Twentieth Century', the biographer was not a "neutral, objective reporter", but in part, narrated his or her own

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<sup>77</sup>Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, pp 58-64.

<sup>78</sup>Sidney Lee, *Principles of Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911.

<sup>79</sup>Richard D Altick, *Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America*, New York: Knopf, 1965, p 289.

story, creating a 'transferential' relationship to the biographical subject. The biographer, here, had autobiographical self-awareness, and awareness of the complexity of the self.<sup>80</sup> This work, especially that by Virginia Woolf (daughter of Leslie Stephen) and Lytton Strachey, who published *Eminent Victorians* in 1918, radically disrupted the concept of a life-course, and began to question the very principles of biographical identity and biological unity fostered by their Victorian predecessors. They emphasised the aesthetic dimensions of biography, with the biographer seen as artist, not chronicler. In their critique, both satirised the extent to which biographers, as "historians of life, dwell on the death-bed scene", posed a paradoxical connection between biography and death.<sup>81</sup> They pointed to the tension between posthumous memorialisation and the attempt to 'grasp' the life as lived, expressed in a language of monuments, statuary and epitaphs. Here, the biographic and the funereal were intermeshed, with the biographical subject identical to the dead.

Exponents of this 'new biography' saw the role of the biographer as exposing and revealing the 'real self' of the subject, with no disguises. Strachey and Woolf questioned the categories of 'inner' and 'outer' in relation to the subject and opened up dominant metaphors in biographical criticism, which dealt with some of the key issues of biographical representation: the relation between biographer and subject, the place of the body in biography and "the temporality of the life as lived and narrated".<sup>82</sup>

Traditional biography, with its Cartesian foundations, had posited the category of the 'individual', which presumed that humans were free intellectual agents whose thinking processes were not coerced by cultural or historical circumstances. We were offered "a narrator who imagines that he speaks without simultaneously being spoken".<sup>83</sup> The 'new biographers' of the early twentieth century, on the other hand, began to open up

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<sup>80</sup>Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses*, p 90.

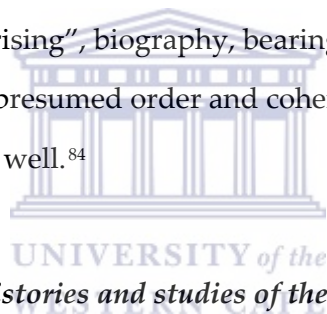
<sup>81</sup>Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses*, p 93. See especially the essay by Virginia Woolf, 'The New Biography', in *Collected Essays*, 4 vols, London: Hogarth, 1966/7, vol 4.

<sup>82</sup>Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses*, pp 130-131.

<sup>83</sup>Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988, p 1.

the notion of the 'subject'. Their work was an early intonation of much critical scholarship around biography, autobiography, narrative and the production of lives which was to emerge mainly out of the discipline of literary studies and the interdisciplinary arena of cultural studies from the 1980s. It is the concept of 'subject' which enabled theorists to begin to conceive of human reality as a construction, as a product of signifying activities which were both culturally specific and generally unconscious. The category of the subject began to call into question the notion of the self as synonymous with consciousness.

In spite of these developments, the genre of traditional biography, with an untheorised notion of the individual at the centre and claiming to be about 'real lives' of achievement and leadership, has continued to be an important feature of what stands as 'history' in the public sphere. From time to time, with an almost "inherent disciplinary resistance of history to self-conscious theorising", biography, bearing the conventional hallmarks of individualism, linearity, and presumed order and coherence, has continued to enter the terrain of academic history as well.<sup>84</sup>



***Beyond individualism: life histories and studies of the social***

From around the 1970s, historians began to turn their attention to the history of social groups excluded from or ignored in (and subordinated by) more traditional histories of political elites and institutions. Through history from below, social history eschewed 'great men' in favour of 'ordinary people', the marginalised and the oppressed. In a memorable and much-cited programmatic statement from the preface to one of the most important works of English social history published as early as 1963, E.P.

Thompson stated:

I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity. Their crafts and traditions may have been dying. Their hostility to the new industrialism may have

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<sup>84</sup>Lynn Hunt, 'History Beyond Social Theory', in D Carroll (ed), *The States of 'Theory': History, Art and Critical Discourse*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, p 96.



been backward-looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not.<sup>85</sup>

This direction was initially propelled by concerted theoretical debate within Marxism, and a challenge to Marxist historians to grasp the necessity of trying to understand people in the past in the light of their own experiences rather than to focus only on economic structures.<sup>86</sup> At issue was Marx's argument that people made history "only on the basis of conditions which are not of their own making". In the 1960s Louis Althusser had read this argument to mean the displacement of a universal essence of 'man' and of the category of the subject from philosophy, political economy and history. From this perspective, individuals could thus never be agents (or 'authors') of history because their acts were prescribed by the historical conditions made by others into which they had been born as well as the material resources and culture they had received from previous generations.<sup>87</sup>

For the social historians, in contrast, it was experience and agency which made the connection between the structural and subjective feeling. In this approach to agency and history, experience was the connection between social structure ('being') and social consciousness. Social history became increasingly concerned with the pursuit of new topics and the opening up of areas of research previously ignored. Located within the framework of visibility, recovery and reclamation, social history sought to present evidence about that which had been previously neglected, especially of the experience of social class. Oral history formed the basis of much life history research, which was seen as an important vehicle for the production of histories of 'ordinary' working class experiences. Life histories told through oral history had pride of place in the generation of histories which sought the authentic "voice of the past",

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<sup>85</sup>E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, New York: Vintage Books, 1963, pp 12-13.

<sup>86</sup>See the essay by E.P. Thompson, 'The Poverty of Theory or An Orrery of Errors', in his book *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London: Merlin, 1978.

<sup>87</sup>See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, London: Verso, 1966.



allowing “heroes not just from the leaders, but from the unknown majority of the people”.<sup>88</sup>

In spite of the theoretical commitments of its beginnings, social history in the United States, according to Lynn Hunt, became eclectic as it also succumbed to history's disciplinary resistance to theory.<sup>89</sup> The pursuit of new topics and new sources of evidence also resulted in fragmentation. Instead of new social theory being formulated, history from below (especially in the United States) tended to settle into another positivist empiricism. Also, the notion of experience, more generally, tended to be shaped by relations of production, generated in material life and structured in class ways, with other subject positions subsumed by it. The ‘experience’ of capitalism, in E.P. Thompson’s approach, for example, homogenised all other experiences, dissolved difference, providing the common denominator for class consciousness in an essentialised approach to class. This obscured the “contradictory and contested process by which class itself was conceptualised and by which diverse kinds of subject-positions were assigned, felt, contested, or embraced”.<sup>90</sup>

In a project which sought to make experience visible, the categories of representation employed by social historians, the meanings of these categories, how they operated and their constitution of subjects were left unexamined.<sup>91</sup> Resistance and emancipation were presented in a teleological story in which agency and experience overcome social control in order to effect visibility. According to Joan Scott, this is not enough. Instead, she says,

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<sup>88</sup>Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988 (first published, 1978), p 21. For another example of the intersection of the concerns of history from below, oral history and life history research, see Daniel Bertaux (ed), *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*. See also Brian Elliot, ‘Biography, Family History and the Analysis of Social Change’, in Michael Drake (ed), *Time Family and Community: Perspectives on Family and Community History*, Oxford: The Open University in association with Blackwell, 1994. It is interesting to note that both Paul Thompson and Daniel Bertaux have done their work from a location in the discipline of sociology.

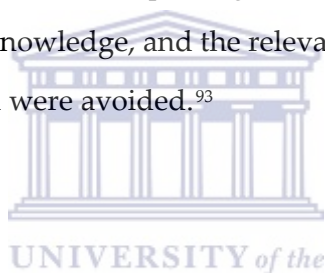
<sup>89</sup>Hunt, ‘History Beyond Social Theory’, p 96.

<sup>90</sup>Joan Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, *Critical Inquiry*, 17, Summer, 1991, pp 373-376.

<sup>91</sup>Joan Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, p 368.

[w]e need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative ... evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. To think about experience in this way is to historicise it as well as to historicise the identities it produces.<sup>92</sup>

Seeing experience through the methods of social history led its practitioners to see the individual as a transparent category, rather than ask how conceptions of selves - subjects and identities - were produced. Instead, subjects were produced through the imposition of universal, naturalised categories, (the worker, the peasant, the black). The very processes of subject construction were precluded, with subject positions constructed as “ready made unities with firm, all-encompassing identities”. Questions of cognition, discourse, the production of knowledge, and the relevance of the position of subjects to the knowledge they produced were avoided.<sup>93</sup>



Following Joan Scott, the processes by which subject positions are assigned, “the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced” are in need of explanation. To argue that the formation of new identities is a discursive phenomenon and that subjects are constituted discursively is to insist that ‘experience’ and language are connected.<sup>94</sup> Experience is neither straightforward, nor self-evident. In redefining its operations beyond its usage in social history as the origin of explanation, is to insist that it is always contested, and always political. For Joan Scott, the focus needs to be on the processes of identity formation, with an insistence on the

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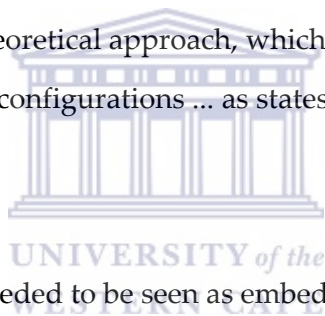
<sup>92</sup>Joan Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, pp 369-370.

<sup>93</sup>Joan Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, pp 373, 382; Gary Minkley, Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, ‘Thresholds, Gateways and Spectacles: Journeying through South African Hidden Pasts and Histories in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century’, Paper presented to the Conference on *The Future of the Past: The Production of History in a Changing South Africa*, 10-12 July 1996, pp 4-5.

<sup>94</sup>Joan Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, pp 382-383.

discursive nature of experience and the politics of its construction. Indeed, society-individual relations are mediated discursively.

The theoretical ground constructed across the disciplines of sociology and history by Philip Abrams sought to overcome methodological individualism and the dualist understanding of the relationship of individual and society as constituting “separate realities”. According to this approach, which had dominated much of early sociology and social theory, the human stood outside society and nature as “an autonomous thinking agent acting on them”. Abrams’ work sought to develop a historical sociology of the individual which addressed the problem of the individual and society by collapsing the distinction, and by containing the individual and the social within a unified scheme. For Abrams, society was “a process constructed historically by individuals who are constructed historically by society”.<sup>95</sup> Human experience could be accounted for through this theoretical approach, which affirmed the “historical unity of personal identities and social configurations ... as states of being in a single two-sided process of becoming”.<sup>96</sup>



Flowing from this, persons needed to be seen as embedded in historical contexts as a means of appreciating that identities were based on social histories as well as personal histories. This meant that an understanding of individuality could be presented, namely that “individuals constitute historical figuration and are historically constituted by them”. Identities were an assemblage of life history and the history of societies.

According to Abrams, the “fine details of individuation” were not unlike the “broader patterning” of that process.<sup>97</sup>

For Abrams, it was almost impossible to overcome dualism in practice. Nevertheless, he presented an argument for the “dovetailing of logic and chronology” in the making of the life history, or “moral career”. The processes of becoming individual are “embedded,

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<sup>95</sup>Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology*, pp 227-228.

<sup>96</sup>Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology*, p 265.

<sup>97</sup>Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology*, pp 250, 298.

enacted, lived in particular conjunctions of life-history and social history, a two-dimensional time". And it is the moral career which is their articulation. Moral careers are "lived by individuals" at the same time as they are "the typical destinies of collectivities". They contain a historical location as well as a logic, which together constitute the "actual biographies of particular individuals". Moral careers are determined and patterned by historically located processes in which the process of becoming is socially structured. Persons become what they are (for example, a revolutionary) as much as they are almost unavoidably socially propelled into those identities.<sup>98</sup>

A symbiosis between the personal and the public in the notion of moral career raises questions about the connections between identity and institutions. Abrams discusses the example of the revolutionary career. The revolutionary career emerges out of the commitment of self, of identity to the idea of revolution. For Abrams, the process of becoming radical occurs in a cumulative process involving the experiences of "affinity" and "affiliation" (the phase of conversion) through the phase of "signification", or enactment of the revolutionary project in which the subject's 'deviation' or political defiance directly and seriously challenges the state's system of meaning for society. The field of action for the subject is defined as distinctly political and through affiliation, the subject engages "in the creation of new political meaning and in the enactment of that ... meaning".<sup>99</sup>

Philip Abrams's work directly addresses the need to move away from untheorised, realist notions of the 'individual' which have characterised much of traditional biography. It begins to answer some of the issues about subject construction and the processes by which identities are made. His work shows that it is possible to overcome dualism and the notion that the individual and society constitute separate realities. However, the notion of 'moral career' still presents the life history as a chronologically patterned journey. In his examination of identity, the life and career of the revolutionary

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<sup>98</sup>Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology*, pp 276-282.

<sup>99</sup>Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology*, pp 282-294.

are seen as having a historically organised and processual nature, premised on a path of development. What makes the life of an individual exceptional is the particular “meshing of life-history and social history in a singular fate”. While individual lives may be unique, their uniqueness arises out of the “dynamic realisation” of a distinct sequence of historically specific possibilities, constraints and opportunities available to “historically located individuals within historically located social worlds”. This theoretical model constructed by Abrams tends to draw a straight line between individual identity and collective identity, with the individual made into an expression and manifestation of the collective.<sup>100</sup>

Likewise, in the case of social history research, Brian Elliot has argued that by concentrating on their “forensic potential”, biographical approaches may be used very deliberately to “explore the connections between major processes of change or great dislocative events and patterns of everyday life”. In this way, he suggests, biography may contribute to the refinement of social theory and empirical generalisations. Biographical materials enable the “cross-sectional quality” of survey data to be supplemented so that individuals and groups may better be traced “through time and space”. They make it possible for connections to be established “between major processes of change and the actual experience of specific social groups”. Elliot argues that biographical studies “take us close into the real, lived experience and uncover the intimate dynamics of the social world”.<sup>101</sup>

In much of social history, a socialised concept of memory is developed to represent more than individual or subjective experience and to stand for collective and objective social and economic experience and consciousness, read particularly in class terms. Social history’s reliance on the historical method of collecting life histories tended to assume that their assembled quantity, matching and sequencing as well as their individual

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<sup>100</sup>Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology*, p 297.

<sup>101</sup>Brian Elliot, ‘Biography, Family History and the Analysis of Social Change’, pp 46-48.

'representivity' would constitute and correlate collective memory.<sup>102</sup> Named and naturalised into individual and collective categories, the status of people 'hidden from history' is sustained and perpetuated as the polyglossia of identity is almost completely obscured, differences concealed, and the relations of power that went into these identities masked.<sup>103</sup>

With the emphasis in social history (and in Abrams' historical sociology) firmly on collective identities, biography (styled as life history) produced in these frameworks becomes a mechanism to view individuals (ordinary men and women) as units of social forms and collective possibilities, as condensates of social relations and economic processes and as repositories of group identities and consciousness, primarily of classes. Individual lives become prisms through which to view and recover 'larger issues' ('contexts') of social structure as experienced collectively as forms of social control and the agency of individuals who have been named into their essentialist identities and group categories.<sup>104</sup>

Literary scholar, Stephen Clingman, has articulated a similar framework in an attempt to address the problem of individualism that "runs counter to a social perspective".<sup>105</sup> He suggests, following Lukacs, that "biographical subjects can also be used as 'laboratory specimens', for exploring complex social and historical issues in the intense and heightened focus of individual life".<sup>106</sup> Exceptionality, for Clingman, may indeed be the "key" to social representativeness. For Lukacs, "typicality" did not imply being "average". The "really typical figure" is one who "condenses in extreme and concentrated form broader experiences otherwise dispersed variously through different lives in society". Typical figures "engage in their fullest potential with the social and

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<sup>102</sup>See Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa', in Carli Coetzee and Sarah Nuttall (eds), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*.

<sup>103</sup>Gary Minkley, Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, 'Thresholds, Gateways and Spectacles', pp 3-5.

<sup>104</sup>For examples of this approach, see Franco Ferrarotti, 'On the Autonomy of the Biographical Method', in Daniel Bertaux (ed), *Biography and Society* and Paul Thompson, 'Life Histories and the Analysis of Social Change', in the same volume.

<sup>105</sup>Stephen Clingman, 'Biography and Representation: Some Analogies from Fiction', History Workshop Conference, University of the Witwatersrand, February 1987, p 2.

<sup>106</sup>Stephen Clingman, 'Biography and Representation', p 7.



historical circumstances of their situation”, and in this way, the exceptional figure becomes representative “not only of wider patterns in society, but indeed of whole historical moments”. Subjects of biographies

are often articulate members of a community who have been through a range of fascinating experiences; in this sense they are exceptional.... But if one sees this exceptionality as condensing a much wider potential in society, then such characters can also be seen as representative of a range of experiences, patterns and social meanings [which] comprised the matrix from which a generalised experience was composed.<sup>107</sup>

In this perspective, biography is a social form of representation, “the high road of social investigation rather than an embarrassed by-way”.<sup>108</sup> Once again, we are presented with the biographical concept of the individual life as a ‘prism’ in which the individual remains an expression of the social. We want to suggest that there is a third element in the equation between ‘individual subject’ and ‘society’ that can enable the approach to biography as ‘prism’ for social processes, collectivities and representativeness to be transcended. This entails an approach that locates individual lives within human relationships. Viewed in this way, Clingman’s notion of a life history as a ‘laboratory of identity’ can really come into its own. Human beings enter into relations of many different kinds with others, through which they construct meanings and narratives and fashion their identities.<sup>109</sup> It becomes possible for biography to emerge as the study of *reciprocal constructions* and the ways in which people narrate each other in relationships, especially ones that are ongoing, regular and formative. It is in these ‘biographical relations’ that individual-society relations are mediated discursively. This is also where identities are constituted through representation within specific institutional sites, and

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<sup>107</sup>Stephen Clingman, ‘Biography and Representation’, pp 8-9.

<sup>108</sup>Stephen Clingman, ‘Biography and Representation’, p 9.

<sup>109</sup>There are some elements of this approach in Shula Marks, “*Not Either an Experimental Doll*” - *The Separate Worlds of three South African Women*, London: Women’s Press, 1987. This is a study of the ‘intesectioning destinies’ of three South African women’s lives by searching into the sociocultural contexts “from which each woman came onto the relationship”. Their attitudes and experiences were influenced by what each brought to the relationship, and its ultimate breakdown. For a discussion of this approach, see Personal Narratives Group, ‘Conditions not of her own Making’, in Personal Narratives Group (eds), *Interpreting Women’s Lives*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.



through particular enunciative strategies. Through this perspective, it also becomes possible to breach the divide between the public and the private, the political and the personal, and to reflect on the individual in a more complex way.<sup>110</sup>

Within social history and historical sociology, little attention has been paid to the narration of lives, to the relationship between subjects and discursive practices and to the question of narrative worlds into which people are born. Some new ground has been forged in anthropological work. However, it is mainly within literary studies, particularly among literary critics interested in autobiography, more than in history and the social sciences, that analytical and theoretical interest in understanding lives as productions has found expression. And, for biography to be meaningful to history, it needs to use these theoretical insights developed within literary interpretation and cultural criticism.

### *Biography and narrative*

Literary theories of auto/biography have had a set of distinct emphases, which stem from their concern for the nature and expression of subjectivity and selves, their interest in the production of narrative, their consideration of these issues in relation to a fact-fiction dichotomy and from a concern to problematise modes of truth presentation. It is necessary for traditional conceptual and disciplinary divides to be transcended in order that the study of pastness through biography can move beyond conventional realist models of great lives as well as the essentialist identities of social history.

The sociologist Norman Denzin has drawn on the theoretical insights of literary theory, arguing that it is not enough to assert that biographical coherence is an 'illusion'. What must be determined, instead, is how life coherence in texts is established, what the sources of this coherence are, and how the narratives underpinning them are

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<sup>110</sup> In her work on 'complex agency', Kratz begins to talk of 'collective individuals'; see Corinne A Kratz, 'Forging Unions and Negotiating Ambivalence: Personhood and Complex Agency in Okiek Marriage Arrangement', in Ivan Karp and D.A. Masolo, eds, *African Philosophy as Cultural Inquiry*.

constructed.<sup>111</sup> It is tempting merely to distinguish between lives as lived and experienced, and lives as told or produced. However, Richard Ochberg suggests that through the perspective of storytelling, we are able to understand the “‘storied nature’ of human lives”. Lives do not simply become narrativised after the fact, once people have lived or experienced their lives. For Ochberg, people live out their lives in a storied manner. It is not possible to disentangle lives as lived from telling or performing a story. Individuals live in ways that are deeply embedded in narrative. Individuals conduct their life episodes in patterns similar to the plots of stories. In other words, the ‘storied life’ should become much more of a focus in the ways in which people think about biography.<sup>112</sup>

As Hannah Arendt has noted, we are part of narratives right from birth and these make us both subject and object. Life stories are a way of fashioning identity in a public sense and in a private sense. Individuals live their lives in a relation with their life stories being narrated. Here the life story becomes part of the individual’s public life. But these forms of personal narration in public may not be sufficient to constitute identity formation. People do not merely tell stories of their experiences after the fact. They live out their affairs in storied forms. We become greatly aware of the narrative connections and attached meanings to certain life actions and these direct the choices made, relations entered into and courses decided upon. In this way, life becomes lived almost like a kind of argument in which one construction of experience is privileged over some other one.<sup>113</sup>

As much as people create themselves, they also recreate themselves and refashion their identities, drawing from encounters with a range of ready-made identities. It is language and narrative, which make it possible to think about these identities and to shape new

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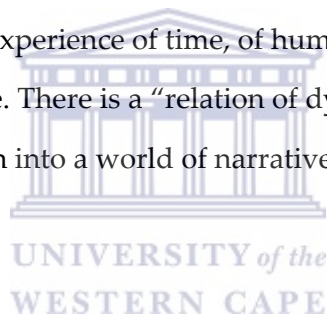
<sup>111</sup>Norman K Denzin, *Interpretive Biography*, p 62.

<sup>112</sup>Richard I Ochberg, ‘Life stories and storied lives’, in Amia Lieblich and Ruthellen Josselson (eds), *Exploring Identity and Gender: The Narrative Study of Lives*, (The Narrative Study of Lives, Volume 2) London: Sage, 1994, p 113.

<sup>113</sup>See Birgitta Svensson, ‘The Power of Biography: Criminal Policy, Prison Life, and the Formation of Criminal Identities in the Swedish Welfare State’, in Deborah Reed-Danahay (ed), *Autoethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*, Washington: Berg Publishers, 1997.

ones.<sup>114</sup> Modernity gave rise to lives that can be seen as “biographically ordered”. People live their lives biographically and construct their reality on the basis of biography. Indeed, as Birgitta Svensson has suggested, modern existence can be seen as “ordered as an autobiographical presentation”.<sup>115</sup> The narrated life is characterised by a “struggle between concordance and discordance”, the aim of which is to discover narrative identity. Through narrative identity, one is able to develop a sense of one’s self as a subject.<sup>116</sup>

Conventionally, a distinction is made between *the life as lived*, supposedly in an unmediated way, and *the life as told* through a subsequent process of narration. However, according to Paul Ricoeur, the process of selection and narration begins “in life itself, with attention and planned activity”. Life is experienced in a temporal way. For Ricoeur, temporality and narrativity are mutually imbricated. Literature and history have in common the human experience of time, of human “within-timeness”. Life, for Ricoeur, “prefigures” narrative. There is a “relation of dynamic circularity” between life and narrative. People are born into a world of narratives, and life is lived “in quest of narrative”.<sup>117</sup>



We refer to a life-story as the interval between birth and death. However, knowledge over the past few decades, for the most part, has tended to distance narrative from lived experience and to confine it to fiction. It is not only history that has a direct relation with life. Ricoeur argues that fiction contributes to making life. He distinguishes between first order narrative, in which “emplotment constitutes the creative centre” and narratology, which is a second order “rational reconstruction of the rules”. This second order is “always preceded by a narrative understanding stemming from the creative imagination”. “There is”, he argues, “a *life* of narrative activity”. With this, Ricoeur

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<sup>114</sup>Kwame Anthony Appiah, ‘Cosmopolitan Patriots’, Africa Seminar, University of Cape Town, 24 March 1997, pp 7-8.

<sup>115</sup>Birgitta Svensson, ‘Lifetimes - Life History and Life Story: Biographies of Modern Swedish Intellectuals’, *Ethnologia Scandinavica*, vol 25, 1995, p 26.

<sup>116</sup>David Wood ‘Introduction: Interpreting Narrative’, in David Wood (ed), *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, London: Routledge, 1991, p 11.

<sup>117</sup>David Wood ‘Introduction: Interpreting Narrative’, pp 16-17.

bridges the gap and revises the paradox between stories which are seen as recounted and lives which are seen as lived.<sup>118</sup>

### *Auto/biography and the production of history*

It has been suggested by Laura Marcus that attempts to persist in defining autobiography conceptually away from biography are inadequate and unhelpful. According to Marcus, “far more exciting conjunctures occur, showing how autobiography and biography function together”. She suggests two forms of interaction: that recounting one’s own life “almost inevitably entails writing the life of an other” and that the writing of another’s life “must surely entail the biographer's identifications with his or her subject, whether these are made explicit or not”.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, Marcus’ use of the category ‘auto/biography’ is directed at challenging a conceptual division between autobiography and biography. This thesis suggests that there is a third, perhaps more important interaction, namely that the writing of another’s life almost inevitably means that one enters into the existence of autobiographical texts, of narrations of self on the part of the subject. This includes narratives lived out in life itself, and biographical texts that the subject had a hand in creating and establishing. The act of biography necessarily entails such encounters with auto-narrations and autobiography.

These storied lives are also lived out inside the narrative world of institutions, where people are immersed in the biographical ordering that occurs through their structures, procedures and discourses. Birgitta Svensson has examined the operation of power in the coercive institutional edifice of the prison, and the mania of the welfare state for recording and cataloguing individuals. Their administrative and bureaucratic procedures of documentation reflect the power of the biographical project of the prison system and penal policy in constituting specific criminal identities and biographies.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Paul Ricoeur, ‘Life in Quest of Narrative’, in David Wood (ed), *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, p 24.

<sup>119</sup>Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses*, pp 272-273.

<sup>120</sup> Birgitta Svensson, ‘The Power of Biography’, pp 71-104.

These, in turn, have a profound effect on shaping autobiographic narrations and understandings.

While the prison seems to represent an extreme case of a coercive biographic institution, Svensson's arguments can be extended to understanding the biographic character of other institutions of social order and regulation such as schools and political organisations. These institutions are also characterised by rules and codes, and the lives of their members become a subject for registration, regulation, evaluation, classification and record-keeping. What emerges is a documentary record, which talks to the history of these institutions, and to their discursive frames, which shape the life narratives of the individuals who constitute them. The resultant archive stands as testimony, not merely to the existence of these institutions and their members, but to their capacity to constitute subjectivities and biographic possibilities (and constraints), as a key element of the social knowledge that they produce.

The biographic process should not be seen as characterised by a passive relationship between subject and biographer, in which the biographer is in some sense in command of the life of their subject. Indeed, there is always a struggle for control over the story of a life. This may involve a struggle between the biographer and the subject in which the narrativisation of self entails more than merely leaving traces, but actively organising and laying the groundwork for the production of a life. This need not be on the scale of taking "a pre-emptive strike for control of the biographical space", as described by Evans in the case of Simone de Beauvoir. De Beauvoir had sought to provide "the authoritative account of her life" with a "conscious determination to construct a particular kind of life and person". This she did through the production of four volumes of autobiography as well as accounts of the death of her mother and of her life-long companion, Sartre. Through these works, De Beauvoir constructed herself through the masculinist mode, as being of "ungendered rationality" with a refusal to engage with the feminine.<sup>121</sup> There was a conscious attempt to construct a particular kind of life and

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<sup>121</sup> Mary Evans, 'Masculine and Feminine Biography', pp 112-113.

person, and to organise human experience. Indeed, the relationship between biographer and subject is more complex than that for which the passive model allows.<sup>122</sup>

Also important is the relationship between biographer and those with whom the subject was close. Sometimes, more interests may be involved, as when the existence and identity of a political organisation depends on and is interwoven with the symbolic power of an individual identity, a biographic presence of a leader. In some cases these struggles result in conflicts with an estate of a deceased, which tries to assert control over the rights to an author's life. Janet Malcolm described one such case in her book *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*. Sylvia Plath's survivors resented the interpretive freedom of the reader. Ted Hughes bemoaned the "absolute power and the corruption" that came with the right of the critic to say what they pleased about the dead. At issue was the question of ownership of "the facts of our lives" after death. Comparing biography to burglary, Malcolm contended that "we do not 'own' the facts of our lives at all. This ownership passes out of our hands at birth, at the moment we are first observed".<sup>123</sup> To be observed involves dispossession of our lives. We can never own our lives. Yet the biographer seizes the life of the subject as a "transgressive" act, engaging in metaphorical theft, stealing that which is not owned.<sup>124</sup>

For such struggle to take place, however, need not imply open warfare. It takes place even where there is no awareness of its presence. There will always be a dialogue between the biographical process and autobiographical traces, even where no autobiography as such exists. These narrative traces are to be found in archival collections, interviews, diaries, and other forms of life-writing and self-production. They

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<sup>122</sup>See the biography of Simone de Beauvoir by Deidre Bair (*Simone de Beauvoir - A Biography*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1990) in which she merely follows these tracks laid by De Beauvoir in order to demonstrate the validity of these self-images, without analysing De Beauvoir's conscious attempts to construct herself in particular ways; Mary Evans, 'Masculine and Feminine Biography', pp 112-113.

<sup>123</sup>Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, London: Picador, 1994, pp 8, 46-7. See also Janet Malcolm, 'The Silent Woman', *The New Yorker*, No 69, 23-30 August, 1993.

<sup>124</sup>Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman*, p 9. See the discussion by Barbara Johnson, 'Whose life is it anyway?: Introduction' in M Rhiel and D Suchoff, eds, *The Seductions of Biography*, pp 119-121. But see Chapter Two for a discussion of the case of Martin Luther King, Jr, and the attempt by the King family to control and benefit from the proceeds of King biographic memorialism.



are also to be found in the 'storied life' of the subject, just as they may have been forged in the mutually constitutive settings of biographical relations and in the documentary imperatives, plots and patterns of biographical institutions. Indeed, they constitute genealogies of biographical production, which shape and influence the contours of contemporary productions through their narrative selections, silences and transactions.

This perspective suggests ways in which it is possible to view biography through the methodological lens of *the production of history*, in which history is understood as "the processing of the past in societies and historical settings ... and the struggles for control of voices and texts in innumerable settings which animate this processing of the past". As a "field of practice", *the production of history* encompasses, inter alia, "the organising sociologies" of historicising projects, commemorative events, "the structuring of frames of record-keeping" as well as "the contentions and struggles which evoke and produce texts and which also produce historical literatures".<sup>125</sup> This broader approach to the production of historical knowledge is also concerned to understand the practices and genres of history making outside the academy, as well as how these relate to the peculiar routines and rituals of academic practice. What are the points of connection, transition and translation between these domains of history? With these questions and methods, it may indeed be possible to speak of *the production of auto/biography*.

As part of understanding the process of producing biography, it is necessary to question the claim that historians may make to be uncovering 'the truth'. What is being created, instead, is a subject in a text that is written. There is no 'real' person behind the text. The language of biography in fact cannot be taken as a window "into the 'real' world of 'real' interacting subjects". Rather, persons are created in texts. Any approach that perpetuates a distinction between 'factual history', containing non-fictional scholarship as truth, and 'fiction', taken to consist of imagined facts and facticities, is unhelpful in enabling a

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<sup>125</sup> David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp 244-5; see also David William Cohen, 'Further Thoughts on the Production of History', in Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith (eds), *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).



stronger theoretical grasp of the narration of lives. Indeed, for Norman Denzin, all writing about lives is fictional.<sup>126</sup>

Likewise, for Raymond Williams, the dichotomy between fact and fiction, described very negatively as 'myth' as against 'fact' - what did happen - is crippling. Biography and autobiography, for Williams, should be seen as test cases, suggesting an overlap between fact and fiction.<sup>127</sup> Biographies, according to Denzin, are always "incomplete literary productions". Conventionally, they use narrative devices, which conform to the presumption that lives have beginnings and the "cultural myth that lives have endings". These devices convey the idea that complete stories about lives can be told. Indeed, according to Denzin, lives are not 'real'. They are constructions, "constrained by the cultural writing practices of the time".<sup>128</sup> For Marcus, the distinction between auto/biography and fiction needs to be effaced, by asserting the fictionality of all discourse. In auto/biography, the 'life' and 'the subject' are constructed in writing. Indeed, "[the] self does not pre-exist the text but is constructed by it".<sup>129</sup>

Seeking an approach to biography that overcomes the untheorised, chronological narrative procedures of traditional biography does not mean rejecting narrative altogether. Indeed, this dissertation suggests that narrative should be taken more seriously in the construction of lives and in the production of history. Merely to impose a narrative structure on events in the reconstruction of the past, as a chronological 'history of events' or as a life history, in realist mode, placed in a 'historical context', is not enough. Rather, we should recognise the existence of multiple narrations intersecting and crosscutting each other, paralleling and contradicting each other as they compete for the creation of historical meaning. These narratives and representations constitute historicising projects differing between past and present, subject and

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<sup>126</sup>Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Biography*, pp 22-24.

<sup>127</sup>Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp 146-149.

<sup>128</sup>Norman K Denzin, *Interpretive Biography*, pp 24-26.

<sup>129</sup>Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses*, p 180. Marcus's writing is a direct challenge to the much-cited work on autobiography by James Olney. Olney had argued for the concept of a unified human nature pre-existing textual expression and stood by a fact - fiction dichotomy. See James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

historian, personal and political, and transcending the distinction between fact and fiction. Moving beyond conventional narrative means taking account of these various historicising projects and understanding the politics, sociologies and genealogies of their production. It also requires the recognition that the academic historian's narrative is "one 'voice' among others".<sup>130</sup>



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<sup>130</sup>Peter Burke, 'History of Events and the Revival of Narrative', in Peter Burke, (ed), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PUBLIC HISTORY, GREAT LIVES AND BIOGRAPHIC CONTESTATIONS

Biography may have a specific history as a literary genre, and may have been central to the life history research methods in the academic disciplines of sociology, anthropology and history. However, perhaps the most significant mode of biography's existence has been outside the academy, where it has been an arena for the production of memory. Political biography based on quite traditional concerns of self-evident leadership, with the nation seen as natural, and seeking to highlight the 'role' of the remarkable individual, has continued to form the basis of much history that has been produced in the public domain. Great lives have been turned into biographical lessons in popular book series directed at young adults, while biographic productions in the form of popular books and television documentaries have also sought to uncover sensational truths about the lives of prominent individuals, sometimes resulting in public biographic contestations.

Beyond the written text, biography has been a key feature of histories produced through visual mediums and memorial landscapes. The genre of the Hollywood biopic, where public history intersects with the making of celebrity, continues to focus on exemplary lives. Conventional biography has also entered the landscape of national heritage and symbolic topography in the form of '*lieux de mémoire*' ('sites' or 'realms' or memory) that seek to create ties of belonging for national subjects.<sup>1</sup> In spite of these

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring 1989); see also Pierre Nora and Lawrence D Kritzman, (eds), *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past* (3 Volumes; New York: Columbia University Press, 1996-1998); first published as Pierre Nora (ed), *Les lieux de mémoire* (seven volumes; Paris: Edition Gallimard, 1984-1992). As a diverse ensemble of representational genres, *lieux de mémoire* are sites "where [cultural] memory crystallises and secretes itself" (Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p 7). They articulate the

sites of the 'memorial complex' being the locus of disputes and contests at different times, perhaps the most challenging approaches to biography in the realm of public history have emerged in a number of museum exhibitions curated in the 1990s, through which issues about the relationship between biography and image making, and lives as cultural productions have been explored. Not only did these exhibitions study biographical narration through visual representation, they also began to step outside nationalist and realist frames, which have dominated approaches to lives and their histories in the public domain.

### *Great lives, history lessons and exposé biography*

Two biographical series found outside the academy, offering readers short, readable chronological narratives of "history makers" and "dominating individuals who have shaped the modern world", are 'The Great Lives Series' and 'Makers of the Twentieth Century'.<sup>2</sup> The former seeks to present "fascinating biographies to captivate, educate, and inspire".<sup>3</sup> The life stories constructed are those of "courageous men and women from all walks of life, in every corner of the globe, who have challenged the way society thinks, stood up for their rights, and changed the world".<sup>4</sup> With subjects in the series ranging from Abraham Lincoln, John F Kennedy and Jesse Jackson to Lech Walesa, Nelson Mandela and Mikhail Gorbachev, lives have been stripped to the barest minimum, presented in simple story form and given catchy slogans as titles.<sup>5</sup> The objectives of the series are to "pay tribute to the character, determination, and personal courage of heroes who have made a difference in all our lives". Each

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heritage of a given community through tangible and intangible forms. They can be distinguished from mere *lieux d'histoire* in their intention to remember, and in their deliberate 'archival' character of visibility or immediacy. See also Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), Ch. 1 and John R Gillis, 'Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship', in John R Gillis (ed), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup>The 'Great Lives Series' is published by Fawcett Columbine (Ballantine Books) in New York and 'Makers of the Twentieth Century' is published in the Cardinal series by Sphere Books in London.

<sup>3</sup>Rebecca Steffoff, *Nelson Mandela: Hero For Democracy* (Revised Edition), New York: Fawcett Columbine by Ballantine Books, 1994, p 154.

<sup>4</sup>Rebecca Steffoff, *Nelson Mandela*, p i.

<sup>5</sup>Titles in the series ranging from *Abraham Lincoln: The Freedom President*, *John F Kennedy: Courage in Crisis*, *Jesse Jackson: A Voice For Change*, *Lech Walesa: The Road to Democracy*, *Nelson Mandela: Hero For Democracy* and *Mikhail Gorbachev: The Soviet Innovator*.

biography seeks to present 'great lives' as storehouses of essential, "unforgettable lessons" particularly to young adults.<sup>6</sup>

The objectives of the 'Makers of the Twentieth Century' series are more ambitious. It seeks to reach students in search of brief introductions as well as "ordinary readers" seeking the minimum about a "life and legacy" through a form that can be "absorbed in a single sitting". It also wishes to command the attention of "the specialist", with interpretations based on "the latest research" and authors drawn from the academy.<sup>7</sup> Any charge that extreme concentration on the individual may distort and exaggerate is given short shrift with the argument that

[at] critical moments the course of history can be diverted, channelled or simply ridden by individuals who by luck, ruthlessness or destiny are able to impose their personality, for good or ill, upon their times.<sup>8</sup>

The unashamed fascination for leaders and individual greatness that characterises this series has given rise to a classificatory system of "the outstanding heroes and villains of the century". The great men are graded into national leaders who have "restored the failing destinies of old nations", like De Gaulle, Adenauer and Ataturk, and those who created new nations out of the "collapse of European empires", such as Jinnah and Nkrumah. Then there are national leaders who went on to make "a still greater impact on the international stage", like Jan Smuts, Willy Brandt and Franklin Roosevelt. A category is then created for those who did not make it to government, but who nevertheless "achieved worldwide resonance as the embodiments of powerful ideas". Finally, a category is reserved for "the great tyrants", who are seen to transcend all the categories, such as Hitler, Stalin and Mao Zedong. In the series, subjects are placed "within the context of their domestic politics" and an attempt is made to assess "their international importance".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Rebecca Steffoff, *Nelson Mandela*, back cover; p i.

<sup>7</sup>See Editor's Foreword by John Campbell in Adam Fairclough, *Martin Luther King*, London: Cardinal by Sphere Books, 1991, pp vi-vii.

<sup>8</sup>John Campbell, Editor's Foreword in Adam Fairclough, *Martin Luther King*, p vii.

<sup>9</sup>John Campbell, Editor's Foreword in Adam Fairclough, *Martin Luther King*, pp vi-vii.

These biographies of 'great political lives', in which individual public action is abstracted, tend to follow a fairly conventional pattern of chronological narrative with a sustained focus on the public political career. The subjects are narrated as rather one-dimensional and ungendered with the life course seen as an ordered progression of acts and events, as a series of lessons learnt, and based on the purposeful actions of rational actors. The lives recounted tend to read as dramatic narratives from which the reader is meant to derive narrative pleasure. The lives are presented as lived through epiphanies or turning point moments, with enigmas set up pointing to future greatness or achievement. In these linear, cliographic narratives, the biographies tend to be centred on stories told as lives overcoming adversity, the achievement of greatness against the odds, the accumulation of achievement in domestic and international politics, or the decisive impact of supreme individuality upon the world. Narrative pleasure is achieved in the resolution of the enigmas in the unfolding of the stories.

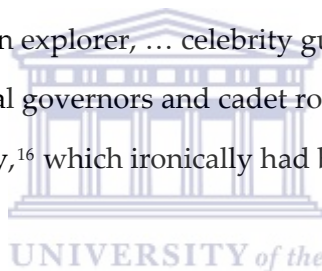
Biography as a genre of history outside the academy also offers readers and viewers a field of public revelation and contestation, scoops on the ultimate truths about lives. Some have sought emotional and psychological healing in literary auto/biography as a therapeutic and cathartic space.<sup>10</sup> Others have tried to sensationalise lives through 'warts-and-all' or 'exposé' biography by revealing, in graphic detail, previously hidden dimensions of lives beyond the public eye, especially of perceived sexual immorality or moral deviation and manifest dishonesty. Assumed leadership or prominence of a political, literary, philosophical or moral kind have laid people as varied as Winnie Mandela, Laurens van der Post, Bertold Brecht and Mother Teresa open to biographic exposé and critique, often leading to public contests over the facts and meaning of particular lives.

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<sup>10</sup>For a South African example of this, see Gillian Slovo, *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country*, London: Little Brown, 1997.

There are biographic exposés of Winnie Madikizela Mandela (as she became known after her divorce), which attempt to trace her ‘descent’ into becoming “an apologist for some of the worst excesses of black South Africa’s armed struggle”,<sup>11</sup> or which implicate her in the murder or attempted murder of political activists, thus casting doubt over her biographic status as “mother of the nation”.<sup>12</sup> Another example of this kind of biography is the study of Mao’s life by Zhisui Li.<sup>13</sup> In this book the author, who had been Mao's personal physician for 22 years, revealed details about Mao's unhygienic personal habits as well as his supposed ravenous sexual appetite that led to the seduction of “thousands” of peasant women out of a belief in the “mystical healing power” of sex.<sup>14</sup>

In the public domain, the field of biography continues to throw up contests over the historical facts of lives, and over the truths of their chronological narratives. The death of Laurens van der Post, “African explorer, ... celebrity guru”, and “philosopher-in-attendance to Britain’s political governors and cadet royalty” saw the “whistle ... blown on his career”<sup>15</sup> in a biography,<sup>16</sup> which ironically had been commissioned by the Van



<sup>11</sup>Emma Gilbey, *The Lady: The Life and Times of Winnie Mandela*, London: Vintage, 1994, back cover.

<sup>12</sup>Fred Bridgland, *Katiza's Journey: Beneath the Surface of South Africa's Shame* (Sidgwick & Jackson, London; AMP-PVD, Wilrijk, 1997). This is a biography of Katiza Cebukhulu, an alleged member of the Mandela Football Club, as told to Bridgland, a narrative about Katiza's journey from being taken from poverty and crime into Winnie Madikizela Mandela's patronage, only to find himself witnessing her alleged murder of youth activist Stompie Sepei. Cebukhulu had been Madikizela-Mandela's co-accused in her kidnapping trial of Sepei, but had disappeared on the eve of the court proceedings. After claiming that he had been abducted by the ANC to prevent him from testifying, he was found in a Zambian jail by British former Liberal Party MP, Emma Nicholson, under whose protection he went into hiding under an assumed name. It is interesting to note that Nicholson wrote the foreword to Bridgland's book. However, see the website <[www.globalafrica.com](http://www.globalafrica.com)>, representing a loose network of Afrocentric thinkers, for whom Bridgland's book represents an example of the character assassination of “Brothers and Sisters past, present and future, who have dedicated their lives to our struggle for liberation”. The representatives of Globalafrica bemoan having to “endure the indignity of watching almost helplessly, as our greatest heroes are vilified and crucified in the Global European (White) media” (<<http://www.globalafrica.com/WinnieM1.htm>>). For a discussion of the ‘fall’ of Winnie Madikizela Mandela in relation to the narrations of Nelson Mandela's biography, see Chapter Four.

<sup>13</sup>Zhisui Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, London: Arrow, 1996. This book claims that historian Hugh Trevor-Roper has described its author as “the Tacitus of modern China”.

<sup>14</sup> Zhisui Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, dust cover.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Gray, ‘A dithering fibber’, in *Mail and Guardian*, 16-22 November 2001; Tom Lodge, ‘Van der Post – adventurer, hero, Jungian – and a nasty piece of work’, in *Sunday Independent*, 14 October 2001.



der Post family.<sup>17</sup> Even Bertolt Brecht, “socialist icon” and “one of the giants of modern theatre” has been the subject of a “devastating demystification” in a controversial and disputed “first full biography” written by academic and public intellectual, John Fuegi in the mid-1990s.<sup>18</sup> These controversial biographical studies were also the subject of acrimonious debates, as reviewers, supporters, critics and family members engaged each other through the printed word. Much of this biographic contestation concerned issues of truth and fact, with moral and political questions also raised about the motives of biographic assessment and criticism.

J.D.F. Jones, former foreign editor and arts and literary editor of the *Financial Times* had started his research as an admirer of Laurens van der Post. With almost full access to his papers, Jones had been given the official task of “unravelling the life” of the man who had become “the embodiment of goodness”, criticism of whom would have been “tantamount to sacrilege”.<sup>19</sup> But instead of adding to “the aura of wisdom and spirituality” that he had accumulated, Jones’ biography revealed that Van der Post was a man who had lied about almost every facet of his life, including his birth, origins, education, military rank, his journeys and expeditions, whom he met and where he went. Van der Post’s stories about himself were “inaccurate, embellished, exaggerated, distorted”. He was, according to Jones, “a compulsive fantasist and master fabricator”.<sup>20</sup> The motive, it seems, behind all these lies was ambition and an urge to place himself at

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<sup>16</sup>J.D.F. Jones, *Storyteller: the Many Lives of Laurens van der Post*, (London: John Murray, 2001).

<sup>17</sup>Some months after Van der Post’s death in 1996, a “gathering of the clan, friends, family and followers” decided that the Van der Post archive would “not be open to the public, only to selected researchers”. Even then, the collection would be “heavily censored”, as Van der Post had left “strict instructions that personal correspondence was not to be available”. No doubt these precautions had been prompted in part by the revelation a week after his death of an extra-marital seduction of a 14-year old in 1953, which had resulted in the birth of a daughter, paternity of whom Van der Post had never acknowledged. See Dea Birkett, ‘The great pretender’, *The Guardian Weekend*, 13 December 1997.

<sup>18</sup> John Fuegi, *The Life and Lies of Bertolt Brecht* (London, Flamingo, 1995); this book was also published under the title *Brecht and Company: Sex, Politics and the Making of the Modern Drama* (Grove/Atlantic, Incorporated, January 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Dea Birkett, ‘The great pretender’, p 14; Lucia van der Post, ‘My father, the storyteller’, *Sunday Times Lifestyle*, 18 November 2001, p 8. According to Lucia van der Post, only “highly personal” letters, mostly to his wife, Ingaret, to Prince Charles and to Mangosuthu Buthelezi, had been removed.

<sup>20</sup> J.D.F. Jones, *Storyteller*. See *Sunday Times*, 9 September 2001, in which the revelations in Jones’ biography were reproduced in the newspaper’s sensationalised reportage on celebrity scandals.

the centre of important events. Van der Post is exposed by Jones as a “charming drunkard”, who “deserted his first wife and offspring”, and who went through life as “a serial seducer of ever younger women”.<sup>21</sup>

While reactions to Jones’ biography of Van der Post were expressed mainly in the public domain of newspapers and magazines, some reference was also made, in passing, to academic assessments of the value of Van der Post’s writing. While some reviewers lost sympathy for Jones’ “tactics”, which made “maximum sensation of a basically gutter-press procedure”, others found it “meticulously researched and carefully written”.<sup>22</sup> Far more significant though, was the reaction by Van der Post’s daughter, Lucia, who had commissioned Jones in the first place. Lucia van der Post revealed that Jones had been engaged as her father’s biographer in order to pre-empt the “grubby, speculative pens of sensation-mongers”, some of who had been “circling like vultures”.<sup>23</sup>

In response to Jones’ charges of deceit and lies, Lucia van der Post referred to the “mythical dimension” and “poetic force” of everything her father had come across. Her father saw life in “poetic” terms and spoke a “poetic truth”, not merely a literal one. Van der Post’s life, for his daughter “couldn’t be understood by the mind”. Instead, it “required imagination”. Her father had made mistakes, “but the mistakes weren’t the whole of his life”. To “divine what moves and motivates” people required “more than a long reiteration of facts”, and “more than puritanical censoriousness”. Instead, biographers needed a “generous spirit”, a “willingness to enter the heart and mind of another” and readiness “to give the subject the benefit of any doubt”. For Lucia van der Post, JDF Jones had “failed to grasp” her father’s “magic”.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Gray, ‘A dithering fibber’; Tom Lodge, ‘Van der Post – adventurer, hero, Jungian – and a nasty piece of work’.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Gray, ‘A dithering fibber’; Tom Lodge, ‘Van der Post – adventurer, hero, Jungian – and a nasty piece of work’.

<sup>23</sup> Lucia van der Post, ‘My father, the storyteller’.

<sup>24</sup> Lucia van der Post, ‘My father, the storyteller’.

While the limitations of Jones' biography of Laurens van der Post might lie in its attempt merely to uncover hidden evidence as the basis of its evaluation, an approach based on 'imagination' and an understanding of the 'poetic', the 'magical' and the 'mythical' dimensions of a life need not necessarily result in a sympathetic appreciation. The beginnings of such an approach were expressed in a short biographic study published a year after Van der Post's death by Dea Birkett.<sup>25</sup> Taking her cue from the stories he wrote, Birkett suggested that Van der Post could be understood as a legend that he himself had written:

An enormously gifted writer and raconteur, he discovered the most effective way to create a world of romance and real-life heroes was by telling stories. But the feted storyteller's most fantastical tales were those he wove about his own life.<sup>26</sup>

As an author, Van der Post established a "trademark" of "inward, psychological journeys with treks through tough terrain", and in his stories, he invented himself as "the lone white, the natural man, pitted against – yet utterly in tune with – the African continent around him". In this storybook world, Laurens van der Post was always "very conscious" of his setting, and "always immaculately dressed in an outfit he thought appropriate for the occasion". And some of the African stories he told, such as those about "his ideal Africans", the "far less threatening Bushmen", seem to have their origins in the writings of others and not, as he had claimed, in authentic Bushman tales heard in his childhood.<sup>27</sup> Van der Post's legends may have entailed the telling of lies. But for Birkett, these lies also belonged to the world of a storyteller, whose life was lived inside the web of the stories he told.

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<sup>25</sup> Dea Birkett, 'The great pretender'.

<sup>26</sup> Dea Birkett, 'The great pretender', p 16.

<sup>27</sup> Dea Birkett, 'The great pretender', pp 16-19. In preparation for this article, Birkett spent some time talking with anthropologist Edwin Wilmsen, whose research has shown that the tales recounted by Van der Post had been lifted directly out of the writings of George Stow, Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd. See Edwin N Wilmsen, 'Primitive Politics in Sanctified Landscapes: The Ethnographic Fictions of Laurens van der Post', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol 21, No 2, June 1995.

A desire to reveal evidence of biographic truths also motivated John Fuegi's search in the Bertolt Brecht Archive and the Schiffbauerdamm Theatre in the German Democratic Republic, where he encountered "tight controls" and "enormous obstacles" to understanding how Brecht's plays had been written. Indeed, there seemed to be a "tight institutional edifice" of theatrical associations, archives, societies and yearbook publications, which protected a Brechtian legacy. However, after a widespread search for information that had been "carefully hidden" by Brecht, Fuegi was able to access unpublished correspondence and diaries made available by Brecht's widow and son.<sup>28</sup>

Read together with evidence from "many deeply scarred witnesses", tape recordings with contemporaries and letters that escaped the police, these sources revealed what Fuegi has interpreted as "deliberate lies and theatrical facades" and "a lifetime of personal and political deception". Fuegi revealed that Brecht was a millionaire, whose "expensively tailored" clothes had been specially made to obtain "that special Brechtian, down-at-heel look". More importantly, Brecht had used his sexual charisma "to enslave and exploit" lovers and colleagues, and took the credit for plays written mostly by them. According to Fuegi, the vast majority of Bertolt Brecht's plays, including *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mother Courage*, had been written by those around Brecht, especially by his lovers, Elisabeth Hauptmann, Margarete Steffin and Ruth Breslau.<sup>29</sup>

Fuegi's biography of Brecht was an empirical reassessment by a long-time Brechtian scholar, who was one of the founders of the International Brecht Society in 1970 and who had edited its annual journal up until 1990.<sup>30</sup> While other studies of Brecht's life

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<sup>28</sup> Fuegi had "no item off-limits" access to copies of all Brecht's files, which had been donated to Harvard University. See John Fuegi, *The Life and Lies*, pp xiii-xviii.

<sup>29</sup> See John Fuegi, *The Life and Lies*, pp xvi-xix.

<sup>30</sup> The International Brecht Society was founded in 1970, modelled on Brecht's own unrealised plans for a "Diderot Society". As an educational institution with an international membership, the Society promotes the performance and understanding of Brecht's texts and addresses issues of politics and culture in contemporary life. It is committed to maintaining Brecht as a living force in the theatre as well as in the political and cultural arenas. It seeks to provide a service to scholars, critics, students and theatre people around the world who are interested in the life, thought and works of Bertolt Brecht. See the website <<http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/german/brecht/>>. While he was a member of the society, John Fuegi had published an earlier book about Brecht. See John Fuegi, *Bertolt Brecht: Chaos, According to Plan* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University

and work had emphasised the seriousness with which Brecht had studied Marxism in developing the themes of his plays, as well as his refined concepts of theatre and performance, for Fuegi, these characteristics were clear evidence of plagiarism by Brecht, who, he suggested, never understood the political ideas that his collaborators had poured into his plays.<sup>31</sup>

The publication of Fuegi's book set off a whirlwind of controversy in academic settings as well as the mainstream press. Four Brecht scholars jointly issued a 100-page rebuttal, which sought to refute Fuegi's suggestions chapter by chapter.<sup>32</sup> This reply to Fuegi was published in the annual Brecht Yearbook series that John Fuegi formerly edited.

Defending him against Fuegi's charges, Willett, long-time Brecht editor and translator, whose writings since 1956 did much to promote Brecht's reputation in the English-speaking world, argued against the charge of plagiarism. He pointed out that collaborative and collective work had been part of the spirit of Brecht's times. Frederic Jameson also presented this argument, and suggested that that Fuegi's attack was "essentially political". For Jameson, Fuegi seemed to present a "case of market-led individualism" desperate to denounce the "truly revolutionary collective experience" that reached its zenith in the 1960s.<sup>33</sup>

While assessments of literary texts and the lives of their authors have been a feature of academic literary studies, there is no doubt that the disputes and contests over the facts and meaning of Brecht's literary life spilled over into the public sphere of theatre and cultural criticism. Sometimes, biographical exposés and the public controversies that

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Press, 1987). In Brecht's spirit of collaborative work, the IBS hopes that this website will function as a clearinghouse, facilitating international contacts and exchanges

<sup>31</sup> See Bob Wake, 'Brecht and Company: A Review' <[www.culturevulture.net/Books/BrechtandCompany.htm](http://www.culturevulture.net/Books/BrechtandCompany.htm)>

<sup>32</sup> James K Lyon, John Willett, Siegfried Mews, and H. C. Nørregaard, 'A Brechtbuster Goes Bust: Scholarly Mistakes, Misquotes, and Malpractices in *John Fuegi's Brecht and Company*', in John Willett (guest ed), Silberman and Maarten van Dijk with Roswitha Mueller, Antony Tatlow, Carl Weber (managing eds), *Brecht Then and Now/ Brecht damals und heute* (Madison: International Brecht Society, No 20 1995), pp 259-367.

<sup>33</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1999); David Edgar, 'Each scene for itself', *London Review of Books*, Vol 21, No 5 (4 March 1999).

they have generated have been taken into even further realms of circulation and consequence, even where biographic contests have formed part of enquiries into the appropriate otherworldly status of persons after their death. Such was the case with Mother Teresa who had been the subject of public biographical critique and contestation a few years before her death in 1997.<sup>34</sup> Two critical biographies were drawn into a posthumous biographic enquiry and evaluation by the Vatican into whether or not Mother Teresa should be placed on an accelerated path to sainthood.<sup>35</sup>

The sequence of biographic exposés of the “old, wrinkled and kindly nun”, which began with Christopher Hitchens’ 1992 article, and which was taken further in Channel 4’s *Hell’s Angel* documentary, culminated in Hitchens’ 1995 book, *The Missionary Position*. This sequence of public biographical assessments represented the first time that the ‘living saint’ had been subjected to systematic biographic criticism. Among the main arguments Hitchens put forward was that Mother Teresa had spent “a great deal of time not on her knees washing the feet of the poor, but licking the feet of the rich”.<sup>36</sup> Missionaries of Charity, he argued, accepted donations from ‘ruthless’ dictators, and business leaders convicted of fraud, while acting as their ‘spiritual camouflage’. Mother Teresa was accused of preaching a message of surrender and prostration to the poor, while lending spiritual solace to dictators and wealthy exploiters.

Hitchens questioned the quality of medical care provided at the Order’s Home for the Dying, suggesting that the dying were not provided with pain-killing drugs. Mother Teresa, he argued, also blindly opposed birth control and abortion. Hitchens also

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<sup>34</sup> Christopher Hitchens, ‘Ghoul of Calcutta’, *The Nation*, April 1992; *Hell’s Angel: Mother Teresa of Calcutta* (Bandung, written and narrated by Christopher Hitchens; produced by Tariq Ali, 1994), screened on Channel 4 on 8 November 1994; Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (London: Verso, 1995). To my great disappointment, since this period of critical journalism in the early and mid-1990s, Hitchens’ journalism went on to become decidedly right wing.

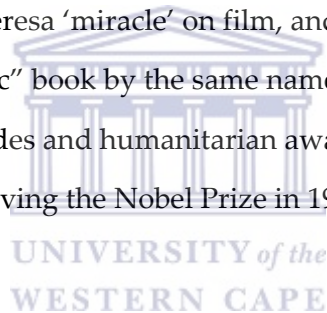
<sup>35</sup> John Follain ‘Mother Teresa “failed to give painkillers to the very ill”’, *Sunday Independent*, 1 August 1999; the two critical biographies were Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position* and Anne Sebba, *Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), which was published shortly after Mother Teresa’s death.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Christopher Hitchens by Stephen Capen, 24/12/95, <<http://www.worldmind.com/Cannon/Culture/Interviews/hitchens.html>>.



accused Mother Teresa of promulgating “a cult based on death, suffering and subjection”. This cult had become a missionary multinational, with an annual turnover of tens of millions. It was based on a relationship between charity and social imagery in which “helpless infants, abandoned derelicts, lepers and the terminally ill” were “the raw material for demonstrations of compassion”. And “the leading exponent of this false consolation”, Mother Teresa, was herself “a demagogue, an obscurantist and a servant of earthly powers”.<sup>37</sup>

While Hitchens’ biographic approach represented another significant case of disputing greatness empirically, it also went a step further to examine the history of the Mother Teresa image. A key stage in its creation, Hitchens suggested, was the encounter that she had with journalist, Malcolm Muggeridge, who “adopted her for his pet cause”.<sup>38</sup> In 1969, Muggeridge had made a BBC documentary film, *Something Beautiful for God*, which claimed to depict a Mother Teresa ‘miracle’ on film, and followed this up two years later with an equally “hagiographic” book by the same name.<sup>39</sup> It was this that made Mother Teresa a celebrity. The accolades and humanitarian awards she received in the west, which culminated in her receiving the Nobel Prize in 1979, followed in the wake of this “break into stardom”.<sup>40</sup>



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<sup>37</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position*, pp 41; 50; subsequent biographical assessments of Mother Teresa have not been able to ignore Hitchens’ critical observations. While claiming an “unbiased and balanced” position, and to give her “genuine spiritual imperatives a political, social and historical dimension”, Anne Sebba (*Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image*) was not prepared to act “as arbiter or referee” on Hitchens’ “fierce attack”. Suggesting that “uncritical defensiveness” on the part of the Catholic hierarchy did Mother Teresa’s cause “no good”, Sebba hoped her book would be read “as a dialogue with as wide a range of experts as possible”. While choosing to tread lightly in her search for some middle ground, Sebba nevertheless questioned Mother Teresa’s medical negligence and ethics. See Anne Sebba, *Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image*, pp xi-xix. See also the more analytical study by Paul Williams, *Critical Lives: Mother Teresa* (Indianapolis: Alpha, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Matt Cherry, ‘An interview with Christopher Hitchens on Mother Teresa’, *Free Inquiry*, vol 16, no 4, 1996 (accessible on the worldwide web at <[http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/hitchens\\_16\\_4.html](http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/hitchens_16_4.html)>).

<sup>39</sup> ‘Something Beautiful for God’ (Produced by Peter Chafer, BBC, 1969); Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* (London: William Collins & Sons, 1971). The book contained a transcript of the television programme, as well as a series of black and white photographs of the Sisters at prayer and at work. In 1968, an interview, which Muggeridge conducted with Mother Teresa, was broadcast in a BBC Sunday-night series called *Meeting Point*.

<sup>40</sup> Matt Cherry, ‘An interview with Christopher Hitchens on Mother Teresa’. The awards received by Mother Teresa included the Pope John XXIII Peace Prize (1971), the Joseph Kennedy Junior Foundation Award (1971), the Prize of the Good Samaritan, Boston (1971), the Jawaharlal Nehru



Moreover, in spite of her claims to operate in a “transcendental” manner, and to be “beyond” politics, the Mother Teresa ‘style’ and timing showed “every sign of instinctive genius”. She possessed, Hitchens argued, “an intuition about the need for her message” and about the way it should be delivered.<sup>41</sup> Hitchens also drew attention to public displays of piety and modesty, which “uncritical devotees” would have understood as evidence of “utter holiness and devotion”, but which were rather “obviously theatrical and calculated”. Mother Teresa’s purposeful humility required “quite a high level of planning and calculation”, the genius of which was “to make it look simple”.<sup>42</sup>

In this biographical dispute over the narrative of Mother Teresa’s life, in a philosophical sense, different phases in the history of documentary were at war with each other. The earlier phase, represented in the official depictions of Mother Teresa’s work, was geared towards exposing social problems, with an eye on reforming them, by arousing the sympathy of middle class and metropolitan audiences. The later approach was more thematic and politicised, aimed at conscious social exposés of shocking truths, and was represented in the visual documentation work of photojournalism. This is what Christopher Hitchens’ critique of Mother Teresa sought to achieve. Both approaches sought to rely on modes of truth-telling.<sup>43</sup> And the contested documentary claims on the truth about Mother Teresa’s life and work in India was also a dispute over representations of Indian society and its relations with the west.

The creation of Mother Teresa’s image has also been reflected upon in post-Hitchens reconsiderations. Writing from a more cautious (“unbiased and balanced”) position, Anne Sebba noted the almost obligatory rite on the part of world leaders of visiting

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Award for International Understanding (1972), the Angel of Charity Award (1972), the Templeton Prize (1973), and the first Albert Schweitzer International Prize (1975). Interestingly, Mother Teresa made use of the Nobel platform in 1979 to deliver a tirade against abortion.

<sup>41</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position*, p 86.

<sup>42</sup> Matt Cherry, ‘An interview with Christopher Hitchens on Mother Teresa’.

<sup>43</sup> See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), Chapter 8.

Mother Teresa, “hoping some of her saintly qualities would rub off on them if they got close enough in the inevitable photograph”. However, in her explanation, Sebba wondered whether the media should shoulder the blame for building her into “something no individual could possibly be”. Alternatively, she suggested simplistically, the public should bear some of the responsibility for their “constant search for heroes to make [them] feel better”.<sup>44</sup>

In an argument which went much further than Sebba’s limited notions of media theory and public image-making, Paul Williams has examined the dramatic transformations that took place in Mother Teresa’s “demeanour, speech, and appearance” after she received the Nobel Prize in 1979. Before then, she had been “animated and physically relaxed”, with “an easy smile on her face” and an “open and inviting” body language. After 1979, Williams argues, she appeared “stiff and imposing”, her hands always “carefully folded in prayer”, in an image and with a vocal expression which seemed “so studied, so poised, so artificial”.<sup>45</sup>

With a new habitual gesture of “interrupting her pontifications by pointing up to heaven with her crooked index finger”, every sentence “seemed to be carefully calculated to convey her saintliness”. She never banished any cameras, and always ensured that the press knew where she would make her next public appearance. And in the 1980s, she found time to intervene directly in decisions over the nature of the script, the construction of her character, the suitability of the lead actors and the appropriateness of the title, in a biopic made by Dominique Lapierre, whom she gave exclusive rights to her story. Despite her claim of humility, Williams argued, Mother Teresa “took herself and her image very seriously”.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Anne Sebba, *Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image*, p xiv.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Williams, *Critical Lives: Mother Teresa*, p 147.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Williams, *Critical Lives: Mother Teresa*, pp 148-151. After eight years of interference and control by Mother Teresa, in which he had “submitted to ... every demand”, Lapierre eventually felt compelled to withdraw from the project after no progress had been made. Eventually, in 1997, the movie, with a new director and producer, and described as “a dull account” of Mother Teresa’s life, was screened on cable television’s Family Channel (p 150). Interestingly, Lapierre had perpetuated a ‘foreign image’ of Calcutta as a “black hole” of destitution, death and disease in his book, *City of Joy*, which had been turned into a Hollywood film by Roland Joffé.

Native Calcuttan intellectuals have reflected upon the cultural economy of the Mother Teresa image, suggesting that its creation and perpetuation reflected the “vested interest” that the west had in a “dependent, capitulating posture”. The Calcutta poor were viewed in a way that reinforced notions of the city as black hole of misery, a metaphor that had colonial origins. It was in relation to this notion that the western media had “carefully nurtured” an image of Mother Teresa as “the epitome of purer than pure”.<sup>47</sup>

Aroup Chatterjee, a London-based doctor who grew up in Calcutta, suggested that there was an “astronomical” discrepancy “between her actual work and her mythological image in the West”. Mother Teresa, he argued, was “essentially a fictional identity”, which obscured the large number of secular and religious people “who are doing much more than she is, but have never been heard of”. In Calcutta itself, Mother Teresa was “almost a nonentity”. The Calcutta-born scholar of Rabindranath Tagore’s writings, Krishna Dutta, concurred with this view, and claimed that he had never heard of Calcutta’s supposed “guardian angel”, Mother Teresa, until he went to Britain. “Calcutta did not need her – she needed Calcutta as a means to her end”, he argued. For him it was indeed ironic that while Mother Teresa “wanted to take the poor of Calcutta into her church, ... in reality they [had] taken her into their temple”.<sup>48</sup>

The social life of Mother Teresa’s biography did not end at her death in 1997. On the contrary, Vatican officials incorporated Mother Teresa biographic narrations and contests into an examination of whether she should be declared a saint. The pope had earlier waived a rule requiring five years to pass for the beatification process could commence and a three-member tribunal was appointed in 1999 to study the case for the beatification of Mother Teresa. The ‘fast-track’ process was also facilitated by other papal decisions by Pope John Paul II. In what was seen as an attempt to “democratise

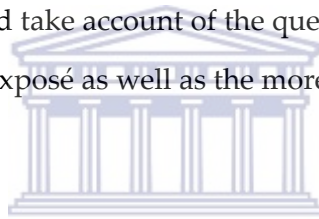
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<sup>47</sup> Aroup Chatterjee, ‘Mother Teresa: her life, her work, her message’, *New Statesman*, 26 September 1997.

<sup>48</sup> Aroup Chatterjee, cited in Anne Sebba, *Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image*, p124; Krishna Dutta, ‘Charity begins in Calcutta’, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 17 October 1997, p 26.

sainthood”, the amount of miracles that the enquiry needed to recognise was reduced by half. Now only one miracle needed to be recognised for “the halfway house” of beatification, and only one more for canonisation. In this revised papal process of “creating role models for how Christians should lead their lives”, Pope John Paul II had beatified and canonised more people than all his predecessors combined.<sup>49</sup>

A Canadian priest, Brian Kolodiejchuk, was appointed as postulator, the person who would oversee the cause to declare Mother Teresa a saint. As postulator, Kolodiejchuk set about the usually “lengthy, exhaustive and ... very expensive” process of collecting “evidence of sanctity”. This would lay the groundwork for a decision by the Sacred Congregation on whether Mother Teresa was of “heroic virtue and therefore Venerable”. Kolodiejchuk also undertook to investigate all evidence as well as any “accusations” and allegations against her as part of the “bookkeeping ... done on earth”. It was expected Kolodiejchuk’s research would take account of the questions raised by Christopher Hitchens’ critical biographic exposé as well as the more measured criticisms put forward by Anne Sebba.<sup>50</sup>



In August 2001, after a swift two-year investigation, Kolodiejchuk completed a 76-volume, 36 000-page report into Mother Teresa’s “life, beliefs and alleged miracles”. This report was submitted for examination to the Sacred Congregation in Rome, whose task was to “pore over every aspect of the candidate’s life and everything the candidate [had] ever written”. Another element in this investigation involved the office of the Promotor Justitie, a “theological censor” known colloquially as the “Devil’s Advocate”, whose duty was to cast out “those whose haloes [did] not burn brightly enough”.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Dominic Crossley-Holland, ‘Fast-track sainthood for Mother Teresa will keep the masses happy’, *The Sunday Independent*, 26 October 1997; Melinda Henneberger, ‘The saints just keep marching in’, *New York Times*, 3 March 2002; *Cape Times*, 21 October 2002; by October 2002, Pope John Paul II had beatified 1303 people and had ‘recognised’ 465 saints.

<sup>50</sup> John Follian, ‘Miracles muster for Mother Teresa’s sainthood’, *Weekend Argus*, 25-26 August 2001; John Follian, ‘Mother Teresa “failed to give painkillers to the very ill”’; Dominic Crossley-Holland, ‘Fast-track sainthood for Mother Teresa will keep the masses happy’.

<sup>51</sup> Dominic Crossley-Holland, ‘Fast-track sainthood for Mother Teresa will keep the masses happy’; John Follian, ‘Miracles muster for Mother Teresa’s sainthood’; Paul Williams, *Critical Lives: Mother Teresa*, pp 212-213. Williams also suggests that the process would also require the exhumation of Mother Teresa’s remains for “forensic experts” to search for “special marks or signs” and to “establish proof of her

As part of the sacred biographic preparations for beatification, what was still required in Mother Teresa's case was the completion and submission of a *positio*, a "comprehensive biography", which Kolodiejchuk expected to complete by 2003. With the announcement in October 2002 of the formal recognition by the Vatican of a miracle attributed to Mother Teresa,<sup>52</sup> it was widely expected that beatification would take place in Spring 2003, with likely canonisation shortly thereafter. And if there was any chance that the 'Devil's Advocate' might be persuaded in any way by Hitchens' critical biographic findings, then the Pope also had the option of bypassing the procedures of the Sacred Congregation to effect "canonisation through public acclamation".<sup>53</sup>

This examination of the posthumous social life of Mother Teresa's biography and the question of saint-making has revealed the Catholic Church as an institution shot through with biographic notions of greatness, exceptionality and exemplary lives to be followed by its congregants. This biographic institutional edifice begins in the core of the upper governing structures of the Vatican, where a range of offices and bureaucratic procedures are continually immersed in representations and contestations over hundreds of causes of sanctification. This feature of the Vatican's political and economic life also extends to the lowliest levels of Catholic institutions, to its school lessons and church sermons, as the life stories of would-be and declared saints are held up as lessons of model lives.

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virginity" (p 213). The prosecutorial role of the 'Devil's Advocate' was jettisoned in 1983 (see Melinda Henneberger, 'The saints just keep marching in').

<sup>52</sup> The 'miracle' in question involved the supposed disappearance of an abdominal tumor after an alleged cancer-sufferer, Monica Besra, of the Bengali village of Basra, applied a medallion with Mother Teresa's image to the site of her abdominal pain on the first anniversary of Mother Teresa's death. While the Vatican recognised this 1998 'miracle', the supposed 'cure' was interpreted very differently by medical staff of the local Balurghat Hospital and by Besra's husband, Seiku Murmu, who complained of the "jamboree" of the press at his doorstep, with "people coming with cameras every few hours or so". Meanwhile, Besra's medical records at Balurghat Hospital went missing, allegedly taken away by the Missionaries of Charity. See Subir Bhaumik, 'What's Mother Teresa go to do with it?', *Time*, 21 October 2002.

<sup>53</sup> Dominic Crossley-Holland, 'Fast-track sainthood for Mother Teresa will keep the masses happy'; John Follian, 'Miracles muster for Mother Teresa's sainthood'; *Cape Times*, 2 October 2002. Mother Theresa's beatification took place in 2003.

This biographic world of saint veneration has been a constant feature of the Church as it has modernised and supposedly tried to democratise itself in the face of legacies of complicity with colonial and authoritarian regimes. While controversial cases of canonisation continue to rear their head, as in the case of the “Nazi pope”, Pius XII, there have been an increasing number of African and Asian saints, indicating papal consciousness of political opportunity and even affirmative action. While some have bemoaned sainthood’s “devaluation” as a result of “Vatican marketing decisions”, others have hoped that the ‘democratisation of sainthood’ might show that “a saint is ... someone like us”. However, this supposed ‘democratisation’ might not have gone far enough. The saintly emphasis has still been on “official role models”, with “too many priests and nuns and not nearly enough of the lay people whom average Catholics might more easily relate to”. The new saints, it seemed, were “not ordinary enough”.<sup>54</sup>

Outside the halls of the academy, biographical productions and contests have been restricted in large measure to the evidentiary realm of the empirical in the quest to uncover hidden truths about the past. Apart from generating sensation through exposing scandal, biography in the public domain has also tended to be associated with notions of ‘celebrity’ and even voyeurism. The regular entry of biographic books on to bestseller lists and their seeming popularity often have more to do with their promise of providing exposés of hidden truths of famous lives rather than with the possibilities the genre might hold for deeper explorations of identity, history and culture. This has tended to limit the critical value of biography as a genre of public discussion and engagement.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Melinda Henneberger, ‘The saints just keep marchin in’; Bonny Schoonakker, ‘The cross the Catholic Church must bear’, *Sunday Times*, 19 September 1999; Peter Stanford, ‘Broadside fired against canonisation of the “Nazi” pope’, *The Sunday Independent*, 24 November 2002.

<sup>55</sup>See the article entitled ‘An unhealthy market in sensational lives’ in *The Independent*, 14 September 1996 for a discussion of the drawbacks of the biography boom in the popular literary market and the dangers of biography, which sells itself by sensation and what happens in bedrooms. See further the Preface to David Ellis (ed), *Imitating Art: Essays in Biography*, London: Pluto Press, 1993. See the interesting case of a biography of Clint Eastwood, the subject of an ‘exposé’ biography, who sought legal intervention in order to have passages of text declared ‘untrue’, and to compel publishers to withdraw the biography from bookshops, and to revise its contents, as it might have damaged his reputation (*Cape Times*, 27 December 2002).



In Hollywood, the genre of the feature film biography, or the 'biopic' has reared its head from time to time, to provide epic visual spectacles in the form of stories of remarkable lives of moral greatness,<sup>56</sup> or to provide a platform for the recovery of a life of leadership, previously obscured by controversy, and to project it into the mainstream.<sup>57</sup> In 2002-3, the release of *Frida*<sup>58</sup> took a visual narration of the life of Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, to a mass international audience of cinema-goers, and into further circuits of fashion, beauty and celebrity, constituting yet another phase in the history of "Fridamania, Fridolatory, Fridaphilia and Frida fever".<sup>59</sup>

### *'Devouring' Frida Kahlo on film*

Described as a "poem on canvass", *Frida* chronicled Kahlo's "bold and uncompromising life" and celebrated her "remarkable contribution" to the world of art. Kahlo was presented as a woman, who, in the 1920s and 1930s in Mexico, "knew who she was and

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<sup>56</sup>Perhaps among the most significant of these was *Gandhi* (Directed and Produced by Richard Attenborough, Columbia Tri-Star, 1982), which won eight Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Actor, and Best Director. *Gandhi* presented a magisterial account of the Indian lawyer, Mohandas Gandhi, who went on to become the spiritual leader of a nation and the symbol of its independence. Following twenty years of research and preparation, Attenborough constructed a cliographic narrative of the 'critical events' in Gandhi's life that drove him along a supposed 'historic journey'. Here, he evolved almost seamlessly from colonial subject, to statesman, to modern-day messiah and 'inspirational figure', who gave the world a non-violent, alternative method of challenging oppression. Five years later, Attenborough turned his film biographical attentions to the South African struggle and made *Cry Freedom* (Directed and Produced by Richard Attenborough, Marble Arch Productions c.1987), based upon the life Steve Biko as told by Donald Woods. See Chapter Four.

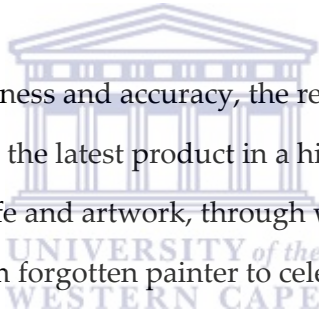
<sup>57</sup>A good example was *Malcolm X* (Directed by Spike Lee, Warner Studios, 1992), which presented a portrayal of the complex transformations in the life of Malcolm X, and which drew upon Malcolm X's autobiography (Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X, as told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992). *Malcolm X* is seen by some as one of the most important films about the black experience in the United States. The book about Malcolm's life history, named as an 'autobiography' (and thus as his story narrated by himself) has a more complex authorship, and was based on extensive audiotaped interviews which Haley had with Malcolm just before he was assassinated in 1965.

<sup>58</sup> *Frida* was directed by Julie Taymor (Miramax, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Margaret A Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo*, Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1999, p 152. The screenplay for *Frida* was adapted from Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1983). See also the film companion book by Julie Taymor (with Clancy Sigal and Linda Sunshine) (eds), *Frida: Bringing Frida Kahlo's Life and Art to Film* (New York: Newmarket Pictorial Moviebook, 2002) which includes a foreword by Herrera praising Taymor's translation of her text and Frida's life to the screen and an introduction by Taymor herself explaining the steps she took to re-create Frida's physical and mental worlds. As the film's 'driving force', Hayek has also written a brief introduction.



dared to be that person". She "had the courage to be who she was", and to be "different" in spite of social expectations, and "she never apologised". For some, *Frida* had succeeded in relating the "compelling story" of a woman and artist who could "transcend pain and create supreme beauty".<sup>60</sup> For other reviewers, however, the "heroic love story and survivor's tale" failed in its attempt to convey "the delicate, damaged texture" of Kahlo's life, and "the triumph of her will over intimidating defeat". It did not reveal "the depth of Kahlo's artistic struggle", focusing instead too much and "overly sympathetic[ally]" on artist and muralist, Diego Riviera, with whom Kahlo had a "turbulent marriage and lifelong alliance". Instead, *Frida* turned Kahlo's "tragic and courageous life" into "biopic banality", instead of examining the process by which Kahlo became an "extraordinary artist and feminist cultural icon". The result was "an incomplete portrait" of Kahlo by a film, which "only scratches the surface" of her "flamboyant" life.<sup>61</sup>



Beyond questions of completeness and accuracy, the research of Margaret Lindauer enables us to consider *Frida* as the latest product in a history of mediation and cultural production of Frida Kahlo's life and artwork, through which a posthumous transformation occurred "from forgotten painter to celebrated heroine". Lindauer has reflected upon the increasing circulation of Kahlo's story and self-portraits, and the cultural and social structures through which Kahlo's life has been recalled and recounted. In the 1970s, Kahlo's life and work was a subject of interpretation only among a small circle of art critics and academics. From the late 1970s, a shift started to occur, mainly in the United States "from seeing Kahlo as unsung artist to Frida as a venerated heroine". References to Kahlo simply as 'Frida' from this time were indicative of a sense of intimate familiarity that accompanied this shift to icon and mythology. By the early 1990s, when a Kahlo self-portrait was used by the Metropolitan Museum on New York billboards to advertise a large travelling exhibition, Kahlo's legend entered popular culture in the US. Fashion magazines and look-alike contests sought to copy the

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<sup>60</sup> Discussion between Oprah Winfrey, Salma Hayek and Julie Taymor, *Oprah*, e.tv, 27/2/03.

<sup>61</sup> Desson Howe, 'So much material, so little Frida', *Cape Argus Tonight*, 13/1/03; Serena Klein, "'Frida' paints an incomplete portrait', *Cape Times*, 17/1/03.

'Frida-look'. Kahlo's self-portraits were distributed on post-cards and T-shirts, and speciality shops commemorated Kahlo's life through the sale of Frida shoes, Frida nail polish and Frida clothing. As the popular persona 'Frida Kahlo' was constructed as posthumous celebrity, Kahlo's increasing popularity acquired cult status, and she became a role model for many in search of a hero.<sup>62</sup>

For Lindauer, the major interpretations of Frida Kahlo's self-portraits in the field of art history accorded with this biographic politics of popular celebrity. An "entrenched narrative of suffering" came to permeate the telling of Kahlo's life. Various biographical productions have generally narrated this suffering in relation to Kahlo's marriage to Riviera as well as the "indeterminable deterioration of her body". Just as Kahlo's life was recounted as a "litany of physical and psychological symptoms", her paintings were interpreted as "self-referential" documents of her pain, and Kahlo was revered for her "'triumph' in creating art" in spite of bodily and emotional injury. In a "one-to-one" association of life events and the meaning of paintings, artworks and producer were merged into a single entity, giving rise to a "totalised narrative" of the artist and her work. This "author-corpus" approach, in which Kahlo's paintings were conflated with her pain, generated the same narrative of tragedy and triumph out of which the "mythic Frida" was born. Lindauer has challenged these interpretations, arguing that Kahlo's paintings, indeed, went beyond self-documentation and their meanings incorporated explorations of broader political, social and economic questions as much as they were implicated in dynamic political negotiations over gender. As "one among numerous masculinist canons at work in Frida mythology", art history had marginalized Kahlo's "creative political production" as a "private record". Similarly, the production and circulation of the mythic Frida had repressed, obliterated and "devoured" the complexities of Kahlo's work.<sup>63</sup>

The film, *Frida*, reproduced the pervasive biographical theme of torment and triumph, through which Frida Kahlo's life had been appropriated and 'devoured' in art history

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<sup>62</sup> Margaret A Lindauer, *Devouring Frida*, pp 1-3.

<sup>63</sup> Margaret A Lindauer, *Devouring Frida*, pp 1-12; 178-9.

and popular circuits of exchange and appreciation. Representing a new stage of 'Fridamania', *Frida* ensured the circulation of the Frida myth to a mass viewership through the lens of Hollywood. With this Hollywood thumbs-up, the commodity world of fashion "jumped onto the Frida Kahlo bandwagon", and "Frida friendly shopping" was advertised for those who wanted to "capture a sense of Frida Kahlo's Mexican style". It was time that "a woman of great style who lived life in a bold, controversial and uncompromising way" was "celebrated by the masses". And celebrating Kahlo's life by acquiring colourful flowing skirts, shawl tops and make-up, as well as "Frida paraphernalia, bags, jewellery and décor" held the promise of capturing "that Frida feeling" and having some of Kahlo's style, spirit and posthumous aura rub off on one.<sup>64</sup>

This meeting of biography and commodity fetishism in an envisaged 'mass celebration' of Kahlo's life was influenced by the specific form of biographic mediation and 'devouring' that *Frida* occasioned. Its mass Hollywood audience of the 'torment and triumph' theme was predicated upon a virtual appropriation of Kahlo's life by lead star and co-producer of *Frida*, Salma Hayek, who had acquired the rights to use Kahlo's paintings and fought to "[bring] Frida back to life" for eight years. "I thought you were Frida", declared Oprah Winfrey to Hayek in an interview. "There was not a breath or an eyebrow where you were not Frida, where you did not embody that character".<sup>65</sup> But Hayek's negotiation of Kahlo's biography went beyond mere realism in character acting.<sup>66</sup> Believing that she might have been "born to do this role",<sup>67</sup> Hayek went into competition for the right to be Hollywood's Frida.

In a scramble for Frida Kahlo's life story, Hayek had snatched the Hollywood rights from pop idol, Madonna. In a "Madonna/Frida coupling" in mid-1990, Madonna had announced that she had acquired two Kahlo paintings as well as the film rights to a

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<sup>64</sup> Nadine Rubin, 'Cry Frida!', *Sunday Times Lifestyle*, 12/1/03, p 5.

<sup>65</sup> Discussion between Oprah Winfrey, Salma Hayek and Julie Taymor, *Oprah*, e.tv, 27/2/03.

<sup>66</sup> Actor, Ben Kingsley's portrayal of the Mahatma in *Gandhi* is seen by many as the yardstick by which to evaluate realistic character acting in 'biopics'. In order to 'inhabit' Gandhi, Kingsley prepared himself by shedding masses of weight and read 23 volumes of Gandhi's collected works.

<sup>67</sup> Discussion between Oprah Winfrey, Salma Hayek and Julie Taymor, *Oprah*, e.tv, 27/2/03.

Kahlo biography, and had begun lobbying to play the lead role. By 2000, however, Hayek's film project was competing with another in which Jennifer Lopez was to star. Eventually, "the right woman won", suggested Julie Taymor, the eventual director, Hayek was the right size, she argued, wore a real Kahlo shirt, and "Salma even looks like Frida". By acquiring and owning the right to tell and step into Kahlo's life, and by completing the film, Hayek discharged a two-decade long obsession and ensured that the Mexico of Frida was the Mexico of Salma, to be consumed at the box office. This domestication, 'devouring' and appropriation of the Frida Kahlo life story of pain and triumph ensured the creation of a Frida/Salma/Hollywood association, whose major beneficiary would be Hayek's professional career.<sup>68</sup>

### *The Biographic Landscape of Memory*

In the domain of public history, commemorative artworks, memorial landscapes and sites of national remembrance have celebrated the greatness of political leaders. While many memorial practices and memorial edifices continue to work with simplified narratives of biographic greatness, disputes and controversies over their management and symbolic meanings have shown how contested memorial biographic representations can be. In post-colonial African settings, at Lenin's Mausoleum on Moscow's Red Square and at various sites of the civil rights memorial landscape in the United States, where notions of great lives have been cast in stone, struggles have taken place over the form and content of commemoration as well as over the interests that remembrance serves. In addition, museum exhibitions have begun to transcend limited notions of great and exemplary lives and narrow methods of documentary truth. During the 1990s, exhibitions on the creation and circulation of images of Mao Zedong, Patrice Lumumba and Che Guevara began to ask deeper questions about image creation and circulation, and the cultural construction of lives. These public biographic claims and contests have emerged as part of the memory work of the display and collecting

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<sup>68</sup> Discussion between Oprah Winfrey, Salma Hayek and Julie Taymor, *Oprah*, etv, 27/2/03; Geoffrey Macnab, 'Salma the siren gets serious', *The Sunday Independent Sunday Life*, 2/3/03, p 12; Margaret A Lindauer, *Devouring Frida*, p 173.

institutions that make up the exhibitionary complex, and reflect broader struggles over citizenship, national identity and personhood.<sup>69</sup>

In order to construct a sense of nationalism in newly independent Ghana in the late 1950s, the administration of Kwame Nkrumah encouraged the production of spectacles, cultural exhibitions and representations that promoted a specific vision of political authority. Among these representations of the nation was “an idealised form of portraiture that was both illustrative and propagandistic”. Artists produced idealised illustrations of Nkrumah for government publications, which aligned Nkrumah with traditional authority and the idea of nationalism. Convention People’s Party manifestoes were dominated by stylised Nkrumah images and Nkrumah portraits were prominently displayed in government offices. A range of media, such as murals, posters, medallions and printed textiles were utilised to disseminate Nkrumah’s image widely in Ghanaian society and to create an identification of his figure with the ‘nation’. The propagation of Nkrumah’s image as national hero on commemorative stamps and the national currency (accompanied by the words ‘Civitas Ghanaiensis Conditor’ – ‘Founder of the Ghana Nation’) met with some resistance from the opposition National Liberation Movement (NLM), who argued that this represented the beginnings of dictatorship. In reply Nkrumah argued that his image on stamps and currency gave non-literate Ghanaians a feeling of being independent and “truly a free people”. Likewise, when a monumental Nkrumah statue was erected in front of Parliament in Accra (as one of a series), Nkrumah argued that this was necessary “in order to demonstrate the nation’s independence”. This did not stop the NLM from responding that an environment was being created of “sycophantic adulation and idolatry”.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The concept of the ‘exhibitionary complex’ and its relationship with citizenship and modernity was theorised by Tony Bennett. See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London, Routledge, 1995). Chapter 2, ‘The Exhibitionary Complex’ was first published in *New Formations*, no 4, 1988.

<sup>70</sup> Janet Hess, ‘Exhibiting Ghana: Display, Documentary, and “National” Art in the Nkrumah Era’, *African Studies Review*, 44, 1 (April 2001), pp 69-72.

“Postwars of the dead” in Zimbabwe after independence in 1980 took the form of an elaborate variation on the memorial complex, which involved the selective and hierarchical creation of national heroes from the ranks of the leaders of freedom fighters. The modern memorial complex’s origins lay partly in the political, material and artistic resources that went into the creation of national cenotaphs, mass military cemeteries and tombs of the Unknown Soldier in Europe after World War I. This “unprecedented ... landscape of remembered personal identity”, which memorialised common soldiers, dead and missing, had ironically been marked by “self-conscious and sacralised oblivion”, in which the “presence of an absence” had been recognised. This memorial character stood in sharp contrast to the triumphal monuments of the nineteenth century, which had commemorated heroes of war, statesmanship, and colonial ‘exploration’. Richard Werbner has argued that in Zimbabwe after independence, the modern memorial complex was given a “distinctive”, perverse postcolonial form, which glorified “above all the individuality of great heroes of the nation”.<sup>71</sup>

Heroes Acre, which was constructed as a national shrine in Harare around a cemetery for the elite, and which served to memorialise “elite distinction” at the expense of ordinary guerrillas, constituted a bizarre conflation of cenotaph and tomb of the unknown soldier. Heroes Acre stood at the apex of an elaborate system of state memorialism, which manufactured and graded an order of heroes from the national to the provincial to the local, with each buried in “an appropriate place within [this] graded order of heroes acres”. At Heroes Acre in Harare, the ranks of chosen national heroes lay in luxury coffins after state-financed funerals, whereas the masses at the bottom of the hierarchy were expected to bury their own dead. In the rural areas, local heroes acres lay neglected, sparking “indifference in the countryside towards

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<sup>71</sup> Richard Werbner, ‘Smoke from the Barrel of a Gun: Postwars of the Dead, Memory and Reinscription in Zimbabwe’, in Richard Werbner (ed), *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power* (London: Zed Books, 1998), pp 71-73; see also Norma Kriger, ‘The Politics of Creating National Heroes’, in Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger (eds), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War* (London: James Currey, 1995); on ‘sacralised oblivion’ and the origins of the modern memorial complex, see Thomas W Laqueur, ‘Memory and Naming in the Great War’, in John R Gillis (ed), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*. This ‘perverse’ memorialism can also be seen as anachronistic in its 19<sup>th</sup> century heroic approach.



participation in annual heroic commemorations". Heroes Acre may have been described in official brochures as "an expression ... of the indefatigable will of Zimbabweans" and as "a symbol of the masses' struggle for freedom" that "arouses national consciousness". But it was a means of imposing an "official version of nationhood and national order" and "inscribing nationhood as ranked distinction" by a regime intent on constructing "an imprint of itself" on the Zimbabwean landscape.<sup>72</sup>

Initially 'national heroes' buried at Heroes Acre were drawn exclusively from the leadership of the ruling party, ZANU (PF). This was extended in the late 1980s to ex-combatants of ZIPRA after the party Unity Accord, and in the mid-1990s to a commercial farmer, who had no liberation struggle or political pedigree, but who was seen as symbolic of African achievement and distinction in the modernisation of agriculture. This "extension of the ranked inscription" served merely to widen the boundaries of the "inner circle with elite members", but failed to resolve political tensions over the recognition of war heroes and national sacrifice, and the resultant access to war pensions and political patronage. Cast by North Koreans (in spite of the world fame of Zimbabwean sculpture), Richard Werbner has remarked that Heroes Acre contained the "identifying signature of postcolonial pastiche". However, it also represented more than a passing influence of Stalinist cults of memorials to political leaders.<sup>73</sup>

Heroes Acre was more than merely a controversial memorial pantheon of national heroes. It placed the dead heroes into a memorial art environment of black granite gravestones, memorial statues depicting heroic figures, Great Zimbabwe high walls, chevrons and Zimbabwe Birds, murals depicting the course of the liberation struggle and an eternal flame. This constituted a triumphalist visual history, through which the formation of the Zimbabwean nation was defined and narrated, and where resistance biographies of national heroes were a defining element. These "personal identities of the dead" and "exemplary biographies" of the nation were set out and recited at some

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<sup>72</sup> Richard Werbner, 'Smoke from the Barrel of a Gun', pp 77-78.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Werbner, 'Smoke from the Barrel of a Gun', pp 79-82.



length, and were widely circulated in an official 'Guide to the Heroes Acre' in the media and at ceremonial commemorations.<sup>74</sup>

To challenge this official narration of national history as the biography of chosen heroes, excluded ex-combatants organised oppositional funerals for the banished, and celebrated the lives of excluded dead heroes through the political critique of public oratory. They built shrines and marked the sites where their comrades had fallen, creating an oppositional memorial landscape, "an alternative imaginary nationhood, not elitist but popular". And they mourned those murdered by the postcolonial state, who lay in unmarked mass graves, in an "imposed namelessness" and "censored beyond commemoration", but who represented "a memorial in the making". Public biographical production emerged as a key feature of the Zimbabwean memorial complex, as rival claims were made on the boundaries of the nation and the narratives of its history.<sup>75</sup>

'Postwars of the dead' in other African postcolonies have also seen the entry of the memorial logics of modernity. The memorial complex of material infrastructure, sculptural art and administrative processes has given shape and form to the political imaginings of nationalism, and its search for a heroic narrative of the nation. In Namibia, part of the cultural formation of the nation after independence also entailed the construction of a Heroes Acre, along the lines of the Zimbabwe model. In Kenya in 2003, as part of an attempt to overhaul its public image and to reinscribe the nation, the new National Rainbow Coalition government announced its decision to locate and exhume the remains of Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi from a mass grave, and give him a "hero's burial". In a belated 'postwar of the dead' and in spite of opposition from white settlers who had survived the violent Mau Mau rebellion of the 1950s, this state burial would see Kimathi restored to a position of national hero in the official memorial landscape. The anniversary of Kimathi's death was also commemorated with tree-planting ceremonies in the area where he was arrested.<sup>76</sup>

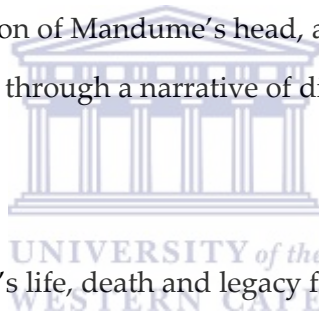
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<sup>74</sup> Richard Werbner, 'Smoke from the Barrel of a Gun', pp 82-88.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Werbner, 'Smoke from the Barrel of a Gun', pp 91-99.

<sup>76</sup> *Sunday Times*, 16/2/03.

Biographic memorial productions have also transcended the authority of colonial national boundaries. In Namibia and Angola, the death of Mandume ya Ndemufayo, the last king of the Kwanyama, in 1917, saw him turned into an iconic figure transcending the border in a sequence of commemorative productions through memorial artwork, community oral and visual histories, and an official monument. Mandume had been killed as part of the upheavals in the Ovambo area, which led to the loss of autonomy, the bisection of the Kwanyama Kingdom and the entry of South African colonial authority.<sup>77</sup> Mandume's biography was circulated in oral memory on both sides of the Namibia/Angola border as part of a history of colonisation, which sought to challenge colonial power. While Mandume's body had been buried in Angola, powerful beliefs and stories circulated about his alleged beheading, giving rise to a memorial movement in Namibia from the 1930s, which demanded, over the succeeding decades, spaces of public memorial, the restoration of Mandume's head, and sought "a process of remembering the body politic through a narrative of dismemberment and commemoration".<sup>78</sup>



The heroic story of Mandume's life, death and legacy found further fruit in the biographic linocuts of John Muafangejo and Vilho Tshilongo's one page laminated history pamphlets, which contained Kwanyama text and hand-drawn portraits.<sup>79</sup> In both

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<sup>77</sup> Patricia Hayes, 'Order out of Chaos: Mandume Ya Ndemufayo and Oral History', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, March 1993. The death of Mandume is the subject of historical dispute as oral histories have made powerful claims that it was the result of a heroic suicide.

<sup>78</sup> Jeremy Silvester, Marion Wallace and Patricia Hayes, "'Trees never Meet': Mobility and Containment – An Overview, 1915-1946', in Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester, Marion Wallace and Wolfram Hartmann, *Namibia under South African Rule: Mobility and Containment, 1915-46* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), pp 10-11; Patricia Hayes, 'Death and the King's Historians: Mandume, South Africa and the Kwanyama, 1915-1994' (paper presented at the International Oral History Conference, New York, 17-22 October 1994).

<sup>79</sup> Margo Timm, 'Transpositions: The Reinterpretation of Colonial Photographs of the Kwanyama King Mandume ya Ndemufayo in the Art of John Ndevasia Muafangejo', in Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester and Patricia Hayes (eds), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1998); Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann, "'Picturing the Past" in Namibia: The Visual Archive and its Energies', in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michelle Pickover, Graeme Reid and Razia Saleh (eds), *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), pp 121-123.

cases, the iconic representations of Mandume's face and form were based on trophy images of his dead body. The production and circulation of Mandume's biography shifted in 2002 from the terrain of anti-colonial and nationalist resistance to incorporation into the official landscape of memory, when a new monument honouring his life was constructed at Oihole in southern Angola as part of the reordering of national memory. This memorial edifice was built as part of a phalanx of modernising construction projects of national roads, harbour furnishings, bridges, libraries and government buildings as part of the reconstruction of Namibia and southern Angola after decades of war and destabilisation.<sup>80</sup> In the 'postwars of the dead' in the postcolonies of southern Africa, the memorial complex was indeed part of the imprint of modernity.

The biographic features of the southern African memorial complex were derived in part from the cult of leadership deification, which was inaugurated in the Soviet Union by Stalin after Lenin's death in 1924 "to ensure his own succession to the leadership".<sup>81</sup> For Stalin and his successors, Lenin served as "the hero whose prestige and authority they inherited".<sup>82</sup> According to Trevor Smith,

Lenin's life and revolutionary career were embellished and refined, and over time the historic Lenin was replaced by a largely fictional, god-like figure who served to legitimise both the state and generations of Soviet leaders who claimed to be carrying on Lenin's historic mission.<sup>83</sup>

For more than six decades, this "cult of Lenin" was propagated in the Soviet Union, based on state controls over education, the press and the dissemination of information. School classrooms were important forums for the transmission of Lenin

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<sup>80</sup> WML Consulting Engineers (Windhoek, Walvis Bay, Oshakati, Luanda), Pictorial Wall Calendar, 2003. My gratitude to Patricia Hayes for this reference.

<sup>81</sup> Chris Bryant, 'Remains of the deity', *New Statesman*, Vol 10, Iss. 465, 8 August 1997, p 17.

<sup>82</sup> Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p203.

<sup>83</sup> Trevor J Smith, 'The Collapse of the Lenin Personality Cult in Soviet Russia, 1985-1995', *The Historian*, No 60, Winter 1998 pp 325-344; see also Trevor J Smith, 'Lenin for Sale: The Rise and Fall of the Personality Cult of V.I. Lenin in Soviet Russia, 1935-1995', M.A. Thesis, University of Ottawa, 1995.

myths, while radio and television programmes presented an incontrovertible view of Lenin as marked by “messianic omnipotence or omniscience”.<sup>84</sup>

Lenin’s image was “reproduced en masse” in a programme of triumphal memorialism. Busts of Lenin were installed to grace the interiors of countless educational and public buildings, gigantic Lenin statues were erected as public monuments in central squares and locations in major cities and in the Kremlin courtyard, the state library was named in Lenin’s honour, and a network of Lenin museums was created centred on the Central Lenin Museum in Moscow. St Petersburg was renamed Leningrad after Lenin.<sup>85</sup> Sites associated with the making of Lenin’s political life were memorialised. Until the late 1980s, a memorial landscape of Lenin deification across the Soviet Union was harnessed in the service of the Stalinist political order. Large Lenin monuments were also built in other European countries that fell within the Soviet axis. In East Berlin in the former GDR, a sixty-three-foot-tall, heroic style Lenin statue was built from Red Granite blocks from the Ukraine. In addition, a huge Lenin-like monument of communist leader Ernst Thälmann, who had been murdered at Buchenwald in 1944, was created in order to promote the authority and prestige of the GDR’s leadership. It portrayed Thälmann as a superhuman, antifascist hero and not a “suffering concentration camp inmate”.<sup>86</sup> More than mere symbols of leaders, these monuments were biographic memorials because they purported to narrate a story of heroic leaders and the making of socialism.

Perhaps the most striking expression of the ‘Lenin cult’, as well as the cult of heroic leadership in general, was the memorial presence of Lenin’s dead body, which was placed in Moscow’s Red Square, embalmed in a red and black granite and marble mausoleum, “preserved against the ravages of nature”. This symbolic “architectural

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<sup>84</sup> Trevor J Smith, ‘The Collapse of the Lenin Personality Cult in Soviet Russia, 1985-1995’, pp 325-332.

<sup>85</sup> Trevor J Smith, ‘The Collapse of the Lenin Personality Cult in Soviet Russia, 1985-1995’, pp 325-332.

<sup>86</sup> Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, pp 201-203. Ladd notes that memorial sculpture in the ‘west’, in contrast, commemorated anti-Nazis as “suffering victims, not conquering heroes” (p 206).

masterpiece” of design simplicity replaced a wooden mausoleum in 1930, was a site of solemn pilgrimage and tourist curiosity for more than sixty years, under the watchful eyes of round-the-clock ceremonial guards. During this time, members of a special team of embalmers applied special reactants to the corpse, which was also given a major chemical overhaul every two years. Located “at the very heart of Russia”, the preserved body of Lenin enshrined in the mausoleum, was invoked by Stalinist authorities to represent immortality and eternity, and convey a sense of permanence of the socialist order.

After his death in 1953, the body of Stalin was placed in the mausoleum alongside Lenin’s, but was removed to a grave alongside the Kremlin walls. There Stalin’s body lay alongside those of other top Soviet leaders, while the ashes of dozens more lay buried in the Kremlin walls, inside which there was also a mass grave of Bolsheviks killed in the 1917 revolution. But it was the ‘holy relic’ of Lenin’s body that became the main attraction of the cemetery landscape of Red Square, and it was incorporated into Red Square’s listing by UNESCO as a protected landmark.<sup>87</sup> It was at the apex of a biographic cultural landscape through which the making of socialism was equated with the political achievements of Lenin’s life.

With the break-up of the Soviet Union and the collapse of Stalinism in Europe since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the biographic landscape of Lenin veneration faced unprecedented political challenges. After showing an impressive ability to survive for more than sixty years after Lenin’s death, the ‘cult of Lenin’ began to disintegrate. According to Smith, “monuments and memorials to Lenin began to fall like dominoes”. The people of Leningrad chose to restore the historical name St Petersburg. The Lenin State Library changed its name to the Russian State Library. While Leninist texts were not purged from the library, Lenin was reduced to just another philosopher and “merely a ‘historical figure’ in his nation’s saga”. Gigantic Lenin statues were toppled in Kiev, Tashkent and the Kremlin courtyard. In Tashkent,

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<sup>87</sup> Trevor J Smith, ‘The Collapse of the Lenin Personality Cult’, pp 332-338; Chris Bryant, ‘Remains of the Deity’, p 17.

the monument was removed during the night, and at the Kremlin, a tall wooden fence was erected around it as an eyesore to deflect people's attention. In the early 1990s, in order to limit criticism and opposition, a practice emerged throughout the Soviet Union of removing Lenin monuments in stages, so that sometimes their removal wasn't even noticed. In spite of opposition from its director and staff, and after rejecting a proposal to relocate "from somewhere to nowhere", the Central Lenin Museum in Moscow "was gradually liquidated", and finally closed in 1994.<sup>88</sup>

In Germany after reunification of the state and the city of Berlin, citizens of the new society sought ways to address the symbolic legacies of the old order in the cultural landscape. Some features, like the Berlin Wall, were torn down through acts of ritual destruction. Some memorial plaques, such as those that carried Erich Honecker's name, were removed promptly by official decree. Some statues and memorials began to be vandalised, and many people expressed a desire to remove "vestiges of a past best forgotten". Berlin's Lenin monument, however, proved to be more than merely a political symbol, with citizens relating to it as "a neighbourhood icon, a repository of memories, or a vital piece of urban architecture". The circumstances of memorial contestation in unified Germany were intense. "Ossis" did not want to feel manipulated by "Wessis", many of whom were Christian democrats who demanded the removal of the material edifices of "the poisoned hand of the GDR". In contrast, some argued that the prior experience of postwar West Germany having "unwisely buried and denied its Nazi past" should not be repeated.<sup>89</sup>

In the public controversy that unfolded around the Berlin government's decision to go ahead with its removal, the Lenin monument became a "rallying point" for those who resented "forced adaptation to West German ways". While the monument was draped with a huge "No Violence" sash, the government chose instead to dismantle it rather

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<sup>88</sup> Trevor J Smith, 'The Collapse of the Lenin Personality Cult', pp 332-338; other monuments were relocated to a park "dedicated to the failure of communism" (Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, p 193).

<sup>89</sup> Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, pp 192-194.



than destroy it. In the ensuing “public relations fiasco”, the concrete core of the monument proved almost impossible to dislodge, and two demolition contractors, six hundred thousand marks and three months later, Lenin’s pieces were laid to rest in a gravel pit. In contrast, the Thälman monument survived after those who had lost the battle over Lenin regrouped. In any event, its size made it almost impossible and too expensive to destroy. Instead it became a site for popular graffiti through which members of the public intervened in debates on old memorials. Likewise, the bronze figures of Marx and Engels, which formed the centrepiece of the Marx-Engels-Forum, and which were probably spared by their “lack of heroic monumentality” were reinterpreted in the public imagination through the irreverent and unofficial nickname “the Pensioners”. As a memorial in retirement, this site also became a site for graffiti artists to intervene in the contests of meaning over biographic memorials.<sup>90</sup>

As Lenin’s “heroic mythology” was dispelled in the 1990s, the reverence with which its “holiest relic”, the Lenin mausoleum, had been treated began to wane. As the lines of visitors started to disappear and demands for its closure mounted, the mausoleum’s hours of operation were reduced and in October 1993, the vigil maintained by the 24-hour honour guard was abolished. Fearing an imminent presidential decree in favour of burial, the outraged remaining members of Russia’s communist political structures held a 24-hour vigil for several weeks. In 1997, a referendum was proposed by Boris Yeltsin in order to determine the future of the mausoleum, and a view began to be expressed inside and outside the Russian Orthodox Church that Lenin’s body should be properly buried. Since the late 1990s, any plans to remove Lenin’s body seemed to have lost their impetus, and the mausoleum, instead, began to convey a rather bizarre sense of being a place that had been forgotten by time. The debate over Lenin’s body had become a symbol of Russia’s crisis of identity and the public’s ambivalent feelings

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<sup>90</sup> Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, pp 196-205; other biographic objects of socialist memorialism such as figurines, sculptures, statuettes, engravings and conversation pieces which had formed the basis of Stalinist exhibitions celebrating socialist achievement in the Museum of German History in East Germany, were passed over to the German History Museum after unification, where they were consigned to a “Special Inventory” of “a curious collection of surviving relics” of a “defunct state”. Many of these souvenirs celebrated the memory of socialist leaders; see Andreas Michaelis, *DDR/GDR/RDA Souvenirs* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1994).



about the past, as “political elites engaged in a symbolic dialogue with each other and with the public in an attempt to gain prestige, legitimacy and influence”.<sup>91</sup>

While the memorial complex in the United States has its origins in the commemorative landscape of the Civil War and emancipation, which represents a “story of systematic cultural repression, carried out in the guise of reconciliation and harmony”, a new genre of contemplative memorials, such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, emerged as a means through which ‘difficult pasts’ of defeat, controversy and dishonour could be reflected upon.<sup>92</sup> In the 1990s, this memorial layering was added to by a “remarkable profusion” of monuments and museums which sought to “define the contemporary significance of America’s civil rights revolution”, and which, for some scholars, “desegregated America’s memorial landscape”.<sup>93</sup> This “complex, sometimes ironic landscape” of monuments, historic markers, parks, registered buildings and museums across the South presented clear challenges to a public history, which depicted “an elite, white American past”. However, its historical representations tended to replicate conventions associated with civil rights historiography. While the past was rendered in “an explicitly antiracist” fashion, for the most part, there was a tendency for portrayals to be located in a ‘Great Man’ paradigm, which gave attention to leaders at the national level, and not local organisers and participants. The mainstream narratives at the largest civil rights memorials continue to place emphasis

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<sup>91</sup> Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, ‘Unravelling the Threads of History: Soviet Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 92(3), 2002, p 524.

<sup>92</sup> Kirk Savage, ‘The Politics of Memory: Black Emancipation and the Civil War Monument’, in John R Gillis (ed), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, p 143; Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, ‘The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past’, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol 97, No 2 (September 1991). It is interesting to note that contrary to the intentions behind the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, this site is an object with which visitors “enter into active and affective relationships” (pp 402-403), through the touching and reproductive tracing of names, and the deposit of special objects, gifts or statements.

<sup>93</sup> Owen J Dwyer, ‘Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Place, Memory, and Conflict’, *Professional Geographer*, 52(4), 2000, pp 660-661.

on charismatic leaders and dramatic events, while elements of working class, women's and local histories are forced to the margins of the landscape.<sup>94</sup>

Sites and institutions associated with the life and career of Martin Luther King, Jr have been given the most prominent place in the Civil Rights memorial landscape. From Atlanta, where he was born and where he ministered and Birmingham where he conducted a campaign against segregation in 1963 to Selma, where he led the Voting Rights March in 1965 and Memphis, where he was assassinated in 1968, King's biography has been imprinted on the landscape of memory. In addition, civic infrastructure across the United States has been named in King's honour and a national holiday marking his birthday has been inaugurated. According to Dwyer, this emphasis on "the primacy of the individual leader" was also gendered. King was often pictured alongside his male lieutenants, such as Abernathy, Young and Jackson, and little mention was made of his female advisors, such as Septima Clark and Ella Baker. Indeed the predominance of women in staffing and organising the civil rights movement and major campaigns, that has received some attention in recent scholarship, has not been reflected in the memorial landscape. Women instead, are "cast as local actors, whereas men are national and international ones", creating notions that "an elite and mostly male leadership won civil rights at a national scale", and that women, "while not invisible, are thoroughly localised and led".<sup>95</sup>

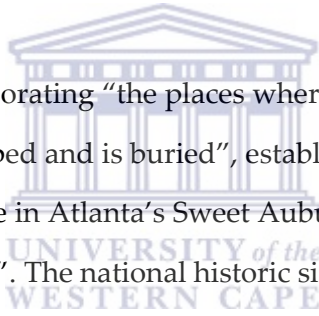
The 'Great Man' approach to the public history of the civil rights movement has not been without contest in the practice of memory work. At the Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham, Alabama has been a leading site at which hegemonic narrations of the civil rights movement have been contested. In its exhibition about the campaigns in Birmingham, biographic attention has been shifted away from King to Fred Shuttlesworth, the leader of the local organisation. The exhibition focuses on Shuttlesworth's disagreement with King over the objectives of demonstrations,

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<sup>94</sup> Owen J Dwyer, 'Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Place, Memory, and Conflict', pp 160-163.

<sup>95</sup> Owen J Dwyer, 'Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement', pp 663-664.

suggesting that use was merely made of King's "star power" to draw international and national attention. While the lustre of Martin Luther King Jr might not have shone as brightly at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, this contest of biography was still located within a paradigm that focused on leadership, albeit between local and national 'stages'. This approach was also one that portrayed the movement as "a series of key moments ... under the orchestration of charismatic leaders" in an overarching teleological narrative of inevitable "regional transformation undertaken at seemingly preordained locales". In response to criticism from local activists, the exhibition was extended to include the "mundane heroics" of the "footsoldiers of the movement", with visitors able to access interviews with local activists in an oral history archive through interactive workstations. In addition, former local activists volunteer as exhibition guides enabling the emphasis on the "sweeping and fabulous" and the 'Great Man' to be further contested.<sup>96</sup>



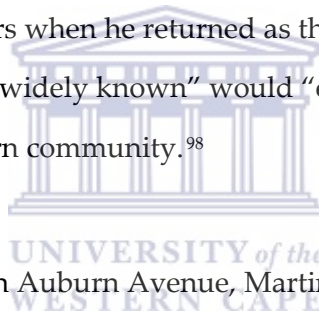
But the main site for commemorating "the places where Martin Luther King, Jr was born, lived, worked, worshipped and is buried", established by Congress in 1980, is the King National Historic Site in Atlanta's Sweet Auburn, "the heart of Atlanta's black community in the 1930s". The national historic site, which is adjacent to the preservation district, has incorporated the Martin Luther King Jr Birth Home, restored to recreate "the childhood years of Sweet Auburn's most famous resident", and the Ebenezer Baptist Church, "important to the King family for four generations". Tours of the site are conducted by the National Park Service, whose Visitor Centre on Auburn Avenue has exhibitions on King's life and legacy in the Civil Rights struggle, a video programme and a programme of volunteer assistance to "meet and greet visitors from all over the nation and the world", and to "help maintain archival records and artefacts".<sup>97</sup> This is a site of commemoration, not criticism, dedicated to turning King's ideas, "vision" and example into a heroic national legacy of teachings on civil rights activism and anti-racist values.

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<sup>96</sup> Owen J Dwyer, 'Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement', pp 663-666.

<sup>97</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr National Historic Site, 'I Have a Dream' (Brochure and Map, 1997); 'Capture the Dream' (Brochure, n.d.); 'Volunteers in Park Program' (Pamphlet, n.d.).

At the National Historic Site's Visitor Centre, visitors are also invited to participate in the promotion of King's legacy, and in addition to King's biography in the setting of Sweet Auburn. Brochures are distributed to young visitors at an educational 'Discovery Centre' with explanations of the nature of Jim Crow laws, reading lists on the history of the Civil Rights movement, and a list of organisations involved in antiracist work and peace activism. Young visitors are invited to "make Dr King's dream come true" by pledging, in writing, to honour his life and non-violent work, and committing themselves to "actively help to promote freedom, justice, and world peace". As the federal agency with responsibility for administering and managing the site, and for "telling the story of Dr King, the Civil Rights Movement and the Sweet Auburn community", the National Parks Service also initiated an oral history programme, locating Auburn Avenue residents with memories of the time of King's youth as well as his adult years when he returned as the co-pastor of Ebenezer. Information "that may not be widely known" would "expand the knowledge" of King's life in the Sweet Auburn community.<sup>98</sup>



Opposite the Visitor Centre on Auburn Avenue, Martin Luther King Jr's body lies in a memorial gravesite consisting of the crypt, reflecting pool, eternal flame, chapel and courtyard. Alongside the tomb, also facing the Visitor Centre is the Martin Luther King Jr Centre for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc (The King Centre), which "continues Dr King's work toward economic and social equality". Founded in 1968 by King's widow, Coretta Scott King, the Centre is headed by King's younger son, Dexter Scott King. In addition to an exhibition which displays King's various awards and focuses on King's Gandhian influences, the King Centre coordinates a schedule of commemorative services, musical celebrations, book signings with Coretta Scott King,

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<sup>98</sup> See the following brochures and pamphlets from Martin Luther King, Jr National Historic Site, 'Looking for Good Memories' (Pamphlet, n.d.); 'Oral History Interview Information' (Reply Sheet, n.d.); see also the following brochures and pamphlets from the Martin Luther King, Jr National Historic Site Discovery Centre, 'Sweet Auburn' (Brochure and Map, n.d.); 'Jim Crow Laws' (Pamphlet, n.d.); 'To Learn More ... To Do More' (Pamphlet, n.d.); 'Make Dr. King's dream come true' (Pledge card, n.d.).

and “The Annual Salute to Greatness Awards Dinner” as part of its management of the King Holiday Observance. This is where the King Papers Project was initiated to facilitate the dissemination of information on King’s life and work. This project, directed by Stanford historian Clayborne Carson, developed as an authorised biographic project of collection, dissemination and publication, leading to the production of guides to King research, King’s collected papers (four volumes), a docudrama, a collection of sermons, and even a “posthumous autobiography”. Through Carson’s work, materials were released into the public domain under carefully chosen authority of the academy. The project also became one of biographical defence, to contain possible disgrace, as the research revealed evidence of large-scale plagiarism in King’s scholarly writings.<sup>99</sup>

The King Centre is also where the intellectual property dimensions of King’s words, voice and image were carefully managed on behalf of the King estate and the King family. In one of his first acts as president of the King Centre, Dexter King is reputed to have met with “the caretakers of Elvis’ image to learn how to market King like the King”.<sup>100</sup> Large fees were charged from authors and TV producers who wanted to reproduce or broadcast King’s speeches. King’s collected works were turned into the Centre’s most valuable asset, and a licensing deal was negotiated with Time Warner

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<sup>99</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr National Historic Site, ‘I Have a Dream’ (Brochure and Map, 1997); The King Centre, ‘2002 King Holiday Observance – Schedule of Events’ (Pamphlet, 2002); *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr* (Warner Books, 1998) was created by Clayborne Carson as an effort “to assemble King’s dispersed autobiographical writings into a coherent narrative”. The notion of ‘autobiography’ here seems to have been more of a marketing decision and a claim on the authenticity of a text created by Carson, rather than one based on scholarly argument about self-narration. See also Clayborne Carson, ‘Editing Martin Luther King, Jr: Political and Scholarly Issues’, in George Bornstein and Ralph G Williams (eds), *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp 305-316, where it is argued that King’s plagiarism “may have allowed him to avoid internalising the European-American modes of thought that underlay the passages” and “may have been more effective than more original writings in allowing [him] to play his chosen role as an African-American leader seeking to influence white Americans”.

<sup>100</sup> David Plotz, ‘Content is King: Dexter King is a King for the ‘90s’, <slate.msn.com/id/1816/>. Memphis, Tennessee, of course, is the home of the Elvis Industry, represented by Elvis Presley Enterprises Inc and with its home at the growing Graceland Complex, Presley’s home-turned-tourist-attraction. It consists of Graceland Plaza (with shops, a cinema and exhibits), a shopping centre (Graceland Shopping), the Heartbreak Hotel, Presley’s Graceland mansion home, and his gravesite, and constitutes a business empire centred on the musical legacy and posthumous celebrity of Elvis Presley. See Jim Patterson, ‘Elvis is still the king of rock’, *Cape Argus*, 12/8/02.

that would generate at least \$10 million for the King estate. Warner would be the label under which all book, audio and CD products of the King Papers Project would “expand ... King’s presence in popular culture”.<sup>101</sup>

The major shop front for this commercial activity is the Freedom Hall Gift Shop in the King Centre, where King has been turned into a legally protected brand through a vast array of products in a refurbished display environment “made possible through the generosity of the Target Corporation”.<sup>102</sup> Visitors were able to remember King by purchasing branded mugs, clothing, calendars, clocks, buttons, postcards and stationery. In addition to a careful selection of video biographies and heroic books aimed at children, the general reader and the scholar, visitors were able to acquire the definitive Warner 8-hour, 7 CD collection of original recordings of King’s “landmark speeches”, sermons, letters and writings together with an “authentic autobiography”.<sup>103</sup> According to the King Centre, proceeds from these purchases are utilised for the “mission” of “educating the world about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr’s philosophy and methods of nonviolence in order to create the Beloved Community”.<sup>104</sup> The King archive, and indeed, the King biography, it seemed, was also the basis of a very carefully managed family enterprise “that puts profit ahead of principle”.<sup>105</sup>

The scale of the King Centre’s commercial activities gave rise to the accusation that it had “almost nothing to do with furthering the martyred civil rights leader’s dream and nearly everything to do with enriching his family”. The King Centre had apparently charged a fee for extracts from King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech to be rebroadcast, while it allowed two cell phone companies to make use of footage of King for television commercials. It was also blamed for stalling the effort to build a King memorial on the Mall in Washington “because King’s heirs are demanding a ‘fee’ for

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<sup>101</sup> Paul Shepard, ‘King Centre criticised for focus on marketing’, <[www.s-t.com/daily/o1-99/01-17-99/a09wn032.htm](http://www.s-t.com/daily/o1-99/01-17-99/a09wn032.htm)>.

<sup>102</sup> <[www.thekingcenter.org](http://www.thekingcenter.org)>.

<sup>103</sup> Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (eds), *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Unabridged) (Time Warner Audio Books, 2000).

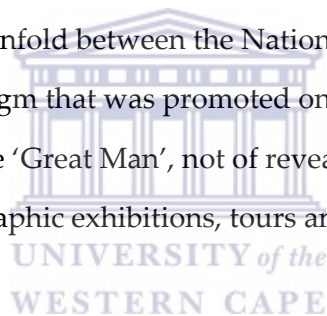
<sup>104</sup> See the website, <[www.thekingcenter.org](http://www.thekingcenter.org)>.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Shepard, ‘King Centre criticised for focus on marketing’.



the use of his image".<sup>106</sup> Moreover, Dexter King was reported to be seeking finance for a \$50 million interactive museum installed with virtual reality games, the King Dream Centre. One critic referred to this as a plan to create a theme park "I Have a Dreamland".<sup>107</sup> In the meantime, community liaison with the impoverished community around Sweet Auburn had seemingly come to a standstill. Beneath the surface of the seeming tranquillity of the solemn memorial landscape on Sweet Auburn, intense struggles had unfolded between the state and the King family, and between the demands of civic memory and those of commerce over the appropriate management and use of King's legacy and biography. And private, family commercial interests claimed prior rights over the public interest. Indeed, as one commentator put it "America may claim King as its civic saint and 'I Have a Dream' as a national manifesto, but King's words belong to his estate".<sup>108</sup>

As this contest continued to unfold between the National Parks Service and the King Centre, the biographic paradigm that was promoted on both sides of Auburn Avenue was one of veneration and the 'Great Man', not of revealing concealed pasts or of critical reassessment.<sup>109</sup> Biographic exhibitions, tours and products focused on King's



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<sup>106</sup> Philip Gailey, 'King would probably have mixed feelings about hometown today', *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 21/1/02.

<sup>107</sup> *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* columnist Cynthia Tucker cited in David Plotz, 'Content is King: Dexter King is a King for the 90s'.

<sup>108</sup> David Plotz, 'Content is King: Dexter King is a King for the 90s'. In 2002, a different contest was unfolding around the same question when Malcolm X's notebooks, letters, diaries and handwritten drafts of his speeches, and his personal Koran came into the possession of Butterfields, an auction house in San Francisco. While Butterfields made plans to sell the papers, preferably "the entire collection to an institution", Malcolm X's relatives made it known that they had intended to place the material in a public archive. See editorial in *The New York Times*, 10/3/02. See also, more generally, Michael Eric Dyson, 'Inventing and Interpreting Malcolm X', in Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff (eds), *The Seductions of Biography* (London: Routledge, 1996) for a study of the "war of interpretation" over Malcolm X's meaning in the viewpoints of different biographical narrations, and in the reproduction of Malcolm's popularity through popular posters, baseball hats, rap recordings, an opera and Spike Lee's film biography. For Dyson these reproductions "are a function of both need and mythology" (p 44).

<sup>109</sup> One of the latest King biographical projects in this vein that was developed with the co-operation of the King Centre is 'In the Spirit of Martin: The Living Legacy of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr', a Smithsonian Institution Travelling Art Exhibition (2002) created and developed by Gary Chassman (Verve Editions), featuring 120 artworks. See the catalogue, *In the Spirit of Martin: The Living Legacy of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr* (created and developed by Gary M Chassman (Atlanta: Tinwood Books,



leadership, teachings and legacy as an almost fixed body of coherent thought, seemingly without contradiction. Yet outside the strictures of national memory and the control of family memorial, King's life and ideas have been a terrain of biographic contestation in the political domain. The most systematic examination of political disputes over the meaning and narration of King's life is Michael Eric Dyson's attempt to reclaim his legacy from the grip of liberalism and conservative political thought. For Dyson, both King's admirers and foes had "frozen him within the liminal realm of his 1963 'I Have a Dream' speech".<sup>110</sup>

Dyson takes issue with the 'feel good' King of liberal thought, in which King's life and meaning had been twisted "into a soft, sweet palatable fruit with no real substance", and his legacy "pillaged by ideological grave robbers. Dyson also notes that conservative writers and right wing political circles had been able to quote from King's speeches in order to challenge affirmative action or arguments for economic reparations. In the domain of national memory, Americans had grown up "learning only about the great pacifist not the hard-nosed critic of economic justice". In political terms, King and Malcolm X had been set up as occupying opposed ethical universes, of non-violent integrationism and threatening separatism, respectively. Indeed, King's "cultural visibility" had to do with perceptions of "the style, content, and aims of his leadership", which "for most of his life were easily translatable and largely attractive to white America". Malcolm X, on the other hand was not as "easily translatable", and while he "appealed especially to working and poor blacks", he also "invited derision, caricature and dismissal". In contrast to these perspectives, Dyson has resurrected the 'true King' as "a prophet, a servant, and a martyr – a revolutionary witness for the poor people of America and indeed the world". For Dyson, the legacy of King should not be seen as at odds with the legacy of Malcolm X.<sup>111</sup>

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2002); 'King Centre and the Smithsonian Partner in Historic Exhibition Dedicated to Dr Martin Luther King, Jr' (The King Centre Press Statement, 10/1/02).

<sup>110</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr* (New York: Touchstone, 2001; first published in 2000).

<sup>111</sup> Samuel G Freedman, cited in Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You*; Dwight N Hopkins, 'I May Not Get There With You: a Book Review', *African American Review*, Spring 2002;

In this radical biographic interpretive departure, Dyson suggests that in “the last three years of the Dreamer King”, “every dimension of his Civil Rights agenda” was reformulated. Indeed, King had plans for a Poor People’s Campaign, a “militant non-violent” march on Washington directed at “disrupting and shutting down” government functions until the poor received jobs or guarantees of an income. Dyson’s King is one who “argued for monetary compensation for black suffering”, and who “called for a non-violent revolution of social and economic structures”. This new King is “a useful hero, a working icon, a meaningful metaphor”, a King relevant to the positions articulated on race and power from within black radical politics in the United States. Dyson’s King is also one “relevant to the lives of young people starving for inspiration”, and even “a genealogical predecessor of today’s rap artists”.<sup>112</sup>

Different narrations of King’s life and different understandings of his meaning resonated with different political positions and responses to conditions of racism in the United States. “Race protectors” engaged in acts of biographical protection of King, promoting “the belief that black heroes [had] to be perfect in order to be useful”, while also suggesting that to “air dirty laundry” is “[to do] the white man’s job for him”. For intellectuals such as Dyson, however, the effect of this defensiveness was to “paint black life [as] stock and cramped, its colours drab and predictable”, unable to grasp “the breadth and complexity of black identity”. Instead what was needed was a “self-critical instinct” that should shape “the politics of portraiture in black culture”. It was indeed possible to “love black folk and tell the truth ... at the same time”. For Dyson then, biographic retrieval was an exercise in truth assertion “which can never harm....”<sup>113</sup> While the video documentary *Martin Luther King, Jr: the Man and his Dreams*, made by John Akomfrah for radical film company Black Audio tries to uncover King’s hidden flaws, it also begins to raise more critical methodological

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Michael Eric Dyson, ‘Inventing and Interpreting Malcolm X’, p 45; Dyson first began to challenge the conventional King-Malcolm X contrast in *Malcolm X: The Man and his Times*.

<sup>112</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You*; see also Dwight N Hopkins, ‘I May Not Get There With You (Book Review)’, *African American Review*, Spring 2002 and Juan Williams, ‘I May Not Get There With You’, *Black Issues Book Review*, 1/7/2000.

<sup>113</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You*, pp ix-xiv.

questions about King's life history.<sup>114</sup> While it does not take a naïve position adopted by many works - that King might have been born into leadership – Akomfrah's film is still based on fairly conventional methods of chronological narration, tracing a process of transformation in the development of leadership.

In this historicisation, it was the Montgomery Bus Boycott that “transformed King's life and changed American politics forever”. It was there where the tactics of non-violence, which were to shape the Civil Rights Movement, were thrashed out. King became the “indispensable symbol of a new form of politics”. With the mantle placed on him without him seeking it, King was “trapped from the very beginning, and it was just never to ever let him go”. It was in Birmingham, the “bastion of segregation” which was ready to confront non-violence with brute force where King became “the undisputed national leader of the Civil Rights Movement”. Capitalising on this “moment of glory”, King threw his weight behind the movement's “most spectacular event”, the 250 000 person march on Washington in 1963. The ‘I Have a Dream’ speech King made in front of the Lincoln Memorial represented the “finest example of his powers as an orator, leader and visionary” and it is for this that he would be most remembered. More than a Baptist minister and a Civil Rights leader, King had become “America's moral conscience”. After receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, King returned to lead a campaign for voter registration in Selma. It is on the march from Selma to Montgomery, two weeks after the ‘Bloody Sunday’ brutality, that “a new King emerged”, a “more militant King”, preoccupied with the war in south east Asia, concerned about the growing gap between rich and poor, and worried by the mounting criticism of youth. Before he was assassinated, King had found the strength “to redeem himself”.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Martin Luther King, Jr: The Man and His Dreams* (Directed by John Akomfrah, Produced by Lina Gopaul, a Black Audio Film Production for the BBC and Arts & Entertainment Channel, ‘Reputations’ Series Editor, Janice Hadlow, 1997).

<sup>115</sup> *Martin Luther King, Jr: The Man and His Dreams*.

In addition to this standard biographical narrative of political transformations and personal self-discovery, Akomfrah also sought to uncover cracks in the image of King as the “great martyr”, undisputed national hero and “embodiment of the Civil Rights Movement” whose “every insight” had “acquired the weight of truth with the passing of time”. Chief among King’s flaws was “his eye for the ladies”, a characteristic that “he would never lose”, and which in later years “would have grave consequences”. FBI surveillance “from city to city, hotel to hotel” revealed this “skirt chasing” side of King that was “at odds with his public image”. In his youth, King had always wanted to win the girlfriend of “the tallest, handsomest guy on campus”. In their search for evidence of corruption or ‘communism’, the FBI instead stumbled upon King’s “potentially embarrassing habit”. Many in the movement knew about it, and some helped with collecting a lover at the airport or taking her to the hotel.<sup>116</sup>

But beyond empirical evidence of moral weakness and personal contradiction, Akomfrah also began to examine elements of the King image. He suggests that there was “another King unknown to the public”, a “personal King” who was “uncomfortable with accolades and glory”. King, the reluctant leader, was torn by an “inner struggle between his public image and his private life, unsure he was worthy of the role history had cast him in”. More significant is Akomfrah’s treatment of the presence of television in the making of King as leader. At Montgomery, King had come to signify “a new kind of Negro”, and it was television that “would keep him in the public eye”. King acquired a new media profile that brought him sympathetic listeners in powerful places. Later, in Washington, the media coverage of the events and King’s speech represented the first time a Civil Rights protest was aired live on TV.<sup>117</sup>

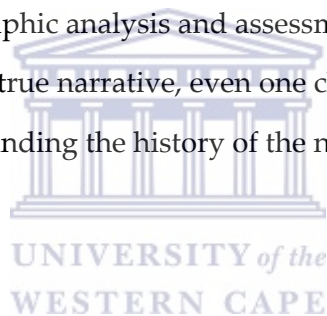
However this discussion merely hints at the possibility of a much more nuanced cultural history of the making of King, which would involve an analysis of the processes of image-making and biographic production, not as subsequent processes,

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<sup>116</sup> *Martin Luther King, Jr: The Man and His Dreams.*

<sup>117</sup> *Martin Luther King, Jr: The Man and His Dreams.*

but as occurring in the midst of the incessant presence of photographers, reporters (and sometimes television) and the ongoing processes of visual representation. King, for example, might have donated the proceeds of his Nobel Prize to civil rights groups, but he also knew the value of intellectual property, and had the 'I Have a Dream' speech copyrighted two days after he gave it.<sup>118</sup> The process of development of King's leadership, reluctant as it might have been, must have involved careful processes of management, projection and even stylisation, by himself and others, and ongoing processes of decision-making, minute taking, speechwriting, written reflection and even administration that must have led to the immediate creation of an archive. King was caught up in institutional settings that constituted a biographic order. In short, the narration of King's life began as the process of its making itself was unfolding, and each march, campaign or landmark speech represented an accumulation of biographic occasions, in which a King biography was nurtured and developed, told and retold. Indeed, in the world of biographic analysis and assessment, it is possible to go beyond the framework of finding the true narrative, even one characterised by contradiction or hidden weakness, to understanding the history of the narrative and the process of narration themselves.



It is these questions about the politics of production that need to find expression in the creation of memorial sites and in visual display, so that the domain of public history becomes one of critical reflection. This will enable the landscape of memory to move beyond the limited frameworks of veneration and celebration through which lives of 'Great Men' as well as the "mundane heroics" of local activists have been commemorated. In fostering an ethos of independent criticism and a memorial methodology that transcends realist frameworks of representing lives, sites and institutions of memory can be turned into spaces of contestation, empowerment and 'public scholarship'. This will go some way to addressing the "robust" criticisms of poverty rights activist, Jacqueline Smith, who has held a daily protest outside the

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<sup>118</sup> Paul Shepard, 'King Center Criticised for Focus on Marketing'; David Plotz, 'Content is King: Dexter King is a King for the 90s'.

National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis for more than ten years. Smith questioned the “appropriate forum for commemoration”, arguing that

the most fitting memorial would be the creation of institutions that support the ongoing struggle for increased access to democratic rights, economic goods and services such as schools and emergency shelters, and organisations that focus on continued activism.<sup>119</sup>

The search for an alternative politics of memorialism need not only mean giving in to an anti-memorial impulse.

### *Heroic biography and exhibitionary interventions*

Greater possibilities for a critical memorialism began to be opened up through curatorial projects that sought to pose questions about the production of images of leaders and the circulation of these images. The production and circulation of images and iconographic depictions of Mao Zedong was the subject of an exhibition shown in London in 1999 and 2000.<sup>120</sup> An exhibition of 200 portraits of Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara at the Fowler Museum of Cultural History in 1997 examined the circulation of diverse interpretations of Che as guerrilla, political leader, intellectual, visionary, romantic hero, saint and martyr through the mediums of photographs, paintings and posters.<sup>121</sup> A travelling exhibition, *A Congo Chronicle*, which was shown in Atlanta in 2002 featured 70 examples of popular paintings through which the life and tragic death of

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<sup>119</sup> Owen J Dwyer, ‘Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement’, p 666.

<sup>120</sup> *Mao: From Icon to Irony* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, October 13, 1999 - April 23, 2000); a related display, *Fashioning Mao* was held simultaneously.

<sup>121</sup> *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message* (UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles, 5 October 1997 – 1 February 1998, curated by David Kunzle); see also the accompanying catalogue by David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth and Message* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History and Centre for the Study of Political Graphics, 1997; unbeknown to Kunzle, the timing of the exhibition coincided with the return to Cuba of the ashes of Guevara and six of his comrades from their previously anonymous graves in Bolivia. The rituals of mourning, funeral commemoration and reburial constituted “a veritable re-encounter between Che and the Cuban people” (‘Hundreds of Thousands pay their final respects to Comandante Ernesto Che Guevara and his comrades-in-arms’, Radio Havana Cuba, 13 October 1997, at <[www.radiohc.org](http://www.radiohc.org)>).



Patrice Lumumba were portrayed.<sup>122</sup> These projects sought to understand the cultural production of national memory and heroic biography.

*Mao: From Icon to Irony* set out to examine the earlier and continued fascination with Mao's life, as reflected in objects and products. It showed how in photographic portraits, woven silk pictures, images on plaques, paintings on T-shirts and lithographed commemorative stamps, Mao was turned into a leader through representations intended to convey qualities of "mature, trustworthy, wise statesmanship".<sup>123</sup> The exhibition also showed how Mao was converted into a deity through idol sculptures, standing figurines, heroic pictures and protective car talismans. With his image transferred on to badges, stamps, vases, desk plaques, mugs and other household crockery, Mao was turned into a symbol. Mao was also depicted as teacher through quotations from writings and speeches transposed on to porcelain cups in calligraphy. Later, Mao was later repositioned and marketed as a brand through the proliferation of his image on memorabilia in the form of pens, pendants, clocks, watches and key rings. Finally, the *Fashioning Mao* exhibition showed how Mao became an icon of vogue and style, with his image transferred onto dresses shirts, camisoles and jackets, and with the Mao suit turned into a fashion statement.<sup>124</sup>

*From Icon to Irony* also historicised Mao's image-production, and suggested that it was during the Cultural Revolution that Mao had "attained the status of a personality cult" and that his popularity had "reached its zenith". At that time, almost every literate Chinese person carried a copy of Mao's "Little Red Book", *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. Through posters, book covers, domestic and outdoor sculptures, badges and woven silk pictures, "images of the Great Leader could be seen everywhere".

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<sup>122</sup> *A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art* (Clark Atlanta University Art Galleries, Atlanta, 20 January – 15 March 2002, curated by Bogumil Jewsiewicki); see also the accompanying catalogue by Bogumil Jewsiewicki et al, *A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art* (New York: The Museum for African Art, 1999). This exhibition was first shown at the Museum for African Art, New York in 1999.

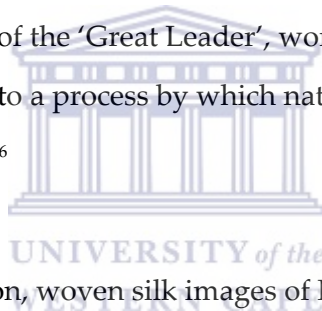
<sup>123</sup> *Mao: From Icon to Irony*, exhibition text.

<sup>124</sup> *Mao: From Icon to Irony* and *Fashioning Mao* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London October 13, 1999 - April 23, 2000).



Although Mao's image had been used on stamps and currency in China as early as the mid-1940s, it was only during the Cultural Revolution that it was employed "as a national rallying point".<sup>125</sup>

The exhibition also showed that, as Mao image-mediums, badges and woven silk pictures had an interesting history. During the Cultural Revolution, every Chinese adult donned at least one Mao badge "as a sign of loyalty and devotion". Indeed at this time, wearing a Mao badge was "one of the few acceptable forms of adornment", with individuals experimenting with different badge sizes and shapes as well as new ways of pinning them. Between 3.5 and 4.8 billion badges were produced in more than 20 000 different designs from a variety of materials, including ceramic, bamboo and plated aluminium. Although the collection of Mao badges was frowned upon, a busy and competitive market emerged around them, especially in new designs. This portable and wearable image of the 'Great Leader', worn on the body as adornment and sign, was incorporated into a process by which national selves were styled and political identities projected.<sup>126</sup>



During the Cultural Revolution, woven silk images of Mao were also made in large numbers. Hundreds of thousands were produced by the "Jacquard control mechanism", a loom with mechanical features that enabled the detailed arrangement of a large number of patterning elements, creating woven images that looked very life-like. The designs of these woven silk pictures were generally based on photographs that depicted important events in Mao's life. Usually framed, they adorned the walls of private homes or were put on display in public meeting halls. They were also given to individuals as awards for personal achievement at work in recognition of political status. Sometimes they were also given as gifts to visiting "foreign friends".<sup>127</sup> As with Mao badges, the portability of these images took them into the domains of private

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<sup>125</sup>Mao: *From Icon to Irony*, exhibition text.

<sup>126</sup>Mao: *From Icon to Irony*, exhibition text; see also Gao Yuan, *Born Red: A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987, pp 150-151 for a description of the workings of such a market in Mao badges.

<sup>127</sup>Mao: *From Icon to Irony*, exhibition text.

decoration and public display of political allegiance. This time, the representations of Mao went beyond merely projecting images of a leader. These woven silk pictures were portable visual biographies, through which the life and achievements of Mao, the leader, were narrated for circulation and display.

Kunzle's exhibition, which marked the thirtieth anniversary of Che's death, incorporated Cuban images of Guevara as well as portrayals from other Latin American countries, the United States, Europe and Vietnam. A group of Cuban posters depicting Guevara's ideals of solidarity with Third World societies was also included. Overall, the exhibition examined two legacies, that of "the omnipresent image of Che Guevara as a heroic figure" as well as the vitality of the political poster as a "weapon against injustice". In the exhibition, the origins of the Che myth were traced in part to photographs depicting Guevara's death in 1967. A famous photographic image by Bolivian photographer Freddy Alborta of the display of Guevara's corpse to the press by the Bolivian army as proof of his death was meant to "extinguish Guevara's legend". However, on being sent around the world, the photograph "enhanced the religious aura surrounding his martyrdom and ennobled his cause". The image of Che's dead body was likened to that of the dead Christ giving rise to artistic variations of Che in Christ-like posture. More generally, as Che's bearded face and starred beret were reproduced on posters, murals, T-shirts and banners, his charismatic image became "a political archetype".<sup>128</sup>

For over thirty years, protest posters "transmitted and promoted Che's ideals, hopes, and dreams" as well as those of others who sought "to challenge the status quo".<sup>129</sup> Yet the Che image of 1967 Cuban posters was very different from the Che produced in the United States in the 1990s, in which he had become a "commercial logo". The "hero iconography" that emerged in Cuba in the first few years after Che's death was "far

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<sup>128</sup> Carol A Wells, 'Preface', in David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*, p 11; *UCLA Latin Americanist*, No 31, Fall 1997, p 7. Carol Wells was the Executive Director of the Centre for the Study of Political Graphics in 1997.

<sup>129</sup> Carol A Wells, 'Preface', in David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*, p 11.

more varied ... [and] far more exciting” than the bureaucratic centralist aesthetic of eastern European socialist states. In spite of fears that the near “saturation” of Che images in Cuba in 1968 in the “Year of the Heroic Guerrilla” might result in a “repetitive, dogmatic, and ... purely mechanical” world of posters, Che poster iconography reflected a “continuing vitality”, which for Kunzle seemed to “flow from the vitality of the legend itself”. While there certainly was a “stereotyped Che image”, the iconography that emerged around Che varied and departed from this in “innumerable” ways, and with Cuban public and poster art having absorbed and activated a range of styles and influences, the image of Che has been “couched in a truly international visual language”. Apart from its “permanent presence” in homes, community centres and in the workplace, the anniversary month of Che’s death, October saw a “constantly changing” array of Che portraits on bright billboards, which provided “sudden moments of beauty” in drab urban settings.<sup>130</sup>

It is the Che poster, however, that has been “his enduring and ever renewable public monument”. The image of Che “embodying an egalitarian ideal” has challenged “social isolation and elitism”, as well as the social cleavages that began to take hold with new tourism and “dollarisation”. While many Cuban posters were official productions of state agencies and institutions, a substantial number were the result of people’s “very real affection” for Che, representing “a spontaneous expression of popular feeling”. Through the Che image, Cubans also continue “to export the *idea* of revolution”. In the 1960s and 1970s, Che was “a hero of Leftist and student movements throughout the world”. His image offered “fresh revolutionary inspiration” to protest movements in cities across the world, and was often used as a symbol in anti-war demonstrations and rallies against US imperialism. It came to stand for heroic resistance itself. But Che’s image was also taken into circuits of youthful rebellion in the west, and turned into a commercialised cult of “nostalgia for revolution” through keyrings, lapel pins, necklaces and stereotyped posters. Che’s image became a banal

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<sup>130</sup> David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*, pp 21-24.

“commercial commodity”, a “poster to be sold” along with those of rock stars and Hollywood celebrities.<sup>131</sup>

While Freddy Alborta’s image of Guevara’s dead body may have contributed to the creation of the Che myth, the photograph that undoubtedly came to stand for the memory of Guevara more than any other is undoubtedly that taken by Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez (who called himself Alberto Korda) in 1960 at a memorial service. The service had been held for more than 80 crewmembers of a European arms cargo ship, who had been killed in an attack for which Cuba blamed the United States. Korda had been assigned to cover the rally, which had drawn a number of foreign celebrities such as Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. As Korda’s camera scanned the stage for celebrities during Fidel Castro’s address, it found an angry and grieved Guevara, who had leant forward briefly with “an absolute look of steely defiance” on his face.<sup>132</sup>

For Korda, it was indeed ironic that this photograph came to be “admired worldwide as personifying Che the serene, even sweet visionary”. Korda’s magazine chose not to publish this photograph, and it lay dormant for seven years, hanging on a wall in his Havana studio. In 1967, it left the domain of the private studio and was transformed into the central image in the cultural production of Che Guevara, especially after his death. It was reproduced and circulated in innumerable ways, spawning “a host of graphic and other derivatives, and innumerable posterised versions”. In the process, Korda’s photograph became a “Messianic image”, twentieth century icon, and pin-up of radical students around the world.<sup>133</sup> It also came to stand for the mythical dead

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<sup>131</sup> David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*, pp 21-24.

<sup>132</sup> David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*, p 58

<sup>133</sup> David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*, p 58; in another case, Magnum photographer René Burri took a photograph in 1963 of Guevara leaning back and smoking a cigar, which also became one of the signal images of Che that came to be symbolic of the Cuban revolution. The image appeared in many books and magazines and on T-shirts and posters in different parts of the world. The photograph was also displayed in Guevara’s honour in a Cuban bank in the 1960s, probably during the time when he was president of the National Bank. In this commemorative position in Cuba’s financial life the photograph was claimed as part of the nation’s patrimony and when Burri, its original creator, attempted “to take a picture of his picture” for “his own amusement”, he was promptly arrested. See Russell Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Frontline of History – the Story of the Legendary Photo Agency* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1997), p 200. This photograph was also used in a

resistance hero in general, of hope concentrated in the facial expression of a tragic figure. It has adorned the chests of mourners as a mark of solidarity at funerals of resistance leaders around the world.<sup>134</sup>

A few months before Guevara's death in 1967, Korda gave a print of the image to Italian leftist publisher, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, who brandished a request for a copy from a senior Cuban government official. Its first public use in posterised form predated Guevara's death when it graced a billboard in the Plaza Revolución when Castro read a letter from Guevara to an Organisation of Latin American Solidarity conference in July 1967. However, shortly after his death, Feltrinelli used the photograph to make a textless poster, which sold millions of copies earning Feltrinelli five million dollars. In Cuba, the photograph formed the basis of portrait posters displayed at the mass rally in October 1967 when Castro confirmed Guevara's death and delivered his famous eulogy. Frémez, the printmaker, remembered working all night preparing the poster from Korda's photograph, using red paper, the only colour available. Korda's image was also enlarged to cover the ten-story Interior Ministry building on the Plaza. After 1967, the Korda image went on to be reproduced, multiplied and distributed numerous times through posters, T-shirts, murals, commemorative postage stamps and an engraved portrait on Cuban banknotes.<sup>135</sup>

While Korda expressed annoyance at some of this "unauthorised borrowing" of his Guevara image, he expressed his delight "that his photograph ... inspired socialist revolutionaries for more than three decades". Korda however sought to prevent the image being "trivialised" in 'inappropriate' commercial settings. Korda successfully sued a pop star for reproducing the image in a way that he saw as disrespectful. Later, he also sued an advertising agency for using it in an advertising campaign promoting a brand of vodka, as well as the photographic agency that supplied the "iconic" image.

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Nikon advertisement with the words "a portrait that made such a noise in the world cost the camera a soft click" (David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*, p 107).

<sup>134</sup> On 17 May 2003, mourners at Orlando Stadium in Soweto, South Africa wore Che t-shirts as a mark of solidarity and respect at the funeral of Walter Sisulu.

<sup>135</sup> David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*, pp 58-60.

In this billboard and magazine advertising campaign, Korda's photograph had been overlaid with a hammer sickle motif, in which the sickle was turned into a chilli pepper. The advertisers and photographic agency argued that nobody held copyright to the picture "because it has been used so extensively and, in effect, is in the public domain". Expressing his offence at this use, and his decision to "reassert his intellectual rights", Korda said that "to use the image of Che Guevara to sell vodka [was] a slur on his name and memory". Che "was not a drunk and drink should not be associated with his immortal memory".<sup>136</sup>

*Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message* went on to explore Guevara's own relationship with photography, and to ask questions about the processes of visual imaging and biographic production during his life, especially since photographic images were so significant in the creation of the Che image and biography. While his childhood had been the subject of excessive documentation by his "shutterbug" father, the young adult Guevara earned a living as a portrait and family photographer on the streets of Mexico, and went on to become a news agency photographer. Even though he became aware of the "acute political and propaganda value of news photographs", Guevara also understood that, as visual evidence, they could also "be used to sign death warrants". According to Kunzle, Che showed an "impatience with news photographers and their tendency to foster cults of personality". Yet, Che himself made use of a camera, with photography representing a "dangerous habit" that accompanied him "the whole length of his life". While many of these images remained confined to the Guevara family archive, they resonated with what Kunzle identified as "Che's unremitting need for self-reflection and self-construction" as reflected in his diaries. Immersed in a world documented by photographers, Guevara participated in the creation of an image of him as a romantic revolutionary. As biographical project, thus, the exhibition *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth and Message* began to explore complex

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<sup>136</sup> David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*, p 59; Matt Wells, 'Revolutionary spirit not spirits', *Mail and Guardian* 11-17 August 2000.



issues about image-making and auto/biographical production that went beyond questions usually asked in the public domain about lives and their narration.<sup>137</sup>

But perhaps the most significant curatorial project of biographic representation was *Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art*, which explored Lumumba's political career and tragic death as they had been represented through Congolese urban painting. By the 1970s and 1980s, Lumumba had been turned into a symbol of hope, and was much more popular with ordinary people than with the government, for whose policies his memory represented a threat. Paintings of Lumumba represented a challenge to the official version of history, and became an indirect way of levelling criticism against the government. As a genre of representation, they constituted one of the variety of forums through which "the trials and tribulations of this political figure [were] retold and reinterpreted". Their visual language enabled Congolese to "construct the mental maps" required to negotiate ways through different narrations of history and "to actively engage with contemporary understandings of collective memory". As such these paintings served "as an archive of imagining and reconstructing unofficial versions of a shared and lived history". *A Congo Chronicle* showed how memories of Lumumba "were transformed into a powerful visual narrative of a cultural hero".<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*, pp 57.

<sup>138</sup> *A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art* (Clark Atlanta University Art Galleries, Atlanta, 20 January – 15 March 2002, curated by Bogumil Jewsiewicki), exhibition texts; Bogumil Jewsiewicki et al, *A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art* (New York: The Museum for African Art, 1999); Elizabeth Harney, 'A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art', *Nka: Journal of Contemporary Art*, No. 11/12, Fall/Winter, 2000, pp 96-97; 'Clark Atlanta University Art Galleries present *A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art*' (Pamphlet, Clark Atlanta University Art Galleries, 2002). Apart from Lumumba biographies told in stories, the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the re-emergence of forensic approaches to Lumumba's life and death, through publications, film and a Belgian Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry. These focussed especially on the brief, turbulent seven months of his premiership, and the forces behind his murder in 1961; see Ludo de Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba* (London: Verso, 2001; first published in Flemish in 1999) and *Lumumba* (Director, Raoul Peck, JBA Production, Paris, 2000). As an intellectual committed to recovering Lumumba's life history and legacy, Peck had also made a documentary on Lumumba's murder in 1991; see *Lumumba: La Mort du Prophete* (France/Germany/Switzerland, Directed by Raoul Peck). Following the finding of the Parliamentary Commission that the Belgian government had a "moral responsibility" for Lumumba's murder, in 1992, the Belgian government formally took responsibility and apologised to Lumumba's family and the Congolese people for its role in the murder. The Belgian government also announced its decision to establish and finance a "Patrice Lumumba Foundation", to "prevent conflict, strengthen justice, and target the youth" (<[www.afrol.com/News2002/drc003\\_lumumba\\_bel.htm](http://www.afrol.com/News2002/drc003_lumumba_bel.htm)>). The

The central works of Bogumil Jewsiewicki's exhibition were fifty paintings by Tshimbumba Kanda Matulu from Shaba province, which emerged from a complex "cycle" of paintings narrating the "key events" in modern Congolese history. The exhibition also included works of other Congolese artists who emulated Tshimbumba's style. Through "stark contrasts of colour" and "heavy chiaroscuro" achieved with industrial paints, these paintings presented powerful visual depictions of frequently told stories, which addressed Lumumba's political legacy. Drawing upon photographs, newspaper reports and radio bulletins from the Mobutist period, these popular paintings copied the "iconic image of the slain leader", and inserted it along with symbols of a "pen in hand, rooster head, or globe" into visualised narratives of Lumumba breaking chains, Lumumba descending from an airplane to undergo his martyrdom, Lumumba taking part in the signing of independence, of events in the world of Lumumba's populist political party, and of the meanings of Lumumba's anti-colonial rhetoric.<sup>139</sup> The representation of Lumumba as Christ translated the story of Lumumba into an aesthetic that turned the events of his death into a tragedy.

These paintings were works of memory, an "icon library in which images come and go", and should not be seen as "testament" to the truthfulness of an event or a person. Indeed, Lumumba was depicted participating in political events, meetings and gatherings in which he participated, and in some, where he took no part. Through the memory work of these paintings, Lumumba was figured as a martyr "who sacrificed his life for his people and his country". He was painted in crucifixion images, surrounded by Judases, and depicted with magical qualities, whose "powerful orations" were capable of "inducing panic". In these painted images, produced and circulated especially at the beginning of the 1970s, "social memory constructed a

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exhibition of *A Congo Chronicle* at Clark Atlanta University Art Galleries was accompanied by a programme, which included lectures and panel discussions on art, politics and visual mythology, as well as a screening of Peck's 2001 film.

<sup>139</sup> *A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art* (Clark Atlanta University Art Galleries flyer, 2002; Bogumil Jewsiewicki et al, *A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art* (New York: The Museum for African Art, 1999); Elizabeth Harney, 'A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art', *Nka: Journal of Contemporary Art*, No. 11/12, Fall/Winter, 2000, pp 97-98.

Lumumba who could stand in opposition to Mobutu". This was in contrast to the confinement of the historical Lumumba to the archives and the banishment of his image from political life and public space after Mobutu's coup d'état in 1965.<sup>140</sup>

The recollection of Lumumba in the 1970s saw him emerge "as a full-fledged realm of memory [and as] the only historical figure to incarnate simultaneously the struggles for dignity, modernity, and national unity". Because mourning his death could have no end in the absence of a body to bury, the void "was gradually filled with images". In the 1990s, when images of Lumumba resurfaced in political life as "the epitome of the selfless politician devoted to the people", he was once again projected as a 'realm of memory' where people used their "knowledge of the past and their experience of the present" to "formulate their conception of a just political order" and to "demand recognition of their dignity". These were the issues of history, aesthetics and biographical production that *A Congo Chronicle* sought to enable exhibition goers to explore through narrative paintings. At the same time, viewers were able to examine how images of collective memory were constructed.<sup>141</sup>

This chapter has been concerned to understand the production of biography through memorial and visual genres outside the academy. We have seen how the public sphere has been an arena for the circulation of conventional methods of narration of lives as lessons on leadership, in which biography has featured as a discourse of power through which historical events are explained through individual causes. The public realm has also seen biographies produced as exposés of moral indiscretions in the lives of the prominent. We have also seen how, in different parts of the world, biography has been a feature of the 'memorial complex' and 'lieux de memoire', through which national public histories have been created in visual form through official intervention.

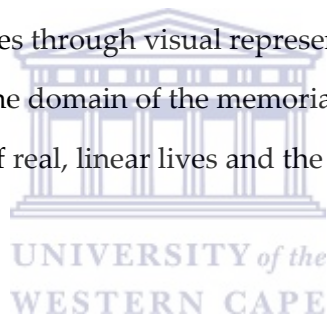
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<sup>140</sup>Elizabeth Harney, 'A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art', pp 97-98; Bogumil Jewsiewicki, 'Popular Painting in Contemporary Katanga: Painters, Audiences, Buyers, and Sociopolitical Contexts', in Bogumil Jewsiewicki et al, *A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art*, p 26.

<sup>141</sup> Bogumil Jewsiewicki, 'Popular Painting in Contemporary Katanga', p 27; Bogumil Jewsiewicki, 'Introduction', in Bogumil Jewsiewicki et al, *A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art*, p 11.

In spite of their official frames, their power and meanings have been contested as part of the reconstitution of political systems.

Nevertheless, this chapter has suggested that the most significant biographic work in visual form has emerged from the interventions of curators, through which exhibition has been a means of examining issues of memory and the production of lives through mediums of photography, posters and memorial art. These histories beyond words began with the impulse to collect, and their installation has emerged from the domain of public scholarship, concerned to advance the possibilities of a critical public sphere. The methodological significance of this work indicates how fluid the boundary is between the academy and knowledge production in the public domain and suggests a much more complex relationship of interconnections and knowledge flows. In opening up questions of image production and appropriation, and the production and circulation of narratives of lives through visual representation, these exhibitions have shown how it is possible, in the domain of the memorial as well as the academic text, to transcend narrow frames of real, linear lives and the lessons of history.



## CHAPTER THREE

### RESISTANCE STUDIES AND POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY IN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the role of the remarkable individual in South African history has taken on new meaning in the academy. There has been renewed focus in South African historical scholarship on the individual and the great life as well as an increased concern to understand 'leadership' through the medium of biography. This biographic concentration has also emerged in the work of historians of South Africa long concerned to develop a 'history from below' perspective, an approach favouring collectivities of 'ordinary people', rather than the lives of leaders and the powerful.



While some social historians of South Africa have engaged since the 1980s with biography as a prism for social and collective processes and underclass experiences, others more recently seem to have become captivated by the attributes and qualities of political leadership. These shifts began to emerge at a time when different accounts of the South African past narrated through notions of resistance, the recovery of hidden history and the recuperation of submerged experiences of blacks, women, peasants and workers, have had to come to terms with the changed conditions of South Africa after 'the struggle'. Under these changed political circumstances of 'transition to democracy', which culminated in the April 1994 elections and the election of Nelson Mandela as president, some of the 'voices from below' began to make the transition into becoming 'voices from above'.

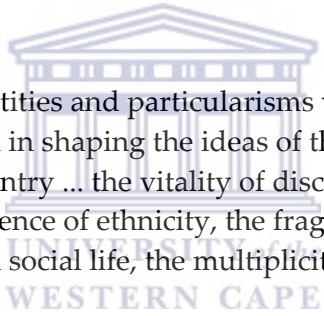
An interesting barometer of such a shift was the synthesis produced in 1994 by William Beinart of radical scholarship on South African history produced since the 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Beinart, whose research has featured prominently among South African social histories, laid particular stress on rural processes in the shaping of South Africa.<sup>2</sup> This emphasis was sustained in *Twentieth Century South Africa* through an insistence on seeing South African history from the perspective of the countryside and with a deliberate emphasis on rural processes. In the process, the awesome weight that South African historiography has accorded the mineral 'revolution' and processes of social transformation and class formation on the Witwatersrand was reduced in scale.

Far from being transformed overnight, Beinart was able to demonstrate that African rural societies had been remarkably resilient in their capacities to survive, adapt and resist change, thus holding on to important aspects of their society and culture. Africans were constructed as independent social agents whose lives and activities could not only be read as responses to the designs of their capitalist and colonial masters. Thus, emphasis was placed on



the remnant identities and particularisms which have been so powerful in shaping the ideas of the mass of the people in the country ... the vitality of discrete rural localities, the salience of ethnicity, the fragmented patterns of urban social life, the multiplicity of religious expression.<sup>3</sup>

Through the absorption on new factors such as culture, ethnicity and gender into his account, Beinart demonstrated the ability of social history to go further than earlier versions of class analysis and enhance its explanatory capacities. In this more nuanced perspective, the salience of rural struggles, the variety of cultural responses, economic activities and social identities of African men and women, adult and youth in the city were viewed in their richness, diversity and complexity. Africans were seen not as passive victims of colonisation, oppression and segregation. Instead, they were involved

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<sup>2</sup>See especially, William Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860-1930*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1982; William Beinart and Colin Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape 1890-1930*, Johannesburg, Ravan, 1987; William Beinart, 'Agrarian Historiography and Agrarian Reconstruction', in John Lonsdale (ed), *South Africa in Question*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

<sup>3</sup>William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, pp 4-5.



in “a wide range of inventive political responses and innovative forms of action”.<sup>4</sup> Black opposition, particularly before the 1950s, was seen as varied, fragmented, richer, more diverse and less predictable than African nationalist mythologies, in search of a consistent trajectory of responses, would allow.

In spite of these analytical advances in the conceptualisation of African identities and agency, other features of Beinart’s history pointed ambiguously to a perspective that could be seen as less than social. Large segments of text were devoted to political history, with the personal characteristics of individual political personalities, like Smuts, Hertzog, Malan, Vorster and Botha, often used to explain historical processes. Reference was made, for example to the value of Smuts, who had “a personal simplicity and asceticism”, a “love of nature and environmental concern”, and “efficiency in government if not in party organization”. His “very capacity for political compromise” we were told, “permitted a period of relative openness during the Second World War when the country’s more liberal whites and welfare planners briefly had greater influence than at any other time until 1990”.<sup>5</sup>

Notwithstanding Beinart’s intentions to transcend the linear resistance narratives of nationalist history, key themes such as the history of the ANC as well as race and power in the context of the history of resistance were dealt with rather uncritically. The apparent ‘non-racialism’ of the Congress movement in the 1950s was treated as self-evident and was left unproblematised. Without any questions posed, the ANC was referred to as having had “long established traditions and symbols of resistance” and the United Democratic Front was seen simplistically as “explicitly non-racial in the tradition of the ANC”.<sup>6</sup> Beinart himself, perhaps unwittingly, slipped into a nationalist

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<sup>4</sup>William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, p 92. For critical evaluations of Beinart’s book, see Ciraj Rassool, ‘Revisionist Texts’, *Southern African Review of Books*, No 34, November/December, 1994 as well as Ran Greenstein, ‘The Future of the South African Past’ (Review Article), *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 22, No 2, June 1996.

<sup>5</sup>William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, pp 133-134.

<sup>6</sup>William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, pp 215, 234.

narrative at crucial moments, reproducing traditions created by the very nationalist histories he sought to transcend.

If Smuts was constructed as the voice of moderation, Nelson Mandela was presented as if he had been born into leadership. In teleological fashion, Mandela's rise to greatness was foregrounded through biographical treatment of his "dramatic life" which "delineates the phases of black nationalist politics" until the early 1960s. It was Mandela who was "at the heart of the transformation of the ANC from a nationalist protest movement to a national liberation movement after Sharpeville in 1960".<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in Beinart's work there were signs that some revisionist historians, long sceptical of histories featuring the role of the individual in history, had begun to explain historical processes by recourse to the personal characteristics of individual political personalities. More than this, there were indications in some places that the terrain of resistance, for two decades the central theme of South African historiography, had the potential to be extended and take shape as a history of national reconciliation. Part of this extended master narrative hinged on issues of leadership and the remarkable individual. Biography in quite conventional form was central to these historiographical shifts.



If Beinart's synthesis could be understood as a yardstick, which marked a moment of ambiguous historiographical reworking alongside political transition, then this feature also reared its head in another setting, this time on prime time public television, in a programme broadcast live during May 1995. In this programme, academics were quizzed about the challenges involved in producing a 'new history for a new South Africa'. Grasping the opportunity afforded by the enlarged audience, outside the academic setting, of the nation in their homes, historian and writer, Luli Callinicos, then of the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand, articulated a manifesto of social history and reiterated a concern that 'gaps' in South African history be 'filled':

History has tended to be the history of the rich, the powerful and usually the male, great men. I am concerned that we bring ... the history of women, that hidden abode, the private sphere and also the

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<sup>7</sup>William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, p 160.

marginalised, grassroots people [and thus] move away from the history of leaders to a history of people - history from below, social history - how do people survive, the creative ways in which they managed to make something in a very hostile environment - what we call human agency. People aren't just victims. We want to get the texture of that life and the way to do it, obviously, is to ask those people themselves about their history; so it is time we started hearing those voices.<sup>8</sup>

The History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand was perhaps the central institution in establishing social 'history from below' as hegemonic in South African historical scholarship. Callinicos, then research officer of the History Workshop, had been instrumental in attempting to make this academic knowledge 'accessible' beyond academic settings. She had been responsible for producing popular histories on behalf of the History Workshop in a series entitled, 'A People's History of South Africa'. Three volumes had been produced, ranging from a study of class formation and the emergence of migrant labour to studies of working people's lives and urban social history.<sup>9</sup> In the final volume biographies were given a prominent place. These were presented as 'life stories', which sought to humanise and add face to the economic and social processes, which were seen as constituting history. Along the lines of Callinicos's TV manifesto, these lives were presented as 'history from below', the voices and experiences of ordinary people, human agency in the 'hostile environment' of an industrialising Rand in the grip of a tightening racial order.

In spite of Callinicos's firm commitment to ordinary lives in South African history both as an explicit critique of histories of the dominant and the powerful, and as an exercise in democratising the historical record, this critical positioning of herself as historian seemed to undergo a shift, live on television. Instead of claiming to be wanting to retrieve and give voice to subjective, underclass experiences in urban and rural settings, as radical acts of recovery, Callinicos seemed to take up a contradictory vantage point: a

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<sup>8</sup>*Agenda* (SABC), 4 May 1995. I also participated in this live debate on new history in South Africa.

<sup>9</sup>See Luli Callinicos, *Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1981; *Working Life, 1886-1940: Factories, Townships and Popular Culture on the Rand*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987, and *A Place in the City: The Rand on the Eve of Apartheid*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1993.

quest to reveal the role of leaders in resistance. As official biographer of ANC leader Oliver Tambo (along with political scientist Tom Lodge, who had also initiated a study),<sup>10</sup> and with privileged access to Tambo's papers, Callinicos articulated this new approach to the past during the same television programme:

I'm actually very interested in this whole thing of leadership. For fifteen years or more I have been writing about the grassroots people and I think there is something to be said for leaders. I think that it is very difficult to say that some other leader other than Mandela would have been just as good. I don't think it would have worked. I think that at this particular historical moment, President Mandela is tailor-made.<sup>11</sup>

Under the altered political circumstances of democratic transition, it can be argued, some radical historians, previously concerned with the capacities of subordinate groups to transform the conditions of their existence, began to slip into post-struggle histories deemed appropriate for nation-building and new patriotism.<sup>12</sup> In this new framework, resistance histories became bound up with reconciliation, the achievement of 'liberation' and the end of the apartheid political order. Under these circumstances, a heroic narrative, which suggested that there was value in understanding great events, like the demise of apartheid, as produced by the efforts, the insights and the wisdom of great men, acquired a measure of legitimacy. In order to understand these shifts and seeming historiographical contradictions, it is necessary to trace some of the career of resistance studies in South African historical scholarship, and to try and understand the ways in which the individual and biography have featured in historical accounts of resistance.

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<sup>10</sup>See Luli Callinicos, 'The Great Interpreter: Images of O R Tambo', History Workshop Conference: Democracy: Popular Precedents Practice Culture, University of the Witwatersrand, 13-15 July 1994; See also the research project description, 'Oliver Tambo Biography' by Tom Lodge in Institute for Advanced Social Research, University of the Witwatersrand, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report*, 1 September 1995 - 31 August 1996. In the late 1990s, Luli Callinicos would also undertake a study of Nelson Mandela's life history, constructed as a heritage trail of the sites of significance associated with its unfolding. See Luli Callinicos, *The World that Made Mandela: A Heritage Trail* (Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 2000).

<sup>11</sup>*Agenda* (SABC), 4 May 1995.

<sup>12</sup>This commitment to history as nation-building has expressed itself, perhaps more explicitly, in debates about transforming the history curriculum in South African schools. See especially the proposals for change by educationist, Ismail Vadi in The History Education Group, *History Matters: Debates about a new History Curriculum for South Africa*, Houghton: Heinemann-Centaur Publishers, 1993, pp 27-28.

Since the 1970s, the terrain of resistance studies in South African scholarship unfolded seemingly within two broad frameworks. These frameworks were not mutually exclusive, and it is possible to demonstrate significant moments of agreement, overlap and fusion, as well as philosophical affinities in certain ways. Also, certain works contained features of more than one framework, and others were not easily categorised. These frameworks at times also resonated with histories produced outside the academy, especially as old and new museums, and other heritage bodies sought to reveal pasts, deemed to be previously hidden from view. Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these frameworks also resonated with official history projects outside the academy, which drew upon academic research and university facilities and forums, as well as political constituencies to constitute a hybrid space of historical production between the academy and the political domain.<sup>13</sup> In broad outline, though, resistance was narrated through these distinct frames, each with different points of emphasis and different political implications.

The first framework can be identified as 'documentary history', which was premised upon "gathering evidence and making referential statements in the form of truth claims based on that evidence".<sup>14</sup> The main roots of this branch of South African resistance studies seem to be in American-based political science and political history. The second is the framework of social history which developed in South Africa during the 1980s in the form of 'history from below', and which became a complex and diverse field. Under the influence of popular resistance politics during the 1980s, 'History from below' also took shape as 'people's history', particularly at the University of the Western Cape. The work of radical scholarship in the form of history 'from below' emerged as a counter-narrative to power and domination, in which resistance was read as the corner stone of

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<sup>13</sup> Here, I am thinking about the South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) and its 'Road to Democracy' Research Project, a presidential history project which was inaugurated by President Thabo Mbeki on Human Rights Day, 21 March 2001. See footnote 202.

<sup>14</sup> Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, p 1. See Chapter One of this book for a critical discussion of documentary history, its research procedures and its philosophical underpinnings.

ordinary experience. It was biographical research in the form of the collection of life stories, which lay at the heart of attempts by social historians to 'democratise' the processes of historical construction.

Documentary historians and social historians narrated recovered and revealed pasts into realist narratives of the nation, based upon conventional hierarchies of source and history, and assumed distinctions between domination and resistance. In these modernist methods and teleologies of national history, biographies of leaders and ordinary people were created as ready-made stories of the nation in microcosm, in pre-determined categories of resistance, without an examination of the processes of subject construction.

### *Documentary history, political biography and the legacy of Karis and Carter*

From the 1970s, a discernable body of research on resistance to systems of racial domination in South Africa took the form of documentary political history. Many, though not all, were written by Americans, or by scholars at American universities. The flagship series of publications in this genre was the four-volumed, *From Protest to Challenge*, edited overall by Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter, with their colleagues Gail Gerhart and Sheridan Johns each contributing to the editing.<sup>15</sup> This format proved to be enduring, with Sheridan Johns and R Hunt Davis, and Allison Drew putting together further publications in this genre, after systematically collecting and assembling documents deemed to be primary materials of political history.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter (eds), *From Protest To Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1972-1977. Volume 1, *Protest and Hope, 1882-1934* was edited by Sheridan Johns; Volume 2, *Hope and Challenge, 1935-1952* was edited by Thomas Karis; Volume 3, *Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964* by Thomas Karis and Gail M Gerhart and Volume 4, *Political Profiles, 1882-1964*, by Gail M Gerhart and Thomas Karis. In 1997, Volume 5, edited by Thomas Karis and Gail M Gerhart, was added to the series. It was released in 1997 under the subtitle *Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979* (Pretoria and Bloomington, Unisa Press and Indiana University Press, 1997). In the late 1990s, Gerhart was also preparing Volume 6 (*Challenge and Victory, 1980-1990*) and Volume 7 (*Political Profiles, 1964-1990*).

<sup>16</sup>Sheridan Johns and R Hunt Davis, Jr (eds), *Mandela, Tambo and the African National Congress: The Struggle Against Apartheid, 1948-1990. A Documentary Survey*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; Allison Drew (ed), *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, Volume One: 1907-1950*, Cape



In an obvious sense, these studies were documentary histories in that they consisted of collections of political documents. These had been edited, chronologically arranged and grouped thematically, and were often annotated. In order to serve a more scholarly purpose, academic essays accompanied the documents. These sought to establish the value of the respective sequences of documents, to create a chronology and periodisation, and to construct a narrative history based on the documents. The consequence was that these texts had an archival sanctity, while they were also given a scholarly character.

This was particularly the case with *From Protest To Challenge* or rather, Karis and Carter, as the series became known. This project sought “to rescue from obscurity the voices of protest in South Africa”. It had its origins in a visit to South Africa in 1961-1962 undertaken by Peter Duignan, a curator of African materials at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, which was a centre for research on American and international affairs in the twentieth century based at Stanford University. During his visit, Duignan established a network of suppliers and collectors in order to obtain materials. The most important of these contacts was Benjamin Pogrand of the *Rand Daily Mail*, who microfilmed papers, files and archives of individuals and groups who had engaged in opposition to the South African state. At the same time, Duignan secretly purchased ephemeral political materials and copies of opposition newspapers. Most of the materials collected came to be housed at the Hoover Institution, while some found their way to the Chicago-based Centre for Research Libraries.<sup>17</sup>

At the suggestion of Peter Duignan, Thomas Karis undertook to co-ordinate the publication of a documentary history of black political opposition in South Africa, based on all the material collected. Karis had already worked on a related project for the

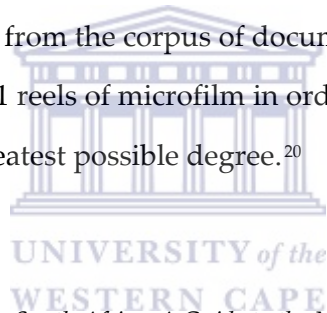
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Town: Buchu Books, Mayibuye Books, UCT Press, 1996; *Volume Two: 1943-1964*, Cape Town: Buchu Books, Mayibuye Books, UCT Press, 1997.

<sup>17</sup>Peter Duignan, ‘Preface to the 1987 Printing’, in Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M Carter (eds), *From Protest To Challenge*, Volume 2.

Hoover Institution since 1962, preparing a guide to the 25-reel microfilm record of the Treason Trial.<sup>18</sup> This time, he asked Gwendolen Carter to work with him. During field trips to Southern Africa in 1963 and 1964, both Karis and Carter collected and copied further primary political materials and began to interview veteran political activists.<sup>19</sup>

After Sheridan Johns and Gail Gerhart had joined the project, the hunt for political materials was broadened to include further collections in South Africa as well as archives, libraries and private collections in the United States and Britain. Further work was done in other countries such as Zambia at the end of the 1960s when Thomas Karis and Sheridan Johns spent spells at the university enabling them to discuss resistance history with South African émigrés. The project was expanded from an initial plan of one volume to four volumes. The publication in hardback of the four volumes under the title *From Protest To Challenge* took place between 1972 and 1977. While publication in this form involved a selection from the corpus of documents, all the assembled political materials were copied on to 71 reels of microfilm in order to make the documents available to scholars to the greatest possible degree.<sup>20</sup>



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<sup>18</sup>Thomas Karis, *The Treason Trial in South Africa: A Guide to the Microfilm Record of the Trial*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1965.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M Carter, *From Protest To Challenge*, Volume 2, Preface. One of the early documentary publications that emerged from this line of work was a biographical one, consisting of a selection of speeches of Reverend Zaccheus R Mahabane and biographical information. See Gwendolen M Carter and Sheridan W Johns (eds), *The Good Fight: Selected Speeches of Rev. Zaccheus R Mahabane*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M Carter, *From Protest To Challenge*, Volume 2, Preface; Peter Duignan, 'Preface to the 1990 Printing', in Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M Carter (eds), *From Protest To Challenge*, Volume 4. Original hard copies of the documents (1882-1964) were stored in boxes at Africa House at Northwestern University where Gwendolen Carter was Director of the Program on African Studies. Later these documents were moved to a research room at Northwestern's Melville J Herskovits Africana Library where they were placed under the care of then curator, Hans Panofsky. I had the good fortune to share a study space with these documents while at Northwestern in 1986-7. While the originals had been "deeded" to Northwestern, where they form part of the Africana Library's collection of rare material, "virtually all the material" was also made available on microfilm in the care of and under the copyright of the Comparative Africana Microform Project (CAMP). See Gwendolen Carter and Thomas Karis, 'Preface' in Susan G Wynne (Compiler), *South African Political Materials: A Catalogue of the Carter-Karis Collection*, Bloomington, Indiana: Southern African Research Archives Project, 1977, pp i-iii. In January 1999, the "'Karis-Gerhart' Collection of South African Political Materials 1964-1990" was filmed for CAMP onto 101 microform reels as a "continuation of the Carter-Karis collection". The collection itself was lodged in the Cullen Library at Wits. See catalogue at <[www.crl.edu/areastudies/CAMP/collections/karisgerhart.htm](http://www.crl.edu/areastudies/CAMP/collections/karisgerhart.htm)>.

Under the conditions of deepening repression and the consolidation of racial power in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, Karis and Carter's project served as a means of preserving materials and safeguarding them away from the attention of the apartheid state.<sup>21</sup> In addition, it served to create a rich documentary base for the academic study of South African resistance politics in the United States. At this time, South African political movements were establishing themselves in exile, and seeking out networks of solidarity and material support. The entry of the South African 'struggle' - in the form of political materials - into the terrain of the academy in the United States granted South African political movements scholarly recognition, intellectual validity as well as moral legitimacy.

But the Karis and Carter project was more than merely a collection of documents. The project was largely responsible for the creation of the academic field of black resistance politics in South Africa. It also served to establish a framework for the narration of South African resistance history, with its own chronology, periodisation and constitutive codes. In the preface to Volume 1, Karis and Carter wrote that the documents

present the drama of more than eighty years of resolutions, requests, anxious arguments, agonising frustrations, and calls for action by African leaders and organisations.<sup>22</sup>

In this historical drama, the unfolding of events was told through chronological narrative, with resistance history seen in narrow terms as the history of organised political formations. Here, political history was a terrain for the assessment of ideas or political thinking, read transparently off organisational documents, and the relationship of this thought to political action. This was a realist conception of political history, narrated from an inventory of political documents whose archived order and chronological arrangement

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<sup>21</sup>The practice of sending documents reflecting resistance histories to the United States for safe-keeping and preservation in university archives continued until at least the late 1980s, with Matthew Goniwe's papers, for example, finding their way to Sterling Library at Yale University. There have also been many stories of documents surviving through concealment in lofts, basements and underground burial. As many researchers and former activists know, such concealment of documents in South Africa was not always possible. The possibility of incrimination regularly resulted in documents being destroyed to protect activists and resistance activities.

<sup>22</sup>Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter, *From Protest To Challenge*, Volume 1, Preface, p xv.

constituted the political formations and leaders written about as modern, purposeful and rational.

This history was presented as objective stages of a process of maturation, and as incrementally progressive modes of negotiating power and modernity. It traced the rise to prominence of a dominant Congress resistance 'tradition' whose history was enshrined in a metanarrative of transition from reformist accommodationism and middle class moderation, dependent on segregationist political authority, to a more militant post-war assertiveness, leading to more confrontational forms of resistance, and eventual imprisonment and exile as a result of its suppression as a mass organisation. The movement of this past unfolded with a sense of inevitability and seamless continuity from one stage to the next, with little contradiction and tension between leaders and rank and file. The category 'documentary' can be extended to encompass this realist method of presenting a political past in the form of the orthodox narrative history, which seeks to write chronological accounts of real political organisations, peopled by authentic selves.

In this documentary history, nationalism tended to be taken for granted as a natural and organic expression of group identity. The approach was a respectful one, with very few critical questions posed about social and political tensions and contradictions within the nationalist movement, nor any about its class composition and the class interests of its members.<sup>23</sup> Another feature of this history was the amount of attention given to leadership of political movements, with South African resistance history told through the experiences and opinions of political leaders, particularly at a national level. It was national leadership figures who conducted the planning, who forged alliances and who restructured their organisations. Through the juxtaposition of historical text and the documents, the series sought to "recreate through the words and actions of African leaders the events, tactics, emotions, and personalities of the past".<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>See the discussion by Colin Bundy in *Remaking The Past: New Perspectives in South African History*, Cape Town: Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, University of Cape Town, 1986, Chapter 9.

<sup>24</sup>Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter, *From Protest To Challenge*, Volume 1, Preface, p xv.

Crucially, this feature found expression through the special place that was accorded to biography. Indeed, an entire volume of Karis and Carter's series, Volume 4, was devoted to political biography. This volume contained more than 300 alphabetically arranged political profiles and 68 illustrative portrait photographs and group shots of political personalities and leaders.<sup>25</sup> The vast majority of the political profiles contained in the volume were no more than a single paragraph in length. This was biography in the form of the cryptic political life consisting of bare essentials and basic data on the lives of the subjects. However, the lives of 27 personalities were narrated in profiles of between one and two and a half pages. These tended to be individual male leaders who had held office in political organisations, with the longest treatment reserved for the lives of Xuma and Luthuli.

As political narratives, the biographical profiles contained in Volume 4 sought to present empirical information on the 'role' of the protagonists as subjects in the national story of resistance in South Africa as told in the first three volumes. Volume 4 also established political biography as a valid arena of academic research and as an essential component of scholarly work on South African resistance history. The impact of Volume 4 has been enduring. The conventional procedures for the narration of lives that it employed set the tone for much South African political biography that was produced subsequently. Later researchers have also mined Volume 4 as a collection of primary biographic documents, almost monumental in their status, which were deemed to contain objective facts about political personalities.

The format of the Karis and Carter documentary collection proved to be enduring in expressing ongoing American interest in South African resistance history. Almost twenty years after the publication of the first volume of Karis and Carter, their long-time collaborator, Sheridan Johns together with R Hunt Davis published a documentary study

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<sup>25</sup>Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter (eds), *From Protest To Challenge, Volume 4*. This volume, edited by Gail Gerhart and Thomas Karis carries the subtitle *Political Profiles, 1882-1964*.

of the “struggle against apartheid”, centred on the public political careers of Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo.<sup>26</sup> This study presented a chronological arrangement of statements and writings by Mandela, Tambo and the ANC into a familiar periodisation and arrangement of resistance history centred on the ANC. These were accompanied by interpretive essays, which drew the documents into narratives of resistance and leadership.

The year 1948 - the start of the book’s concentration - was taken to be the beginning of apartheid, and the first portion of documents reflected the “challenge” to apartheid by a “new generation” as represented by the ANC Youth League, especially in the persons of Mandela and Tambo. 1960 was the next important date and this marked the phase of “proscription and enforced reorientation”. 1964 signalled the beginning of the phase of “post-Rivonia politics”, a period which was taken to run until the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Mandela in 1990. The documents arranged in this order were taken to “articulate the aspirations of Africans for full participation in a more equitable and democratic order in South Africa”.<sup>27</sup>

At the centre of the articulation of African aspirations according to Johns and Davis, were Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, who were at the “heart” of more than four decades of struggle and who were “central to any resolution of the South African crisis”. The biographic focus on “the two leaders”, Mandela and Tambo, was the main organising feature of the book. They were among the new generation, which revitalised the ANC and they were on the ANCYL executive committee, which drafted the Programme of Action adopted by the ANC in 1949. As a result, they were able to strike “a more responsive chord in the African populace”. At the time of his imprisonment in 1962, Mandela was “the pre-eminent figure in African politics” whose position of political leadership was

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<sup>26</sup>Sheridan Johns and R Hunt Davis, Jr (eds), *Mandela, Tambo and the African National Congress: The Struggle Against Apartheid, 1948-1990, A Documentary Survey*.

<sup>27</sup>Sheridan Johns and R Hunt Davis, Jr (eds), *Mandela, Tambo and the African National Congress*, pp xiii-xvii, 13.



established through his professional work as an attorney and his political activism, particularly his underground work in the early 1960s.<sup>28</sup>

Mandela's incarceration on Robben Island paved the way for the rise to leadership of Tambo, long-time associate of Mandela from Fort Hare days in the 1940s and also his Johannesburg law partner in the 1950s. In exile, but unconfined by prison walls, it was Tambo who "articulated most fully and widely the ANC vision of the country's future" until his stroke in 1989. But Tambo did so, implies Johns and Davis, as trusted caretaker leader on behalf of Mandela during his enforced absence. However, while in prison and out of the public eye, Mandela "continued to exhibit his unique qualities of leadership among his fellow prisoners" and documents in a special section of the book are presented to bear testimony to this. And after his release in 1990, Mandela began to emerge as the ANC's "prime spokesperson ... at home and abroad".<sup>29</sup>

At no stage did Johns and Davis attempt to engage with the historiography of resistance in South Africa, nor with the methodology of their book's lineage originating largely in Johns' own editing of the first volume of Karis and Carter. Apart from a rudimentary discussion of audiences,<sup>30</sup> little attempt was made to examine the production of political documents, their distribution and redistribution and the meanings produced and accumulated. Once again, African nationalism was taken as given, with almost no social analysis nor any analysis of its discursive strategies. Leadership was also taken for granted. In spite of biography being central to the organisation of the book, the approach was largely empiricist and documentary realist, founded on untheorised notions of the individual and leadership. Explanation was sought in chronology itself and in the linear forms of causation constructed by the narrative.

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<sup>28</sup>Sheridan Johns and R Hunt Davis, Jr (eds), *Mandela, Tambo and the African National Congress*, pp ix, xi, 3, 21.

<sup>29</sup>Sheridan Johns and R Hunt Davis, Jr (eds), *Mandela, Tambo and the African National Congress*, pp 4, 317.

<sup>30</sup>Sheridan Johns and R Hunt Davis, Jr (eds), *Mandela, Tambo and the African National Congress*, pp 10-13.

Whereas Karis and Carter in the 1970s had produced a documentary history of African nationalism in South Africa, the political scientist Allison Drew in the 1990s produced a “Karis and Carter of South African socialism”.<sup>31</sup> Spanning two volumes, Drew’s study tried to document the existence of a “radical left tradition” between 1907 and 1964. The documents were organised chronologically and arranged within a discursive system of South African socialist politics. Volume One covered the origins of socialism in South Africa and the first few decades of its development until the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 made open socialist politics illegal. Themes around which documents were arranged dealt with socialists confronting a “racially-divided working class”, their “gradual recognition of the national question” and “their efforts to build political alliances”.<sup>32</sup> Volume Two took the story further and examined the relationship between socialist tendencies and the “national liberation movement” from 1943 until 1964. Documents were grouped in themes of “political alliances” and “building the national movement”, the “national question”, the “agrarian question” and the “armed struggle”.<sup>33</sup>

It must be recognised that Drew’s project made a bold attempt to redress the “historical predominance of the African National Congress and its affiliated organisations or allies”. However, as with Karis and Carter, the discursive categories employed by the authors of the documents for analysing society and discussing political issues - framed as the national ‘question’, the land ‘question’ and so forth - were taken as given and ‘natural’ and reproduced by Drew in her volumes. While Karis and Carter attempted to draw a linear narrative of nationalist resistance politics, Drew sought to identify a “tradition” of socialist resistance politics, albeit a “heterogeneous and eclectic” one.<sup>34</sup> In spite of the existence of a growing corpus of scholarly works suggesting that claims on ‘tradition’ be regarded with

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<sup>31</sup>Allison Drew (ed), *South Africa’s Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, Volume One: 1907-1950*, Cape Town: Buchu Books, Mayibuye Books, UCT Press, 1996; *Volume Two: 1943-1964*, Cape Town: Buchu Books, Mayibuye Books, UCT Press, 1997. This was a phrase used in discussions between members of the editorial board of Mayibuye Books, on which I served. These volumes drew upon the archival research conducted by Drew for her Doctoral dissertation. See Allison Drew, ‘Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism in South Africa, 1928-1960’, Ph.D dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1991.

<sup>32</sup>Allison Drew (ed), *South Africa’s Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, Volume One*, pp 5, 11.

<sup>33</sup>Allison Drew (ed), *South Africa’s Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, Volume Two*, p 5.

<sup>34</sup>Allison Drew (ed), *South Africa’s Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, Volume One*, p 10.

scepticism,<sup>35</sup> the use of this notion as an analytical device enabled Drew to grant narrative coherence to socialist politics in South Africa. In addition, chronological narration and documentary sequencing were the key methods of reconstructing this grand socialist unity. Nevertheless, a myriad of fissures, disjunctions and contradictions, suggesting an assortment of fragments, contradicted any notion of linearity and 'tradition'.

But Drew did not set herself the task of questioning claims on tradition nor of deconstructing political statements as modes of representation. Instead, within a realist epistemology, presented in a language of class and class struggle, she approached documents with a concern for what they said and how they served as written expressions of ideas. Documents, for her, were to be seen as containers of facts and archives, as repositories of collections of facts. Viewed in this way, documents became divorced from their own history of safekeeping, storage, collection and recollection as they had been passed along or transacted into circuits of distribution within which they shed old meanings and took on new ones.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Drew's use of photographs was purely illustrative, as a transparent window on events and people, rather than as a genre of visual representation. Indeed, in the naïve desire to show the real, her illustrative deployment of photographs as evidence missed out on the peculiar histories of these images and why it was that they existed.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>See, for example, the much-cited book edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

<sup>36</sup>One example will suffice. The Workers Party of South Africa Papers housed in the Mayibuye Archive at the University of the Western Cape were 'mined' by Drew for 22 documents on the history of Trotskyism and political alliances in South Africa. No interest was shown in why and how this collection had survived and how it had found its way into the Mayibuye Archive. The biography of this collection is indeed interesting. In the first place the papers owed their existence to Claire Goodlatte, tireless WPSA secretary who had concealed the documents in the roof of her Salt River home where they were found almost 60 years later. The documents were separated into two sections, one of which found its way into the hands of a small trader in ephemeral Africana in Cape Town. It was these documents that were acquired by the Mayibuye Archive (with my intercession). The other section of the documents was acquired by members of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC and was eventually handed over to the Department of Historical Papers at Wits University. This section was unused by Drew.

<sup>37</sup>Between pp 16 and 17 of *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*, Volume Two, (and on pp 438 and 455 of her dissertation), Drew inserted two photographs taken by Claremont-based photographer, Ralph Taylor, of scenes from the mass meeting held by the Anti-CAD movement on the Grand Parade on 30 March 1952 to protest against the Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival. The first, a crowd scene, was attributed to Halima Gool, from whom Drew had received a copy, and has

Biography, as the conventional chronological narrative of political lives, was a key element in these volumes. This was particularly the case with the endnotes to the documents, where cryptic political lives of leaders were constructed as part of explanatory passages. Biography here was seen as a project to trace the trajectories of political thought and social analyses of individual activists, as an important component of mapping a history of socialism and its relationships with the political movements for national liberation. Chronological lives were understood as 'prisms' through which to understand political ideas, policies and strategies, as well as political and social conditions. These profiles, tucked away in the explanatory endnotes, worked as 'biographic documents', much like Karis and Carter's Volume 4, and sought to provide ready biographic facts on leading socialist activists.

The documentary history has also proven to be a durable format. This was demonstrated by historian Robert Edgar's 1992 publication of Ralph Bunche's travel notes.<sup>38</sup> This was a recording of Bunche's visit to Southern Africa during 1937, and its importance lay in it being "one of the few 'outsider' accounts of South Africa by a black person". It was also "a rich repository of information on black life in South Africa in that period".<sup>39</sup> As with others in the genre, biography in traditional form reared its head, particularly in the footnotes, where biographical profiles of individuals mentioned in the documents were given. As an exercise in biography in itself, of a subject who had brushed up against South African social and political life during his visit, the publication of the notes provided a

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been carelessly and erroneously captioned: "The Cape Anti-CAD was a mass movement in its heyday during the 1940s (sic)". The second, of the podium of speakers, identified each person, and was also attributed to Halima Gool. These photographs were part of a set, which had been specifically produced by Ralph Taylor to be sold as commemorative images of the boycott meeting. *The Torch* had sold them in support of the local co-ordinating committee of the NEUM, and they seem to have been widely circulated. See Tina Smith and Ciraj Rassool, 'History in Photographs at the District Six Museum', in Ciraj Rassool and Sandra Prosalendis (eds), *Recalling Community in Cape Town: Creating and Curating the District Six Museum* (Cape Town: District Six Museum, 2001), pp 143-145.

<sup>38</sup>Robert R Edgar (ed), *An African American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J Bunche*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1992. Robert Edgar has also produced documentary history of radical nationalist politics in Lesotho. See Robert Edgar, *Prophets with Honour: A Documentary History of Lekhotla la Bafo*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987.

<sup>39</sup>Robert R Edgar (ed), *An African American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J Bunche*, p 2.

“glimpse into the inner mind of one of the twentieth century’s leading black personalities”.<sup>40</sup>

Bob Edgar’s passion for documenting South African resistance history through biography did not stop here. In 1996, in collaboration with Luyanda ka Msumza, he produced a biographical work that traced the evolution of Anton Lembede’s political ideas.<sup>41</sup> Very much in the mould of Karis and Carter, it brought together Lembede’s writings from his student days at Adams College in the 1930s with the pieces he wrote just a few days before his untimely death in 1947. The collection was accompanied by a biographical essay, which contained a conventional chronological narrative of Lembede’s political and intellectual life. Lembede was constructed as a “seminal figure” in South African political thought, not merely because of his “eloquent articulation” of the politics of Africanism, but because he was “the first to have constructed a philosophy of African nationalism”.<sup>42</sup>

### *Documentary narration, resistance history and political biography*

But Karis and Carter has served as a model for more than just the documentary *collection* of South African resistance history. Its constitutive elements and procedures have also formed the methodological basis for its documentary *narration*. Early intonations of the concentration on formal political organisations and their national leaders and the uncritical approach to nationalism were to be found in the research of Edward Feit and Peter Walshe.<sup>43</sup> Walshe’s book also gave a great deal of attention to the personalities of the

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<sup>40</sup>Robert R Edgar (ed), *An African American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J Bunche*, p 4.

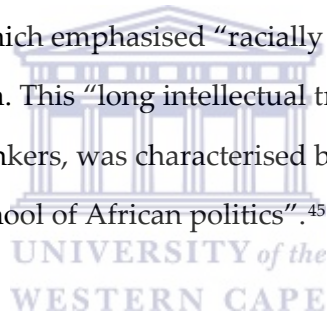
<sup>41</sup>Robert R Edgar and Luyanda ka Msumza (eds), *Freedom in our Lifetime: The Collected Writings of Anton Muziwakhe Lembede*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996. One of the South African co-publishers is Mayibuye Books.

<sup>42</sup>Robert R Edgar and Luyanda ka Msumza (eds), *Freedom in our Lifetime*, pp 1-2.

<sup>43</sup>Edward Feit, *African Opposition in South Africa*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1967; Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*. These studies of nationalist resistance in South Africa were part of a more general impetus in African Studies during the ‘independence decade’ of the 1960s which focussed on the politics of nationalist opposition to colonialism. In these studies, earlier forms of resistance to colonial conquest tended to be seen as the beginning of nationalist opposition. See for example, Terence Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7. A study in African Resistance* (London: Heinemann, 1967), Robert I Rotberg and Ali A Mazrui (eds), *Protest and Power in Black Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) and Michael Crowder (ed), *West African Resistance: The Military Response to Colonial Occupation* (London: Hutchinson, 1971). See also Terence Ranger, ‘Connexions between “Primary Resistance” Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and

early ANC. It was Gail Gerhart's narrative study of the evolution of black politics from the ANC Youth League, through the emergence of the PAC, to the development of Black Consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s that perpetuated the documentary tradition in South African political history. Whereas Karis and Carter focussed on collecting, assembling and ordering information or data on nationalist resistance organisations, their leaders and their political strategies, Gerhart placed the data into a narrative.<sup>44</sup>

With its focus on the realm of political ideas, referred to as the "interplay of ideologies", read transparently off documents, Gerhart's study attempted to understand the "role of the African urban intelligentsia" in the formulation of "African ideology". The method through which she tried to accomplish this was biographical, with the chosen subjects, Anton Lembede, A.P. Mda, Sobukwe and Biko styled as "four individual nationalist thinkers". Her interest was in how their ideas, contributed to a "significant strain of African political thought", which emphasised "racially exclusive strategies" for challenging white domination. This "long intellectual tradition", as expounded through the lineage of four chosen thinkers, was characterised by Gerhart as the "orthodox nationalist or Black Power school of African politics".<sup>45</sup>



During the 1980s and early 1990s, the codes and conventions of the Karis and Carter model formed the basis of much graduate work on South African resistance history done in the United States.<sup>46</sup> Biographical studies produced as Ph.D dissertations by Catherine

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Central Africa', *Journal of African History*, Vol 9, Nos 3 & 4, 1968, as well as his *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia 1898-1930* (London: Heinemann, 1970). For analyses of resistance studies in nationalist historiography, see Arnold Temu and Bonaventure Swai, *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique* (London: Zed Press, 1981), Donald Crummey, 'Introduction: "The Great Beast"', in Donald Crummey (ed), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* (London: James Currey, 1986) and Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (eds), *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1986).

<sup>44</sup>Gail Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1978.

<sup>45</sup>Gail Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, pp vii, 2, 3.

<sup>46</sup>See, for example, the little-known study by South African, John Peter Hendricks, 'From Moderation to Militancy: A Study of African Leadership and Political Reactions in South Africa, 1936-1960', Ph.D dissertation, University of Michigan, 1983. See also Joshua Lazerson, 'Working against the Tide: White South Africans in the National Liberation Movement, 1942-1964', Ph.D dissertation, Northwestern



Higgs and Steven Gish also followed in the methodological footsteps of Karis and Carter.<sup>47</sup> John Hendricks' self-styled 'descriptive' study of African political reactions and prominent political personalities in South Africa replicated the Karis and Carter model for documentary history in virtually every respect. Indeed, it was a crude distillation of all its features in the form of a narrative history.

Hendricks tried to present a "synthesis" of the activities of the leading political organisations and leaders. For him, it was the African nationalist leaders who displayed "the most serious commitment" to the ideal of eliminating white supremacy. Hendricks identified a "continuity" of African nationalist leadership in twentieth century South Africa, indeed, the persistence of a "leadership tradition", which he periodised into five phases. The period, 1910-1930 was an initial phase of moderation, during which the spokesmen for Africans were a conservative elite, while the decade after 1930 saw the emergence of leaders who were more emphatic in their political demands and more vocal in their attitudes. This was personified by the attributes of D.D.T. Jabavu, the Reverend Z.R. Mahabane and James Calata.<sup>48</sup>

The 1940s, on the other hand, could be understood through "the contrasting political styles and philosophies of Alfred Xuma and Anton Lembede", and their "impact" on the nationalist movement. Xuma, leader of the "South Africanist" stream of African nationalism, brought "a sense of order, organisation and direction to the nationalist movement which had previously been lacking". Xuma was "an essentially self-confident and secure man" and the improvement of the ANC was "a reflection of the Xuma personality". Lembede, on the other hand, was "one of the architects of the radical ... Africanist philosophy". He was "fiercely proud of his skin colour" and "almost fanatical

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University, June 1990; Allison Drew, 'Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism in South Africa, 1928-1960'.

<sup>47</sup>Catherine Anne Higgs, 'The Ghost of Equality: D.D.T. Jabavu and the Decline of South African Liberalism, 1885-1959', Ph.D dissertation, Yale University, 1993; Steven D Gish, 'Alfred B Xuma, 1893-1962: African, American, South African', Ph.D dissertation, Stanford University, July 1994.

<sup>48</sup>John Peter Hendricks, 'From Moderation to Militancy', pp 7-14.

in his desire to rid Africans of the shackles of oppression". It was his "dynamic personality" which drove the ANC Youth League in its early phase.<sup>49</sup>

The years of the 1950s constituted a "turbulent decade", when African nationalism was "at its boldest and most confident stage". For Hendricks, this period was dominated by "the towering figure" of Albert Luthuli, who took over Xuma's role as leader of the "South Africanist stream" of nationalism.<sup>50</sup> Luthuli was

African nationalism in South Africa's elder statesman. His stature and personal example infused tremendous character and sense of purpose to the African nationalist movement. In the face of enormous pressure from the Nationalist Government, Luthuli held the nationalist movement together in the 1950s. Luthuli was the first African leader to command respect from a segment of the white population and this made him an extraordinarily dangerous man.<sup>51</sup>

Also important during the 1950s, for Hendricks, was Robert Sobukwe who in the latter 1950s assumed the leadership of the "Africanist stream", which Lembede had embodied in the 1940s. Sobukwe "personified the impatient, restless Africa of the late 1950s". Hendricks included Nelson Mandela, especially for his "legendary role" in the early 1960s, when his "political dynamism and legendary courage" were most evident. Taking these leaders together, according to Hendricks, "their political styles and actions more than any other lend an heroic tradition to African resistance in South Africa". Not necessarily included, but also worthy of mention alongside the pantheon of legends is Z.K. Matthews, who was "perhaps the most distinguished African academician in South Africa" and who had "a considerable intellectual input in the nationalist movement".<sup>52</sup>

Hendricks' account of South African resistance history was premised on the attributes of individual leaders and the idea of a leadership tradition. For him, it was important to

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<sup>49</sup>John Peter Hendricks, 'From Moderation to Militancy', pp 15-17, 285.

<sup>50</sup>John Peter Hendricks, 'From Moderation to Militancy', pp 18-19. In his dissertation, Hendricks has spelt Albert Luthuli's name in the older Zulu orthography as Lutuli. I have changed Hendricks' spelling except when quoting his work.

<sup>51</sup>John Peter Hendricks, 'From Moderation to Militancy', pp 19-20.

<sup>52</sup>John Peter Hendricks, 'From Moderation to Militancy', pp 18-20.

understand the background, political character and personality traits of African leadership. This methodological individualism was taken a step further through the suggestion that African nationalist leadership reflected continuity and that leadership styles were handed down as traditions. The sum total of this resistance history, through different phases, could be grasped through the construction of a pantheon of personalities.

In spite of the centrality of the individual and biography to this account, as with Karis and Carter, no attempt was made to explain individuality and leadership theoretically or to understand how individuals were produced and leaders constructed. For Hendricks, these were empirical issues, which could be read off political statements, drawn largely from the Karis and Carter collection. The objective was to tell a story of leadership in struggle, with leadership seen as self-evident. In this story of resistance leadership, historical explanation was to be found, teleologically, in the unfolding of events.

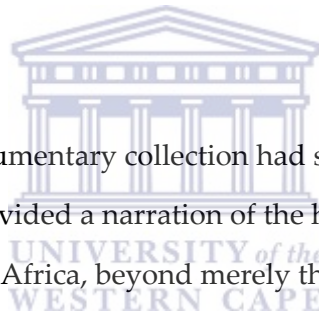
While Gerhart and Hendricks documented the unfolding of African nationalism, Joshua Lazerson's doctoral research was on the participation of whites in resistance to apartheid.<sup>53</sup> Allison Drew, on the other hand, focused on the development of socialist politics in South Africa. Concerned to explain the 'role' of white South Africans in the evolution of a "non-racial political culture", Lazerson focused on the Communist Party of South Africa in the 1940s, the Springbok Legion in the 1940s and early 1950s, and the South African Congress of Democrats between the early 1950s and the early 1960s. It was in these organisations that "white South Africans who sought to support blacks in their efforts to change the status quo found expression for their energies". In his study of attempts on the part of blacks and whites to "interact as partners in the movement for political, social and economic liberation", Lazerson was concerned to uncover what had brought whites to the African nationalist movement, and what they had brought to it.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Joshua Lazerson, 'Working Against the Tide'. Lazerson's dissertation was later published. See Joshua Lazerson, *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994. The South African co-publisher was Mayibuye Books.

<sup>54</sup>Joshua Lazerson, 'Working Against the Tide', pp 1-8.

Following in the footsteps of Karis and Carter for documenting and narrating South African resistance, Lazerson's study contained a definite biographical element. An entire chapter tried to trace a "collective biographical sketch" of white radicals by profiling a range of individuals who had been members of the organisations he examined. Each was located primarily within an ethnic legacy, as Jews who had "highly visible" political roles (Picardie, Kodesh, Turok, Goldberg, Thornton, Barsel, Bernstein, Wolpe), British immigrants either grounded in working class experience or who had emerged as important symbols of commitment (Joseph, Huddleston), or Afrikaners who had rejected their heritage (Fischer, Beyleveld, Du Toit). These life stories tried to explain how individuals came to realise that they had been living in "an abjectly evil society" and why they had been moved to commit themselves to challenging the order in which they were reared. In these resistance biographies, activists were presented as individuals who were able to trace a heritage of persecution or radicalised politics or who had conversion experiences.<sup>55</sup>



Allison Drew's project of documentary collection had started off as part of doctoral research. Her dissertation provided a narration of the history of the "broad and varied socialist movement" in South Africa, beyond merely the Communist Party, and the attempts by socialists "to mobilise a social base across colour lines in a rigidly divided society". It focused on the "interaction between socialist theory and practice and the movements of self-reliance which flourished from the 1930s through the 1950s". Her study analysed the "theoretical frameworks which socialists used to explain the articulation of class and colour" against the yardstick of the "actual conditions of working class development and political consciousness". She attempted to evaluate how accurately Trotskyists had analysed their circumstances, and whether their tactics and strategies were correct. Drew also tried to "illuminate the structure and inner dynamics" of the socialist movement, which had been influenced by mergers, "schisms", as well as "external socio-political developments". This study of "socialist theory and practice on the

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<sup>55</sup>Joshua Lazerson, 'Working Against the Tide', pp 75-76.

national and land questions” concentrated geographically on the Western Cape and the Transvaal, “historically the two main centres of socialist activity in South Africa”.<sup>56</sup>

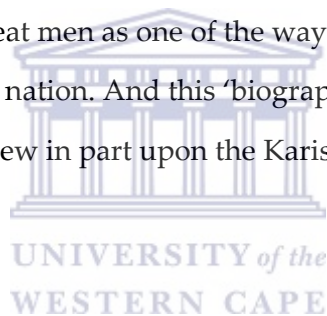
Drew’s dissertation was an explicit attempt “to document”, in narrative terms, the development of “the less well-known Trotskyist tendency”, in the context of national democratic and socialist politics. In Drew’s own words, her study was the “construction of written history directly from primary documents, many of which have not been published before”. Interviews with particular socialists were also conducted “to provide insight into the perceptions and viewpoints of some of the principal figures in South Africa’s socialist movement”. Where interviews had been used “as a source to establish specific historical events”, they were “corroborate[d] ... with other evidence”. The purpose was to generate supposedly authenticated ‘evidence’ about intellectual and political history that could be rendered into a narrative account about socialist political organisations and their leaders. Statements, decisions, policies and lives were drawn together into a positivist account of these formations, and their relationship with national political bodies. This was documentary history almost as mathematics, replete with a graph depicting the lineage of the “organisational structure” of this fractured “radical tradition”. Central to this narrative was a concept of the life course and intellectual and political trajectory of individual socialist activists, the facts of which could be discovered empirically through sufficient archival research and supplementary interviews.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Allison Drew, ‘Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism in South Africa, 1928-1960’, pp xii-xiii; 2-9. Drew’s dissertation was published much later as *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000). Her dissertation research also resulted in a few published articles. See Allison Drew, ‘Events were breaking above their heads: socialism in South Africa 1921-1950’, *Social Dynamics*, Vol 17, No 1, 1991; ‘Theory and Practice of the Agrarian Question in South African Socialism, 1928-1960’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 23, 2/3, January-April 1996; ‘South African Socialists and the Agrarian Question, 1921-1960’, *Matlasedi*, Vol 14, No 1, April/May 1995.

<sup>57</sup> Allison Drew, ‘Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism, 1928-1960’, pp 8-9; 103. Apart from biography being part of the general features of Drew’s documentary history work, there have also been examples of more explicit biographical research and publication, see Allison Drew and David Binns, ‘Prospects for Socialism in South Africa: An Interview with Neville Alexander’, *Journal of Communist Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4, December 1992 and Allison Drew, ‘Into the wilderness: The 1929 Communist Electoral Campaign in Thembuland’, Paper presented to the conference, *The Eastern Cape: Historical Legacies and New Challenges*, East London, 27-30 August 2003. The latter paper, as Drew mentioned in her presentation to this conference, was part of a biographical project on S.P. Bunting, and was first presented to a conference on ‘Communist Biography’.

Biographical studies completed as doctoral dissertations in the 1990s have also borne the stamp of the Karis and Carter legacy. Catherine Higgs reconstructed the public career of D.D.T. Jabavu as an “extraordinary life”, while Steven Gish tried to rescue the life of “an extraordinary black South African”, Alfred Xuma, who had “fallen through the cracks of South African history”.<sup>58</sup> Because of the impact of ‘history from below’, Gish argued, “the crucial contributions of African leaders who helped shape the struggle for racial justice” had been obscured. Gish’s project was an explicit call for a return to “personality and individual initiative” and for the “rediscovery of the individual”.<sup>59</sup> These biographical studies were perhaps the most explicit academic expression of that feature of the Karis and Carter historiographical legacy that had given a central place to the individual in the history of resistance in South Africa. The publication of Higgs’ dissertation in marginally updated form in South Africa in 1997 was undoubtedly connected to resurgence of interest in individuals and great men as one of the ways of explaining and celebrating the creation of the post-apartheid nation. And this ‘biographical moment’, from which the academy was not immune, drew in part upon the Karis and Carter’s legacy.<sup>60</sup>



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<sup>58</sup>Catherine Anne Higgs, ‘The Ghost of Equality’, p 1; Steven D Gish, ‘Alfred B Xuma, 1893-1962’, pp 5-7. Higgs’ notion of an ‘extraordinary life’ was drawn from William Zinsser (ed), *Extraordinary Lives: The Art and Craft of American Biography*, New York: American Heritage, 1986.

<sup>59</sup>Steven D Gish, ‘Alfred B Xuma, 1893-1962’, p 5.

<sup>60</sup>Catherine Higgs, *The Ghost of Equality: The Public Lives of D.D.T. Jabavu of South Africa, 1885-1959* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, and Cape Town: David Philip and Mayibuye Books, 1997). Gish’s dissertation was also published in largely unaltered form (but strangely, not in South Africa) as *Alfred B Xuma: African, American, South African* (New York: New York University Press and London: Macmillan, 2000). Nevertheless, in South Africa, reviews in the press promoted the book as “compulsory reading for all South Africans for a better understanding of the ANC in general, its politics of patience, and also for the role model value it offers black South African youths” (Cornelius Thomas, ‘Definitive Biography’, *Daily Dispatch*, 13 May 2000). Around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, biographies of resistance leaders continued to be a prime area of publishing for a publisher such as David Philip. Among these were Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary* (Cape Town: David Philip and Mayibuye Books, 1998) and Elinor Sisulu, *Walter & Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002). David Philip had advertised the publication of the latter since 1997. These two biographical studies were significant because, as serious narrative studies of political lives, they were both, in different ways, deliberately positioned in ways that sought to bridge the divide between the academic and the popular. See below. For a discussion of Mayibuye Books and the work of the Mayibuye Centre, see Chapter Four



Higgs' study was largely a chronological account of Jabavu's political activism, as well as his public lives in education and religion. While there was a thematic arrangement to the study of Jabavu's "many lives", the central organising feature was a chronological one, in which the course of Jabavu's life was traced from his birth, childhood and education, culminating in his political failure, and his "ultimate fall from grace".<sup>61</sup> Indeed, with her main concern to present the facts of the story of Jabavu's life as they unfolded chronologically, Higgs justified the thematic organisation followed by her study, arguing that "the documentary evidence does support this compartmentalisation".<sup>62</sup>

This realist approach was made more apparent in Higgs' discussion of her methodological approach to biography. Jabavu, she said, was "a particularly accessible subject" who "knew the meaning of his own life", and who "seemed to wear no mask". Very little of Jabavu's private correspondence had survived. For Higgs, it was therefore not possible to examine any inner conflict between his embrace of Cape liberalism and absorption of a western model of civilisation on the one hand, and his self-definition as an African, his teaching of African languages and promoting of African rights, on the other. The study of any aspect of the past, even of an 'inner life', for Higgs, required not analysis, but empirical verification.<sup>63</sup>

In the absence of private papers, but with a large collection of published articles, pamphlets and books, Higgs claimed her study was "of necessity" of Jabavu's public lives. Any information about relationships in Jabavu's private life was shoved aside as opening a path into the terrain of the unscholarly and to charges of "gossip-mongering and voyeurism".<sup>64</sup> Not only was the terrain of the 'private' and its relationship with the

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<sup>61</sup>Catherine Ann Higgs, 'The Ghost of Equality', pp 2, 27.

<sup>62</sup>Catherine Higgs, *The Ghost of Equality*, p 2. Here, I draw from the dissertation and the book. While the book is a slightly revised and updated version of the dissertation, absolutely no methodological changes were effected.

<sup>63</sup>Catherine Higgs, *The Ghost of Equality*, pp 2-3. In fashioning this level of coherence in the study of lives, Higgs drew on articles from Eric Homberger and John Charmley (eds), *The Troubled Face of Biography*, a publication based on a conference that largely defended the approaches and terrain of conventional, masculinist biography. See Chapter One for a discussion of these issues.

<sup>64</sup>Catherine Ann Higgs, 'The Ghost of Equality', p 27; Catherine Higgs, *The Ghost of Equality*, pp 162-3.

'public' misunderstood but an empiricist argument was used to justify a conventional biographical focus on a public career and to close off any possibility of asking questions about archival trails and the production of lives, as well as the narratives of his life which Jabavu himself had set in place. The consequence was a formalist notion of what a biography is, and an untheorised picture of Jabavu's public career between the 1910s and 1950s, which was seen as reflecting "a very consistent worldview".<sup>65</sup>

Steven Gish's study of Xuma was another 'formalist' biography, in which a life history was written up from the chronological arrangement of sources.<sup>66</sup> Through a modus operandi that was rigorously chronological, Xuma's life was narrated in chapters, which moved from "the early years, 1893 – 1913" through to "enigmatic elder statesman, 1950-1962".<sup>67</sup> An account of Xuma's youth in the Transkei in the late nineteenth century was followed by an examination of his educational experiences in the United States. This was succeeded by a discussion of Xuma's return to South Africa in the late 1920s to a career as a young medical doctor and his entry into the world of the educated African elite on the Witwatersrand. The narrative traced Xuma's political evolution and his emergence as a prominent public figure during the 1930s, and focused on his political achievements while president of the ANC during the 1940s. It ended with discussion of his political activities during the 1950s and early 1960s while in retirement from organised political life.

Gish's dissertation was an attempt to write a biography of an "exceptional" man, one of "unprecedented educational and professional achievement". In this list of achievements, Xuma had graduated from a number of prestigious educational institutions in the United States, he was the first "western-trained" African medical doctor in Johannesburg, and he was the first African to acquire an advanced degree in public health. He was the longest serving ANC president in its first 40 years, and as president, he helped to transform African protest politics into a national movement. Xuma was also one of the first black

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<sup>65</sup>Catherine Higgs, *The Ghost of Equality*, p 3.

<sup>66</sup>Steven D Gish, 'Alfred B Xuma, 1893-1962: African, American, South African', Ph.D dissertation, Stanford University, July 1994.

<sup>67</sup>Steven D Gish, 'Alfred B Xuma, 1893-1962', p viii.

South Africans to protest against the country's racial policies at the United Nations.<sup>68</sup> In addition to cataloguing Xuma's achievements, Gish's biography also wished to record the formative influence of African American political thought on the evolution of a South African political career.<sup>69</sup>

At another level, Gish sought to document how Xuma's achievements and struggles reflected wider issues of political leadership, nationalism, ideology and community in South Africa. He also wished to record what Xuma's political career illuminated about tensions in the development of African nationalism, and submerged conflicts between African nationalists and white liberals. Indeed, Xuma's life was utilised as a vehicle, which "sheds light on white liberalism, Pan Africanism, and the world of the educated African elite".<sup>70</sup> Gish argued that, far from being politically conservative and elitist, the African petty bourgeoisie, which Xuma represented, felt a keen sense of responsibility towards the African masses, and attempted to voice the concerns of the African population as a whole.<sup>71</sup>

In Gish's research, explanations for political history were sought through recourse to the qualities of the individual initiative and personality. And individual personalities were taken to operate within a 'context', which, in the case of Gish's work, was a self-evident African nationalism and protest politics, whose course Xuma was seen as having

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<sup>68</sup>Steven D Gish, 'Alfred B Xuma, 1893-1962', pp 6-8.

<sup>69</sup>In this regard, Gish's work followed in the footsteps of a series of conventional political biographies produced by American scholars during the 1970s, which sought to trace American influences on South African political careers. See Richard D Ralston 'American Episodes in the Making of an African Leader: A Case Study of Alfred B Xuma (1893-1962)', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol 6, No 1, 1973 and R Hunt Davis, 'John L Dube: A South African Exponent of Booker T Washington', *Journal of African Studies*, Vol 2, No 4 (Winter 1975/76). Here, in conventional fashion, Hunt Davis tried to show the consistency of Dube's approach through the years, arising out of the conscious adoption of Washington's strategy and tactics, and philosophy. See also Manning Marable, 'African Nationalist: The Life of John Langalibalele Dube', Ph.D dissertation, University of Maryland, 1976.

<sup>70</sup>Steven D Gish, 'Alfred B Xuma, 1893-1962', pp iv.

<sup>71</sup>See Steven D Gish, 'Dr Alfred B Xuma and the Black Petty Bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1928-1940', Paper presented at the African Studies Association Annual Meeting, Seattle, 20-23 November 1992. In attempting to rescue the political careers of remarkable men from the historiographical effects of social history in South Africa, Gish's work downplayed issues of class and sought to challenge research that stressed class differences between Africans.

invigorated in the 1930s and 1940s. For Gish, Xuma's ideas and politics, particularly his reaction to trusteeship and white paternalism, demonstrated that Africanism had earlier roots. Here, policy shifts on the part of the ANC were explained through a notion of leadership, which was taken as self-evident.

We have traced, in some detail, the evolution of documentary approaches to South African resistance history, produced almost entirely by American and American-trained scholars. With their origins in the efforts of Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter and their colleagues to document and narrate African nationalism and resistance politics in South Africa, this approach has proven to be enduring. The methods and concerns of this approach continue to form the basis of a great deal of research on South African political history. In this approach, the conception of politics and resistance has remained characterised by a focus on organised bodies, led by great men whose leadership has largely been taken as given. These histories of political organisations have been told through the lives, speeches and opinions of leaders. Political documents and the documentary collection, in the form of statements, speeches or minutes of meetings, viewed transparently as storehouses of facts of a story of resistance, have remained the essence of their methodology.

The concerns of this approach have been to construct national histories, in which leaders have been made to speak as national subjects through resistance history. Biography, the political careers of leaders and the whole question of leadership have been central to these national histories of resistance. In spite of this, there has been an astounding lack of theorisation of the production of lives and the place of narrative, as well as of issues of gender, identity and subjectivity. Political lives have been seen, rather, as units of national history. The approach to biography has tended to be formalist and teleological, in which lives have been turned into relatively unmessy narratives of resistance, with their subjects endowed with rationality, consistency and purpose, and the process of their lives constructed as constituting development and progression.

In these traditional 'masculinist' biographies,<sup>72</sup> the focus has been on public lives, considered in realist mode, drawn from archives seen as storehouses of political documents as well as the subject's own writings, understood as unmediated windows on their ideas. Chronological narrative has been utilised to reorder life courses, conceived as natural and linear in their resistance efforts. This perspective continued to rear its head in research on South African political biography, as was evident from the work of Catherine Higgs and Steven Gish, which came to stand as prominent works in the field. Neither of these studies even began to reflect on the methodological and theoretical inadequacies of the legacy they drew upon. And in this legacy of documentary political history, pioneered in South African studies by Karis and Carter, understanding the public lives of political leaders was part of a focus on the high politics of resistance institutions.

In contrast, the life history research by South African social historians from the 1980s, claimed to democratise the historical record and overcome the silences of written sources by revealing history of the 'voiceless' through generating evidence 'from below' through oral history. Biographical research was central to these recovery histories. Working within a broadened paradigm of resistance from that of institutional histories of black opposition, studies of resistance and political mobilisation at the local level centred on biographies of local activists. Social historians also attempted to study lives in a social context. While they sought to recover the lives of key individuals from neglect and amnesia, they tried to bring greater complexity to biographical study by seeking to identify and explain class contradictions and ideological ambiguities. Biography was also a vehicle for studying collectivities. While some studies tried to reconstruct social biographies of the African middle class, it was the life histories of 'ordinary people', which were at the heart of the development of social history in South Africa.

### ***Biography, local resistance and collective experience in South African social history***

A large proportion of research on resistance and black political expression had focused almost entirely on formal, highly structured, political organisations and their national

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<sup>72</sup>See the discussion of the 'masculinist' form of conventional biography in Chapter One.

leaders. These narrow institutional histories of resistance had taken the form of “national middle class African figures planning, forming alliances, overhauling the structures of their organisations and directing mass activity”. Indeed, in these accounts, local political figures almost never came into view and rank and file remained largely blurred. In addition, moments of resistance in these accounts were rarely “situated in their sociological terrain”.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, there was a failure to examine forms of resistance, which had unfolded outside the scope of formal organisation as well as the “variety of urban constituencies and forms of protest, consciousness and ideology” which had influenced the mass political culture of the 1950s.<sup>74</sup> These institutional accounts also showed little appreciation for the dynamics, extent and significance of rural resistance and the social and political impact of migrancy on rural mobilisation. Not only were small-scale and short-lived instances of rural class conflict obscured, but the scale of rural revolts during the 1940s and 1950s, and the connections between evolving migrant organisation and the ANC and the Communist Party were not appreciated.<sup>75</sup>

The move away from the purely institutional accounts of politics and resistance in South Africa centred on the deeds and biographies of national leaders, occurred in the work of radical scholarship by social historians, which sought to uncover the submerged agency of ordinary people and give voice to the experience of marginal groups. During the

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<sup>73</sup>Hilary Sapire, ‘African Political Organisation in Brakpan in the 1950s’, in Phil Bonner, Peter Delius and Deborah Posel (eds), *Apartheid’s Genesis, 1935-1962*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press and Wits University Press, 1993, p 252-3. A central focus has been the history of the ANC, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, narrated through an account of institutional radicalisation under the influence of the Congress Youth League and the Communist Party.

<sup>74</sup>Hilary Sapire, ‘African Political Organisation in Brakpan in the 1950s’, p 253.

<sup>75</sup>This criticism is made, inter alia, by William Beinart and Colin Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape 1890-1930*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987, pp 1-3. Among the other works that began to address the scale and range of rural forms of resistance and protest were Colin Bundy, ‘Land and Liberation: Popular Rural Protest and the National Liberation Movements in South Africa, 1920-1960’, in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, London: Longman, 1987; Peter Delius, ‘Migrant Organisation, the Communist Party, the ANC and the Sekhukhuland Revolt, 1940-1958’, in Philip Bonner et al (eds), *Apartheid’s Genesis* and more generally, Delius’ book, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1996.



1980s in South African scholarship, history 'from below' emerged as a counter-narrative to power and domination, seeking to incorporate subaltern, ordinary voices in an approach to resistance, which was understood as founded upon ordinary experience. The recovery of "subjective popular experiences" in rural and urban settings and the recovery of largely unwritten and non-literate 'underclass' experiences formed the basis of histories of resistance which had been marginalised in institutional histories.<sup>76</sup>

South African social historians saw themselves as overcoming the silences of written sources and challenging hegemonic interpretations of the past through oral history research.<sup>77</sup> According to Keegan, when the reminiscences of ordinary individuals were set "in the larger historical context", vast dimensions of human history were revealed for the first time. More than simply "embellishments of the historical record",<sup>78</sup> the stories and voices revealed in oral testimony had the potential to reshape how major events and processes of social change were understood. It was biographical research in the shape of the collection of life stories, which was central to this attempt to democratise the historical record.<sup>79</sup>

Social historians also saw themselves as infusing issues of agency, experience and consciousness into radical historical research, deepening the analysis of class formation and capital accumulation. These questions had been given little attention in structuralist research on the political economy of South Africa conducted during the 1970s. The concern had been with explaining economic structures and analysing the nature of the state. Much of the early research had been concerned to show that racial structures of South Africa had been shaped by conditions of industrialisation,<sup>80</sup> while later work had

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<sup>76</sup>Paul la Hausse, 'Oral History and South African Historians', in *Radical History Review*, No 46/7, Winter 1990, p 348.

<sup>77</sup>Tim Keegan, 'Mike Morris and the Social Historians: A Response and a Critique', *Africa Perspective*, Volume 1, Nos 7 & 8, 1989, p 6.

<sup>78</sup>Tim Keegan, *Facing the Storm: Portraits of Black Lives in Rural South Africa*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1988.

<sup>79</sup>Tim Keegan, 'Mike Morris and the Social Historians', p 6.

<sup>80</sup>Martin Legassick, 'South Africa: Forced Labour, Industrialisation, and Racial Differentiation', in R Harris (ed), *The Political Economy of Africa*, New York: 1975; Harold Wolpe 'Capitalism and

begun to emphasise the interests of different fractions of capital in order to explain state policies.<sup>81</sup>

Although located in colonial Zimbabwe, it was largely Charles van Onselen's early work which had paved the way for rethinking the history of industrialisation and labour in southern Africa, opening up ways of studying African agency and worker consciousness.<sup>82</sup> His later work on the social history of Johannesburg began to 'recover' the 'agency' of working people on the Witwatersrand in the wake of the discovery of gold.<sup>83</sup> While it was class formation and the life of labour on the Rand which formed the initial focus of South African social historians,<sup>84</sup> during the 1980s and 1990s, their work went on to explore the experiences of non-mining classes, rural forms of resistance and consciousness and the inscription of social life, class and culture in space.<sup>85</sup> The writing of history 'from below' implied a local, small-scale perspective in addition to a national one. In their day to day experiences of life, the "consciousness and culture of ordinary people [were] formed in a very small segment of society".<sup>86</sup>

Social histories were produced in a variety of academic settings in South Africa, which also sought to disseminate research to popular audiences. These settings included the Cape Town Oral History Project and the Natal Worker History Project, but the central

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Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid', *Economy and Society*, 1, 1972.

<sup>81</sup>Rob Davies, Dave Kaplan, Mike Morris and Dan O'Meara, 'Class Struggle and the Periodisation of the State in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 7, 1977.

<sup>82</sup>Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1976.

<sup>83</sup>Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914, Volume 1, New Babylon and Volume 2, New Nineveh*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982.

<sup>84</sup>Belinda Bozzoli (ed), *Labour, Townships and Protest: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979.

<sup>85</sup>Belinda Bozzoli, 'Introduction: History, Experience and Culture', in Belinda Bozzoli (ed), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983; Belinda Bozzoli (ed), *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987; Philip Bonner, Isabel Hofmeyr, Deborah James and Tom Lodge (eds), *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press and Ravan Press, 1989.

<sup>86</sup>Belinda Bozzoli, 'Introduction: History, Experience and Culture', in Belinda Bozzoli (ed), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983, p 35.

academic institutions involved in the production, dissemination and popularisation of South African social history were the History Workshop and the Oral Documentation Project of the African Studies Institute (later known as the Institute for Advanced Social Research and then the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research), both at the University of the Witwatersrand. In the 1980s and 1990s, this work ranged from portraits of black lives on the Highveld, to the 'moral economies' of urban mineworkers and squatter proletarians; from the local traditions of resistance amongst rural workers to migrant organisations, criminality and working class life under urban apartheid.<sup>87</sup>

The conception of resistance and politics in the work of social historians was wider than that which had occupied the minds of institutional historians and their concern for political organisations. Social history focussed on the actions of 'ordinary people' in a "grassroots" or cultural approach to resistance. Resistance was seen as embedded in culture and was occasioned by a proletarianising thrust in agriculture, threats to living standards and schemes of removals. Actions that sought to avoid detrimental changes in class and economic status, and to retain existing social and cultural networks in the face of "the proletarianising tendencies of capitalism", were seen as instances of resistance. These were individualised, 'everyday' forms of resistance, such as the retention of access to beer brewing by women and "jumping the fence" by sharecroppers. These individualised acts were instances of "resilience as resistance". However, they were thought of as having social consequences on a significant scale.<sup>88</sup>

In informal shack settlements on the outskirts of Durban, where illegal economic activities flourished, workers shaped cultural alternatives to control and coercion through shebeens and other income-generating activities. In places like Mkhumbane, shack inhabitants formed stokvels and co-operatives in what was a defensive culture, characterised by self-reliance. It was this movement that became "the organisational backbone through which workers could express their views on Durban's society". In

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<sup>87</sup>See the discussion by Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa'.

<sup>88</sup>Belinda Bozzoli, 'Introduction: History, Experience and Culture', pp 28-31.

what emerged as a “grassroots critique of local power structures”, the notion of ‘New Africa’ became integral to proletarian experience in Durban, co-operatives called for a moral community of African workers, and urged them to unite and defend their own interests where existing organisations were incapable of doing so.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, working class inhabitants of spaces like District Six and Sophiatown articulated a strong sense of coherence, identity and belonging, drawing on a world of imagination to create themselves and community.<sup>90</sup>

Even with this broadened approach to resistance, organised political protest and the fortunes of formal political organisations were not beyond the scope of South African social history. Only now, the focus ceased to be on the grand campaigns of Congress in the urban areas and attempts at mass mobilisation in the 1950s, as expressed in the Defiance Campaign and the Congress of the People. Attention ceased to be given simply to the heroic and pioneering deeds and public careers of national leaders. Rather, research sought to study local expressions of class and nationalist politics in the urban and rural areas and to draw connections between national organisations and the politics of everyday life. Through the application of class analysis to nationalist politics, social historians also drew attention to social differentiation, contradictions and tension within popular movements. While biography in the form of life histories of ordinary urban and rural experience was at the heart of social history in South Africa, it was also a medium for studies of organised politics on a local and national level, which claimed to be based on analyses of class experiences and social ambiguities.

Hilary Sapire attempted to explain the local responsiveness in Brakpan to ANC programmes in the 1950s, suggesting that this was brought about because subsistence

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<sup>89</sup>Iain Edwards, ‘Swinging the Assegai Peacefully? “New Africa”, Mkhumbane, the Co-operative Movement and attempts to Transform Durban Society in the Late Nineteen-Forties’, in Philip Bonner et al (eds),  *Holding Their Ground*, p 84; Paul la Hausse, ‘So Who Was Elias Kuzwayo? Nationalism, Collaboration and the Picaresque in Natal’, in Philip Bonner et al (eds), *Apartheid’s Genesis*, p 206.

<sup>90</sup>Bill Nasson, ‘“She Preferred Living in a Cave with Harry the Snake-catcher”: Towards an Oral History of Popular Leisure and Class Expression in District Six, Cape Town, c. 1920s-1950s’, in Philip Bonner et al (eds),  *Holding Their Ground*; Andre Proctor, ‘Class Struggle, Segregation and the City: A History of Sophiatown, 1905-1940’, in Belinda Bozzoli (ed), *Labour, Townships and Protest*.

struggles over municipal controls during the war had been spearheaded by local tenant organisations, Vigilance Associations and the Communist Party. During the 1950s, the ANC had inherited much of the “character and style” displayed by the Party in the previous decade.<sup>91</sup> Central to Sapire’s research on the radicalisation of African political responses to the state’s emerging ‘native policy’ in Brakpan was the life history of local Communist Party and ANC activist, and popular schoolteacher, David Wilcox Bopape. Sapire argued that

although Bopape was an exceptional figure, he also exemplified a new style of urban grassroots politicians on the Witwatersrand. Roused by the democratic ideals espoused in the war and by the spontaneous ferment within the locations, mines and squatter camps, these ‘new men’ championed local causes to ‘further the struggle’.<sup>92</sup>

In Sekhukhuneland in the 1950s, a local organisation, Sebatakgomo, which had close links to the Communist Party and the ANC played a “pivotal part” in the rural revolts of 1958. Rooted in migrant worker networks, this organisation drew on a lineage of rural mobilisation associated with the Zoutpansberg Balemi Association (ZBA) in the 1940s. According to Delius, it was migrant worker members rather than ideologues of the Party who “grasped the organisational opportunities” and it was their styles and political strategies that determined the success of rural mobilisation. Delius suggested that the history of Sebatakgomo showed that national political movements, like the ANC and the Communist Party, might not have been as remote from rural struggles as previously claimed and that the radicalising impact of the Communist Party on the ANC in the

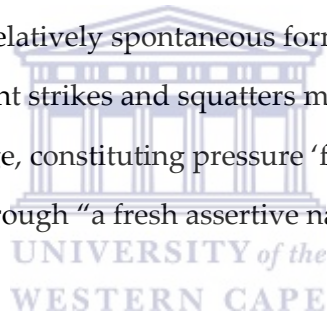
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<sup>91</sup>Hilary Sapire, ‘African Political Organisations in Brakpan’, in Philip Bonner et al (eds), *Apartheid’s Genesis*, p 256.

<sup>92</sup>Hilary Sapire, ‘Apartheid’s “Testing Ground”: Urban “Native Policy” and African Politics in Brakpan, South Africa, 1943-1948’, *Journal of African History*, 35, 1994, p 122. See also Hilary Sapire, ‘The Stay-away of the Brakpan Location, 1944’, in Belinda Bozzoli (ed), *Class, Community and Conflict*. Sapire’s work examined the making of state policy on the administration of urban African communities at the local level and the increasing persistence of local African responses through intersections between the life history of Bopape and that of Afrikaner anthropologist and Brakpan’s manager of Non-European Affairs, Dr F J Language. These erupted around Language’s dismissal of Bopape from his post at the Brakpan Amalgamated Mission School in 1944, and a public brawl between the two local notables on the streets of the Brakpan African location. The biographies of the two men became ‘microcosms’ for the workings of state policy at the local level, and African popular discontent and activism.

1940s and 1950s had been underestimated. Once again, as with Sapire's research, the life history of a local activist, the migrant worker and Communist Party member, Alpheus Malivha was at the centre of this narrative of rural mobilisation.<sup>93</sup>

It is the historical analyses of Tom Lodge<sup>94</sup> which was probably at the forefront of studies of organised political resistance which sought to locate political movements in their "economic and social matrixes"<sup>95</sup> and which tried to relate local forms of protest, ideology and culture to national political activity. According to Lodge, in the course of the 1950s, as it tried to incorporate escalating urban and rural protest, the ANC had been significantly transformed and its leadership radicalised. During the 1940s, the rapid growth in the urban African working class as a result of rural socio-ecological crisis and wartime economic conditions had given rise to a large new political constituency in the city. The shortage of housing and an escalating cost of living, with increases in food and transport prices gave rise to relatively spontaneous forms of subsistence struggles in the form of transport boycotts, rent strikes and squatters movements. It was these conditions, according to Lodge, constituting pressure 'from below', which pushed the ANC in a radical direction through "a fresh assertive nationalism".<sup>96</sup>



The urban campaigns of Congress and the mass mobilisation in the 1950s in the Defiance Campaign, the Congress of the People, the protests against the Bantu Education Act and the campaigns against passes drew on these new social forces. Lodge went on to show

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<sup>93</sup>Peter Delius, 'Sebatakomo and the Zoutpansberg Balemi Association: The ANC, the Communist Party and Rural Organisation, 1939-1955', *Journal of African History*, 34, 1993, pp 293-313 and *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, ch 5. For an account which challenges Delius' account of mobilisation and the ZBA as well as the beginnings of Malivha's life history of local rural political activism as constructed by Delius, see Thiathu Nmutanzhela, "'Pulling Out Sticks and Removing White Stones from the Fields": Memory of Resistance to Betterment in the Zoutpansberg', Paper presented to the History Workshop Conference, Democracy: Popular Precedents Practice Culture, University of the Witwatersrand, 13-15 July 1994.

<sup>94</sup>Lodge's foremost work in the 1980s was his book, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983. See also his published articles, 'Political Organisations in Pretoria's African Townships, 1940-1963', in Belinda Bozzoli (ed), *Class, Community and Conflict* and 'Political Mobilisation in the 1950s: An East London Case Study', in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*.

<sup>95</sup>Hilary Sapire, 'African Political Organisation in Brakpan in the 1950s', p 253.

<sup>96</sup>Tom Lodge, *Black Politics*, p viii.



that during the 1950s, a period seen in many nationalist accounts as a heroic age of unity and consistency, the new nationalist movement contained several tensions:

between ethno-nationalists and social radicals, between both these on the one hand and the older generation of liberal civil rights campaigners on the other, and finally, between the movement's working-class base and its largely petty bourgeois leadership.<sup>97</sup>

In addition, Lodge examined the history of formal political organisations as well as that of “more inchoate resistance groups”. In order to understand “the variations and inconsistencies in black responses to political repression and social injustice”, Lodge’s study tried to concentrate on the “details” of local situations without “losing sight of the overall picture”.<sup>98</sup>

While some of Lodge’s arguments were refined in later social histories of resistance,<sup>99</sup> his 1983 book was the foremost study that had transcended conventional political history and narrations of narrow institutional politics. Alongside Lodge’s work, a range of other studies, either based on, or influenced by biographical research, also significantly challenged the main contours of institutional histories of the rise of nationalism in South Africa for their failure to take account of the evolution of class differentiation amongst Africans. Whereas the forays of Sapire and Delius into biographical research sought to highlight the political activity and consciousness of local activists as vehicles for studying local variations in political cultures and styles of protest, the biographical research of Shula Marks, Brian Willan and Paul la Hausse attempted to draw attention to the fractured nature of the African middle class and the contradictions of nationalism.

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<sup>97</sup>Tom Lodge, *Black Politics*, p viii. The examination of these tensions and contradictions formed the bulk of Lodge’s book (Chapters 2-9).

<sup>98</sup>Tom Lodge, *Black Politics*, p ix.

<sup>99</sup>For example, Peter Delius’ research on Sekhukhuneland cited above presented the argument that, in some parts, the Communist Party, particularly in its local expressions, may have been more significant than the Youth League in the radicalisation of the ANC during the 1940s. Colin Bundy’s unpublished biographical work on Govan Mbeki suggested that a generational radicalism began occurring in the 1930s, and not the 1940s, thus challenging Lodge’s periodisation of resistance ‘phases’. See Colin Bundy, ‘Schooled for Life? The Early Years and Education of Govan Mbeki’, Paper presented at the Africa Seminar, University of Cape Town, 30 March 1994.

In an early study of the political life of John L Dube, Shula Marks used the notion of 'ambiguity of dependence' to understand the first generation of Congress leaders.<sup>100</sup> In posing questions about political lives in relation to the nature of the state, nationalism, class and consciousness, Marks opened up the associated metaphors of the mask and the tightrope as a means of understanding the complexities of domination and resistance, as well as obedience, consent and quiescence. At one level, Marks entered into dispute with R Hunt Davis about the significance of Booker T Washington in respect of Dube's formative influences, arguing instead that these could be found in his early years in the American Zulu Mission in Natal.<sup>101</sup>

At a less conventional level, however, the picture presented by Marks of Dube in education and religion and especially his political career was one that sought to identify complexity and contradiction. While Dube had devoted his life to "the unity and ultimate liberation of black South Africans", for him these were attainable if Christian values and a western model of political development were adopted. While Dube had challenged the myth of inferiority, these were expressed "in the clichés of white paternalism and missionary propaganda".<sup>102</sup>

For Dube, who spoke to two audiences, "ambiguity was the essence of survival". While Dube's African constituency listened to him call for "political vigilance and guidance" and "political emancipation and rights", Americans and white Natalians heard that Africans could benefit from education and needed to 'hasten slowly'. According to Marks, while Dube's mask may have slipped on occasion, "he learnt early the constraints of dependency". In arguing that it was not possible, and indeed unnecessary, to identify an "authentic voice" in Dube's life, Marks' research began suggest a move

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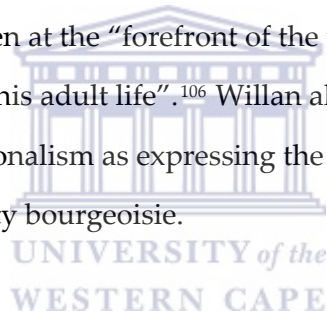
<sup>100</sup>Shula Marks, 'The Ambiguities of Dependence: John L Dube of Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol 1, no 2, 1975.

<sup>101</sup>Shula Marks, 'The Ambiguities of Dependence', pp 165-170. For R Hunt Davis' research see his article, 'John L Dube: A South African Exponent of Booker T Washington' referred to earlier in this chapter.

<sup>102</sup>Shula Marks, 'The Ambiguities of Dependence', p 180.

away from biographic images of consistency in leadership and public achievement.<sup>103</sup> During the 1980s, Marks took this study of class and nationalism in Natal further in a series of biographical studies in which the metaphor of the mask and the notion of moral ambiguity were central.<sup>104</sup>

Brian Willan's biographical research in the 1970s and early 1980s on the life of Sol Plaatje marked a significant step in applying class analysis to the history of African nationalism and, following in Shula Marks' footsteps, in identifying contradictions and ambiguities in African protest politics.<sup>105</sup> Willan sought to reconstruct the life of Plaatje, an "immensely talented and versatile man", who had established his reputation as a newspaper editor and journalist, political leader, author, novelist, and founder of the South African Native National Congress. Plaatje was "one of the leading black South African figures of his generation". In a life of "almost ceaseless endeavour and commitment", Plaatje had been at the "forefront of the public affairs of the African people for the greater part of his adult life".<sup>106</sup> Willan also studied Plaatje's life as a prism for understanding nationalism as expressing the class-based attitudes and aspirations of the African petty bourgeoisie.



In researching Plaatje's life and writing his biography, Willan was moved by a perception that "little is generally known of Plaatje's life and career", and that "the vast

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<sup>103</sup>Shula Marks, 'The Ambiguities of Dependence', pp 175-180. Heather Hughes built upon Marks' work on Dube by identifying another vector of elite identity necessary to understand his ambiguities. Dube was a member of the Qadi chiefdom, which provided support for him throughout his career, and which influenced his role in brokering segregationist alliances between black and white in the 1920s and 1930s. See Heather Hughes, 'Doubly Elite: Exploring the Life of John Langalibalele Dube', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol 27, No 3, September 2001.

<sup>104</sup>Shula Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth-Century Natal*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986.

<sup>105</sup>Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1984. This book is based on research for his doctoral study, 'The Life and Times of Sol T Plaatje', Ph.D dissertation, University of London, 1979. See also his seminal article, 'Sol Plaatje, De Beers and an Old Tram Shed: Class Relations and Social Control in a South African Town, 1918-1919', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol 4, no 2, April, 1978 as well as his later piece, 'An African in Kimberley: Sol T Plaatje, 1894-1898', in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness 1870-1930*, London: Longman, 1982.

<sup>106</sup>Brian Willan, 'An African in Kimberley: Sol T Plaatje, 1894-1898', p 238; *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*, p vi.

majority of South Africans ... have never heard of his name".<sup>107</sup> This neglect of Plaatje was due to

South Africa's capacity to obscure and distort its own past, to neglect the lives of those whose ideals and aspirations have been in conflict with official orthodoxies, past and present. The South African historical memory, to put it another way, has been highly selective in its recall.<sup>108</sup>

Relying on oral testimony, archival sources, and an exhaustive survey of little-known material about Plaatje, Willan's book provided a sensitive and sympathetic account of Plaatje's life in a social context, offering a wealth of detail in a richly textured and finely nuanced portrait. Willan's book represented a recovery project of social history, seeking, in Thompsonian terms to rescue his life and achievements from the "enormous condescension of posterity".<sup>109</sup>

Willan's study was a chronological account of Plaatje's life from his 'early years' in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, through his public career and intellectual achievements as a court interpreter, editor and journalist, writer, political leader, to his sojourn in England in the early 1920s and his subsequent displacement from a position of political leadership. Plaatje's ideas, according to Willan, were a combination of Victorian liberalism and Christian belief, joined with a "powerfully felt sense of responsibility for the leadership of his people". He sought the "restoration of an old regime, not the creation of a new order".<sup>110</sup>

With growing disillusionment and despair at his increasing political isolation in the 1920s, Plaatje turned to the preservation of Tswana language and literature as his main preoccupation. This he accomplished through publishing translations of Shakespeare's works, compiling a new Tswana dictionary and entering into disputes over Tswana

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<sup>107</sup>Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*, p vi.

<sup>108</sup>Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*, p vii.

<sup>109</sup>See the discussion of E.P. Thompson in Chapter One.

<sup>110</sup>Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*, p 315.

orthography with “self-appointed academics and government officials”.<sup>111</sup> According to Willan, Plaatje’s novel *Mhudi*,<sup>112</sup> published in 1930, two years before his death, was

a conscious and deliberate attempt on Plaatje’s part to marry together two different cultural traditions: African oral forms and traditions, particularly those of the Barolong, on the one hand; and the written traditions and forms of the English language and literature on the other.<sup>113</sup>

It was in the two articles cited earlier, rather than his book that Willan was more explicit about his analytical intentions. He had used a key episode of Plaatje’s life - the donation of an old tram shed to Africans in Kimberley as a meeting hall - to study the ambiguities of African protest politics and the historical agency of the African petty bourgeoisie in developing ideological forms functional to its class interests. During 1918, both Plaatje and De Beers had responded on the same terms to the perceived threat of labour unrest spreading from the Rand to Kimberley. In their common disapproval, De Beers and Plaatje had realised the advantages for themselves of co-operation.

Willan analysed Plaatje’s disapproval of working class militancy as expressing petty bourgeois class interests. He also showed that this not an isolated episode. Before and after 1918, Plaatje had expressed his opposition to African involvement in strike movements. For Willan, Plaatje’s agreement with De Beers in this episode had emerged out of a pre-existing set of ideological assumptions. The origins of these assumptions lay in Plaatje’s mission education, and in much of his subsequent career as court interpreter and newspaper editor. In addition, economic and political developments after 1909 had made consensus between De Beers and Plaatje possible. While the Act of Union appeared to weaken the influence of the diamond industry in relation to gold, the African middle class was being thwarted by the Act’s failure to extend the African franchise out of the Cape.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*, p 346.

<sup>112</sup>The full title of Plaatje’s novel was *Mhudi: An Epic of South African Native Life a Hundred Years Ago* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1930).

<sup>113</sup>Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*, p 352.

<sup>114</sup>Brian Willan, ‘Sol Plaatje, De Beers and an Old Tram Shed’, pp 211-212.

Willan went on to outline his interest in recovering the social history, achievements and aspirations of the African middle class. Biography in Willan's work was a 'lens' to uncover "something of the wider social experience of the community of which Plaatje was a part". Willan's work was a study not only of the "exceptionally gifted individual", but also of an identifiable social class, with its own institutions and societies, whose social life Plaatje was associated with and whose values and beliefs he had assimilated.<sup>115</sup> Willan examined Kimberley's African petty bourgeoisie (teachers, clerks, interpreters, priests, traders), who had stood between a partially formed proletariat and a propertied bourgeoisie. They had developed peculiar forms of cultural expression, and they were loyal to the empire and valued education, church attendance, progress and improvement. Through a network of churches, clubs and societies, their activities created a sense of class and community. As an exercise in social history, Willan wanted his biographical studies of Plaatje to be

a reflection of the collective personality of a wider group of people from whom Plaatje derived so many of the beliefs and values, and so much of the confidence and experience that enabled him to emerge as a national political and literary figure ... In Plaatje, these qualities found perhaps their greatest expression, but they were essentially those of a social group, not of a single individual.<sup>116</sup>

Willan's biographical studies of the black petty bourgeoisie in Kimberley were the impetus for Phil Bonner's application of class analysis to the history of African nationalist politics. Bonner drew attention to the contradictory and ambiguous effects of the upsurge in working class militancy on the petty bourgeoisie. Bonner argued that the fragmented response to conflict between labour and capital on the Rand between 1917 and 1920 on the part of the petty bourgeois leadership of the Transvaal Native Congress reflected the contradictions of the middle position of this layer of small businessmen and professionals. Standing between capital and labour, they had been pulled in two ways. One section had offered its leadership and support to the black working class, while a

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<sup>115</sup>Brian Willan, 'An African in Kimberley', pp 238, 255.

<sup>116</sup>Brian Willan, 'An African in Kimberley', p 255.



middle section had vacillated. Another “more established affluent and reactionary” section urged workers not to go on strike, resulting in workers regarding an individual from this group as the “Enemy of the People”.<sup>117</sup>

Drawing on Shula Marks’ concepts of the mask and moral ambiguity as a point of departure, Paul la Hausse studied the career of the “petty criminal, failed populist and confidence trickster”, Elias Kuzwayo through the notion of the “picaresque”. The picaro, who supposedly inhabited and traversed boundaries between worlds, was a “confidence man” who lived “by his wits”.<sup>118</sup> Seen in this way, Kuzwayo’s fragmented career as trade union activist, teacher, agricultural demonstrator, co-operative society spokesman, independent churchman and medical practitioner, labour agent and petty capitalist was a case study of contradiction and ambiguity as experienced by the fractured African middle class of Natal. It is this section of the black middle class which had presented major obstacles to coherent black political mobilisation.

Inside a single life of brokerage, role-playing and manipulation, Kuzwayo seemed to combine the worlds of the ‘New African’, the conservative *izemtiti*, “who had embraced the new world of the coloniser”, and that of the opportunistic collaborator. In addition to being a repository of social contradiction, Kuzwayo also occupied a space shared by the African elite. His life, for La Hausse, held up “a mirror to his times and to the aspirations of members of Natal’s fractured middle class”. Rather than simply dismissing them as ‘sell-outs’ and ‘opportunists’, La Hausse tried to understand the composition and dynamics of this group, their self-interest and longings for self-advancement, as well as “the cultural worlds these individuals inhabited, fashioned and moved between”.<sup>119</sup> However, La Hausse showed his discomfort at the potential instability of a contradictory identity category, suggesting that to be analytically useful,

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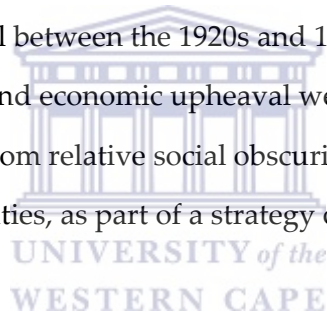
<sup>117</sup>Philip Bonner, ‘The Transvaal Native Congress 1917-1920: The Radicalisation of the Black Petty Bourgeoisie on the Rand’, in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa*, pp 289, 296.

<sup>118</sup>Paul la Hausse, ‘So Who Was Elias Kuzwayo? Nationalism, Collaboration and the Picaresque in Natal’, in Philip Bonner et al, *Apartheid’s Genesis*, pp 195-200.

<sup>119</sup>Paul la Hausse, ‘So Who Was Elias Kuzwayo?’, pp 195, 201, 219-220.

studies of the picaresque needed to be grounded in the material, and rooted in “historical processes of change and issues of social biography”. As with the work of Marks and Willan, La Hausse had utilised biography as a mode of examining the social history of class and collective experience.

In this research, La Hausse also began to open up the paradigm of resistance as history from below to incorporate an examination of forms of collaboration. These were quite possibly ways in which members of a fractured African middle class tried “to resolve their structurally dependent position within a repressive political economy”. While the notion of the picaresque seems to be “characteristic of more obscure marginal figures”, La Hausse argued that it could add to Shula Marks’ research and offer explanations for the lives of more prominent individuals such as A.W.G. Champion. In addition, Kuzwayo’s picaresque career provided possible insights into the styles of certain forms of popular leadership in Natal between the 1920s and 1930s. During this period, conditions of massive social and economic upheaval were conducive to the emergence of zealous “instant leaders” from relative social obscurity. La Hausse suggested that collaboration with the authorities, as part of a strategy of survival, was frequently the result.<sup>120</sup>



To sum up, biography has occupied a central place in the emergence and development of South African social history. Working within a broadened paradigm of resistance from that of institutional histories of black opposition, studies of resistance and political mobilisation at the local level, such as those by Sapire and Delius, centred on biographies of local activists. Social historians attempted to study lives in a social context. While they sought to recover the lives of key individuals from neglect and amnesia, they brought greater complexity to biographical study by seeking to identify and explain class contradictions and ideological ambiguities.

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<sup>120</sup>Paul la Hausse, ‘So Who Was Elias Kuzwayo?’, pp 221-22.

Biography has also been a vehicle for studying collectivities, as shown in studies by Marks, Willan and La Hausse which also tried to stand as social biographies of the African middle class. However, it is the life histories of 'ordinary people', which have probably been the lifeblood of the development of social history in South Africa. In different university centres, research projects developed during the 1980s geared towards recovering life histories of ordinary experience. Of these, the research conducted by the Oral Documentation Project (ODP) at the University of the Witwatersrand was the most significant.

*Oral testimony, ordinary experience and the production of rural lives in South Africa*

The ODP began life in the African Studies Institute (ASI) at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1979.<sup>121</sup> At its inception, it embarked upon an extensive programme designed to record the life and work experiences of urban and rural workers in the former Transvaal. The initial period of work centred on the collection of tape-recorded interviews with African peasant farmers, labour tenants and agricultural wage earners. By the early 1990s, approximately 1000 rural life histories had been collected in the Transvaal countryside.<sup>122</sup> Also, in 1982, a specific project of the ODP was initiated to research the lives and experiences of rural black South African women.<sup>123</sup>

In virtually all the work of the ODP, the research involved a division of labour between field interviewers and researchers. The field interviewers sought out informants, conducted interviews in SeSotho or Setswana, and produced painstaking transcriptions and translations into English.<sup>124</sup> Since the early 1980s, the recordings, transcripts and

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<sup>121</sup>In the mid-1990s, the ASI became the Institute for Advanced Social Research, and - perhaps with a sense of post-apartheid 'rebirth' - the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) in 2001.

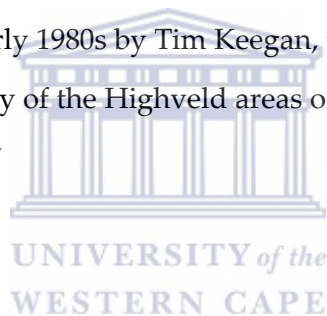
<sup>122</sup>Belinda Bozzoli with Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1991, pp 4-5.

<sup>123</sup>This project led to the publication by Belinda Bozzoli with Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng*.

<sup>124</sup>The discussions of the research process by Charles van Onselen and Belinda Bozzoli are indeed revealing. See Charles van Onselen, 'The Reconstruction of a Rural Life from Oral Testimony: Critical Notes on the Methodology Employed in the Study of a Black south African Sharecropper', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 20 No 3, April 1993, pp 502-513 and Belinda Bozzoli, 'Migrant

translations of these oral interviews formed the basis of published studies of individual life histories and experiences. Indeed, in this time, the ODP was perhaps the major centre of biographic production in South African social history, in which biographies were produced through a hierarchy of mediations. The sociological circumstances of the research process in this biographical programme of work raise a set of issues around authorship, the transitions between languages, and the translation from oral transcript to written history.<sup>125</sup>

It is interesting and probably not surprising that it was field interviewers, who produced the first published biographical studies derived from the oral materials collected by the ODP. The articles by Ted Matsetela and Maletse Nkadimeng (who wrote with Georgina Relly) were early attempts to make sense of rural life histories, and were characterised by a quality of 'first order' processing and arranging.<sup>126</sup> Both pieces were accompanied by an article written in the early 1980s by Tim Keegan, then a research fellow in the ASI, on the sharecropping economy of the Highveld areas of the southern Transvaal and northern Orange Free State.<sup>127</sup>



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Women and South African Social Change: Biographical Approaches to Social Analysis', *African Studies*, Vol 44, No 1, 1985, pp 88-91.

<sup>125</sup>The use of the notion of 'translation' is deliberate. It refers both to transitions and transformations from one language to another as well as the issues of power, authorship and the politics of narration involved in the relationship between oral testimony and written history. See the discussion by Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Oral History in South Africa: A Country Report', Paper delivered to the International Conference on Oral History, Columbia University, New York, 18-23 October 1994. In an earlier appraisal of the record of oral history research in South Africa, Paul la Hausse had drawn attention to the problems of ensuring "accurate" transcriptions and interpreting. However, this approach tended to reduce the issues around knowledge production to a set of technical questions. See Paul la Hausse, 'Oral History and South African Historians', *Radical History Review*, No 46/7, 1990, p 353.

<sup>126</sup>See Ted Matsetela, 'The Life Story of Nkgono Mma-Pooe: Aspects of Sharecropping and Proletarianisation in the northern Orange Free State, 1890-1930', in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa*; Maletse Nkadimeng and Georgina Relly, 'Kas Maine: The Story of a Black South African Agriculturalist', in Belinda Bozzoli (ed), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*.

<sup>127</sup>Tim Keegan, 'The Sharecropping Economy, African Class Formation and the 1913 Natives' Land Act in the Highveld Maize Belt', in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa*, and reproduced in Belinda Bozzoli (ed) *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*.

After collecting oral testimony from his relative, Emelia Pooe, on tape in SeSotho over a period of a year in 1979/80, “using an informal, conversational approach”, Matsetela effected a “retelling” of her life in the form of a biographic article about the life history of a Free State peasant tenant-farmer. While an attempt was made to try and make Pooe’s life stand on its own, “certain historical facts” were included in order to “give this personal story a wider significance”. On its own, her testimony was characterised by “inconsistencies and gaps” and an “incapacity ... to supply ‘facts’ other than how ... she subjectively experienced them”. In addition, Matsetela suggested that when transcribed and translated into English from the original SeSotho “for a wider audience”, a significant proportion of “subtleties and idiomatic feeling” was lost.<sup>128</sup>

However, much of Pooe’s story had been confirmed by historical research on processes of rural transformation and her story “constitute[d] an authentic ... account of peasant life” as dealt with in the historiography, and epitomised the fate of many Orange Free State communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Like other black peasant farmers, the Pooes had benefited from agricultural skills passed down from generation to generation. Like many other families, they had taken to sharecropping on various farms. Later, they were also displaced from the land in the Free State by legislative measures and capitalising forces in agriculture. However, the Pooes had moved to the Transvaal in 1915 where they persisted with sharecropping for a number of decades, in spite of unfavourable conditions and the intentions behind the Natives’ Land Act of 1913. As such, Emelia Pooe’s story stood as a case study of the resilience of sharecroppers and the persistence of sharecropping arrangements in the Transvaal and even the Free State, albeit in modified form.<sup>129</sup>

Malete Nkadimeng and Georgina Relly, drawing on 20 hours of interviewing conducted with sharecropper Kas Maine and the resultant “wealth of material about his life”, presented a “tentative” reconstruction of his life story. A “more coherent” picture of Maine’s life would only be possible at a later stage, they felt, once testimonies from his

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<sup>128</sup>Ted Matsetela, ‘The Life Story of Nkgono Mma-Pooe’, pp 212-213.

<sup>129</sup>Ted Matsetela, ‘The Life Story of Nkgono Mma-Pooe’, pp 213-214, 229-233.

family had been collected and when his testimony could be compared to other historical source material. Much like Matsetela's life history of Emelia Pooe, the account which Nkadimeng and Relly presented showed how Maine managed to avoid wage labour for almost four decades after 1913, and evade "those forces which would have captured him as a farm labourer or relegated him to a location". In addition to reflecting the high mobility of sharecroppers who regularly 'jumped the fence', Maine's life story revealed how the persistence of sharecropping was connected to the technological backwardness of white farming.<sup>130</sup>

The story of Kas Maine also provided "a sense of the detail and complexity of human consciousness underlying the major events and changes in the rural Transvaal during this century". As Maine declared in an interview conducted in 1980: "*Die saad is myne, die skare is myne ... die span is myne. Alles is myne, die grond is syne*".<sup>131</sup> According to Bozzoli, localised rural studies of ordinary lives such as this provided "nuance and variation in interpretation" and enabled "unwarranted generalisations about whole classes of people" to be kept in check. Maine's life story made "concrete" what would have been a "hypothetical analysis of the class character of sharecropping" and lent insight into "the real ... nature of class relations and class struggles".<sup>132</sup>

Notwithstanding such claims about the value of oral testimony for its apparent access to the 'real' and 'concrete' world of experience, the importance of Emelia Pooe and Kas Maine's life stories for social history was that they were seen to reflect a general social pattern, that "sharecropping was the dominant relationship of production in most of the arable districts of the white settled highveld". The juxtaposition of Tim Keegan's analytical study of this process alongside both the biographic studies by Matsetela, and Nkadimeng and Relly served to turn the life stories of Pooe and Maine into illustrative vignettes of a social process explained by Keegan as ongoing resistance against proletarianisation. The resilience of African sharecroppers in mobilising family labour

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<sup>130</sup>Malete Nkadimeng and Georgina Relly, 'Kas Maine', pp 89-91, 99.

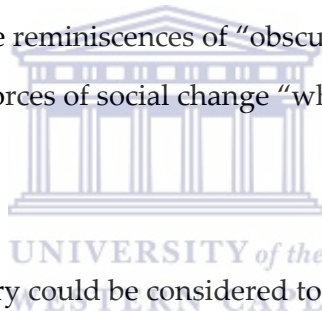
<sup>131</sup>Malete Nkadimeng and Georgina Relly, 'Kas Maine', pp 89-91.

<sup>132</sup>Belinda Bozzoli, 'Introduction: History Experience and Culture', pp 14-15.



and 'jumping the fence' led to the persistence of sharecropping. For Keegan, this constituted rural class struggle, which both undermined the 1913 Natives' Land Act and shaped the nature of capital accumulation in the countryside.<sup>133</sup>

These same explanatory and contextualising purposes of Keegan's article were carried through in his book on black lives in rural South Africa.<sup>134</sup> This book contained four life stories of rural experiences of black South Africans on the Highveld in the twentieth century. These were written in the third person by Keegan and were drawn from oral testimonies collected as part of the work of the ODP at Wits. In the book, the life histories were 'set in context' by explanatory articles on rural transitions in the highveld and the value of oral testimony.<sup>135</sup> According to Keegan, the "range of information" and the "richness and variety" of experiences presented in the life stories constituted an "oral record pertaining to social and economic life". Treated by Keegan as a form of evidence, he argued that these reminiscences of "obscure people" were able to reshape our understanding of major forces of social change "when set in the larger historical context".<sup>136</sup>



While each individual life story could be considered to be unique, the purpose of the historian, however, was to look for patterns, "not reminiscences for their own sake".<sup>137</sup> Keegan argued that

each individual's life embodies something of the common experience of a larger social group; each individual life reveals aspects of the experience of a class, of a racial or ethnic group, of a community, of a geographical region, of a particular kind of economic enterprise.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>Tim Keegan, 'The Sharecropping Economy, African Class Formation and the 1913 Natives' Land Act in the Highveld Maize Belt', in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa*, pp 196-7, 204-208.

<sup>134</sup>Tim Keegan, *Facing the Storm*.

<sup>135</sup>The titles of Keegan's articles contained in Part Two of *Facing the Storm* are 'Social Transformations on the Highveld' and 'Oral testimony in the Recovery of People's history'.

<sup>136</sup>Tim Keegan, *Facing the Storm*, p 131.

<sup>137</sup>Tim Keegan, *Facing the Storm*, p 160.

<sup>138</sup>Tim Keegan, *Facing the Storm*, p 159.

The individual and family experiences revealed evidence of large-scale processes of social change, resistance to capitalist encroachment and the emergence of “intermediary” economic forms. The oral testimony also revealed the workings of culture, identity and consciousness, and the importance of “individual initiative and class aspirations”. Once again, the persistence of sharecropping was revealed as the predominant economic relation in some areas over an extended period of time. Evidence was also provided of processes of accumulation and social change amongst whites and the extent of white reliance on black tenants who had kept “a whole generation of Afrikaners afloat on the land”. The life histories also revealed the ways in which ethnic identity had been employed by blacks as a means of “communal protection of resources” and as a “weapon of communal resistance to dispossession”.<sup>139</sup>

In spite of Keegan’s commitment to the power of oral history, for him it constituted only a “supplementary source”. Its purpose was to supplement more formal, written sources “which provide the larger context of public events, of political and constitutional, economic and institutional developments”. Human memory in the form of oral testimony was “given to error, misconception, elision, distortion, elaboration and downright fabrication”. History, on the other hand, was the product of the “creative imagination of the historian” which played “the central role in orchestrating and interpreting the diverse, contradictory, fragmentary, momentary pieces of evidence which survive”. History depended on the “accuracy” of the footnotes. And for Keegan, the value of oral evidence, in turn, depended on how carefully it was scrutinised for “inaccuracies, hearsay or speculation”. Its value also depended on whether the informant had a “strong, vivid, perceptive memory” and whether his recollections revealed “larger social experiences and forces”.<sup>140</sup>

In this conception of ‘history from below’, biographies in the form of life histories of ‘ordinary people’ tended to be viewed as windows on large, collective social processes. When translated and transcribed, they stood as life documents, or sources of evidence,

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<sup>139</sup>Tim Keegan, *Facing the Storm*, pp 132-147.

<sup>140</sup>Tim Keegan, *Facing the Storm*, pp 160-163.

whose value depended on their accuracy and their quantity of information. In this regard, they resembled the biographical portraits of nationalist leaders, which featured prominently in the Karis and Carter tradition of documentary history. These life stories were not seen as history. Indeed, they were regarded as prior to history. For Keegan, the passage to history required the intervention of the professional historian, trained in the literate rules and procedures of the archive. In this account, the memory of experience was analysed as oral remembrance, documented as testimony through oral research. These life histories were not evaluated as products of the workings of memory, seen as a genre through which the relationship between the past and the present was negotiated. The sociology of their production, the politics of the research process, and the multiple layers of narration involved were questions that were overlooked.<sup>141</sup>

These were the very issues that were inadvertently raised by the publication of the long awaited epic biography of Kas Maine<sup>142</sup> by Charles van Onselen, one of the 'founding fathers' of social history in South Africa, and the director of the former ASI in which the ODP was housed. Indeed, the arrival of *The Seed is Mine* to much fanfare and acclaim, after at least 14 years of research and announcements of its imminent arrival on at least two occasions - 1988 and 1990<sup>143</sup> - also marked the 17th year of biographical attention accorded to Kas Maine by virtually the full gamut of researchers in the ODP: field

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<sup>141</sup>See the discussion of these issues in Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa'.

<sup>142</sup>Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1996. It was also published by Hill & Wang - a subdivision of Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc - in February 1996 in hardback, and by Harper-Collins in Canada in hardback in March 1996. The South African paperback edition by David Philip was brought out in May 1996. By June 1996, the first South African impression was sold, and a second was scheduled for release in July 1996. In the United States, the Hill & Wang hardback sold 7 500 copies in the first six months and was scheduled for production in paperback in New York in early 1997. The book, described as "majestic" and as a "masterpiece", won a variety of awards including the 1997 *Sunday Times* Alan Paton Award and Herskovitz Prize as well as the Bill Venter Literary Award for 1997/1998. See Institute for Advanced Social Research, University of the Witwatersrand, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report*, 1 September 1995 - 31 August 1996, p 10; 'The Seed is Mine wins the R35 000 Bill Venter Literary Award for 1997/ 1998', *Profile: the House Journal of the Altron Group*, Issue 2, 1998.

<sup>143</sup>See references in Tim Keegan, *Facing the Storm*, pp 168-169, and Paul la Hausse, 'Oral History and South African Historians', p 348. Part of the years of build-up leading to its publication by three publishing houses in three countries was the impression that the biography, long in gestation, was an ambitious project in the history of rural social and economic life in South Africa and that when published it would in all likelihood be a classic in historical studies.

researchers, research fellows, the resident photographer and the director himself. During this time, Maine encountered the full complexity of the institutional dynamics of the ODP and the ASI, and divisions of labour contained in it, as he became the ODP's main informant on sharecropping in the Highveld. In the process, *The Seed is Mine* became South African social history's flagship publication and Kas Maine's life emerged as the quintessential trope for South African 'history from below'.

It is interesting to note that Theodore Rosengarten's book about the life of a sharecropper in Alabama in the United States served as a major inspiration for *The Seed is Mine* as well as most of the biographical work in rural social history conducted through the ODP.<sup>144</sup> During more than thirty sessions of interviews conducted by Rosengarten, and 120 hours of recorded oral history, Shaw had narrated the 'life' of a black tenant farmer in the "tradition of farmer-storytellers".<sup>145</sup> With a rigour "steeped in genealogies", naming over 400 people, Shaw's oral stories had served to create

a human topography through which he travels with the assurance of a man who knows the forest because he witnessed the planting of the trees.... [His] family chronicles express both the bonds among people and a man's attachment to the land.<sup>146</sup>

Indebted to Rosengarten for his "wonderful portrayal" of Nate Shaw's sharecropping life, Van Onselen and ODP field interviewer Malete Nkadimeng had gone about trying to find "suitable highveld informants" in the quest to explore the complexity of rural social and economic relations, race, black respectability and resistance in the South African countryside. Researchers at the ODP led by Van Onselen were particularly concerned to challenge the assumption that the intrusion of capitalism and the process of proletarianisation on the highveld involved a linear transition from communal cultivators to peasants, to labour tenants, culminating in wage labourers. The "formidable figure" of Kas Maine was first encountered by an ODP field interviewer

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<sup>144</sup>Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw*, New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1984 (first published, 1974). The article by Matsetela and Relly, and the book by Keegan both referred to Rosengarten's study.

<sup>145</sup>Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers*, p xxii.

<sup>146</sup>Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers*, p xxiii.

(probably Nkadimeng) in a resettlement camp in 1979. Maine was the patriarch of an extended family of immigrant BaSotho sharecroppers, which had farmed successfully in the south-western Transvaal for half a century. His life seemed to contradict the notion that sharecropping had disappeared on the highveld after 1913.<sup>147</sup>

A few years before the publication of *The Seed is Mine*, Charles van Onselen reflected on the methodology of reconstructing Maine's rural life from oral testimony.<sup>148</sup> The collection of oral testimony, Van Onselen felt, would "generate primary material" which would make it possible to "document and analyse the behaviour of a virtually illiterate sharecropper". It would thus also be possible to "conjure up the life and times of a single black man in the South African countryside between 1895 and 1985". Van Onselen wanted to do justice to "the peculiarities of personality", while describing and analysing the behaviour of a single person "within an appropriate class context". While wishing to study economic, political and social structures, through biography Van Onselen also wanted to grasp the actions and consciousness of historical agents and the conditions under which humans were chained by structures or were able to transcend them.<sup>149</sup>

Following Sartre, Van Onselen sought to locate his study of Maine's life in relation to layers in a "hierarchy of mediations", beginning with the 'family', notwithstanding the "permeability" of its boundaries, and the extended family. A third layer of informants was drawn from Maine's own "cohort", black sharecropper farmers in his own age category and of the same ethnicity. A fourth layer, drawn from the landlords themselves and their descendants would "assist in restoring some balance" to the data, enabling points of conflict to be determined "with greater accuracy".<sup>150</sup>

These layers of testimony would provide evidence of a life of black sharecropping through agreements with poor white farmers, sheltered paradoxically by "white

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<sup>147</sup>Charles van Onselen, 'The Reconstruction of a Rural Life', pp 502-3; *The Seed is Mine*, p 10.

<sup>148</sup>Charles van Onselen, 'The Reconstruction of a Rural Life'.

<sup>149</sup>Charles van Onselen, 'The Reconstruction of a Rural Life', pp 497-8.

<sup>150</sup>Charles van Onselen, 'The Reconstruction of a Rural Life', pp 498-501.

populist resistance to state interference”, in spite of the passage of the Natives’ Land Act of 1913. Maine’s life would be able to shed light on the historical complexities of rural relations between sharecroppers, labour tenants, wage labourers, and white farmers and landlords. It would also account for black respectability, dignity and resistance, as well as “the social codes and etiquette of race relations”.<sup>151</sup>

Since 1979 when the first interview with Maine took place, more than 60 interviews with Maine were conducted, 20 with his black farmer cohort, and “dozens” with traders, lawyers and landlords. More than 50 interviews with members of Maine’s family gave insight to the dynamics of patriarchal control and the ways in which it was subverted and challenged. Oral testimony on such a large scale allowed for “a great deal of cross-checking for accuracy and internal consistency”. Nevertheless, in a methodological argument similar to Keegan’s, Van Onselen suggested that unless such oral evidence was able “to square” with documentary evidence, in all its magnitude it “counts for little”. With this perspective, Van Onselen’s “lucky break” came when 850 documents were handed over by the Maine family after Kas Maine’s death. Maine had kept these hidden in plastic bags in his shack. Among them were letters, receipts, church membership cards, licences for dogs, bicycles, cars, tractors, passes granting movement for business purposes, receipts for livestock and grain transactions. These served to provide “incontrovertible” evidence of a sharecropping life.<sup>152</sup>

Van Onselen also tried to engage with the difficulties of the changing “knowledge transactions” between interviewer and interviewee over time, the differences of age, colour, class and gender, the issues of language and translation and those of subjectivity, memory and reliability.<sup>153</sup> In particular, he pointed to the ways that language choice in a multi-cultural setting could influence the researcher’s effectiveness. When material was ‘generated’ in a second or third language, “the resulting product will in itself partly

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<sup>151</sup>Charles van Onselen, ‘The Reconstruction of a Rural Life’, pp 502-3.

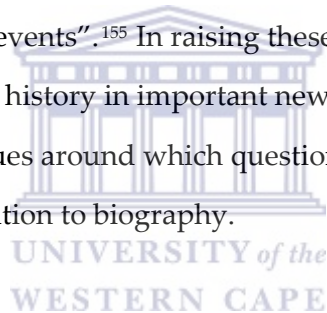
<sup>152</sup>Charles van Onselen, ‘The Reconstruction of a Rural Life’, pp 503-6.

<sup>153</sup>I have written on these issues elsewhere with Gary Minkley. See Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, ‘Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa’. Here I have drawn upon this work.



determine the voice and style in which the final historical presentation is made". For Van Onselen, this meant the "almost unavoidable" need to "eschew cryptic quotation and revert to the third person" in telling Maine's life. He suggests, though, that Maine's "narrative skills" did help "to shape and direct the resulting work", albeit in a "remote and indirect fashion".<sup>154</sup>

Drawing on an example from the Kas Maine oral archive, Van Onselen argued that more critical attention should be given to the theory and method of "data collection rather than interpretation". Using an unusual, traumatic moment of recollection, spoken in a form uncharacteristically lengthy for Maine, Van Onselen showed how it was rendered in almost the same words by Maine in a later interview. Van Onselen argued that it "not only tells us about the state of the subject's cognitive processes at the time of these events, but also reveals one of the codes that he had employed to store and retrieve the results of an important set of events".<sup>155</sup> In raising these issues Van Onselen began to probe language, memory and history in important new ways in South African studies.<sup>156</sup> Indeed, these are the very issues around which questions of self-narration and the production of self arise in relation to biography.



These potential advances, however, were not sustained in Van Onselen's book. The story of Kas Maine did offer major new insights, but these were not of method in the production of biography. Rather, the achievements of *The Seed is Mine* related to the social processes it studied: the detailed examinations of the black family, the sharecropping economy and the gradual impact of the encroaching tide of capitalism, of vicious forms of racism and relations of paternalism. In methodological terms, it was the ways that Kas Maine used memory as a resource, a storehouse of oral knowledge about prices, markets, contracts and agreements, and about weather, movement and family, which were highlighted.

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<sup>154</sup>Charles van Onselen, 'The Reconstruction of a Rural Life', pp 506-510.

<sup>155</sup>Charles van Onselen, 'The Reconstruction of a Rural Life', pp 511-513.

<sup>156</sup>Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa', p 9.

Maine “astounded with his ability to recall, in sequence, the names of more than a dozen of his former landlords as well as the nature and size of each of the harvests they had shared”.<sup>157</sup> Oral testimony was a means of generating evidence about the facts of Maine’s life. It was his ability to remember *in detail* and *with accuracy*, which made him ‘real’ and a suitable subject for biographic attention. In perpetuating a conventional approach to memory and life history, Van Onselen appeared less concerned with how these instances of orality as life history told their own story of remembrance, forgetting and narrativity.

For Van Onselen, “Kas Maine’s odyssey was but a moment in a tiny corner of a wider world that thousands of black South African sharecropping families came to know on a journey to nowhere”. His life history, drawn from oral testimony, and rendered as a life document, stood as a “body of historically verifiable facts”, and a building block of collective experience. It was sifted, ordered, verified, referenced and cross-referenced, evaluated and processed by the historian to stand as consciousness, the remembrance of real collective experience.<sup>158</sup> In the words of one reviewer, this “thick biography”, in enabling us “to see a living slice of historical society *whole*”, was “history you can believe in”.<sup>159</sup>

For Van Onselen, memory was not Kas Maine’s medium of history. For him, the recordings and transcripts of Maine’s life history constituted a data bank of experience. The narrative voice that emerged in the book through the employment of the third person singular was Van Onselen’s.<sup>160</sup> More than this being determined by language and the nature of material,<sup>161</sup> the book represented Van Onselen’s translation of the imagined and represented content of Maine’s life history, drawn from testimony and the orality of

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<sup>157</sup>Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*, p 10.

<sup>158</sup>Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*, pp 8-10.

<sup>159</sup>Bill Nasson, ‘A Sharecropper’s Life’, *Southern African Review of Books*, Issue 42, March/April 1996, pp 3-4.

<sup>160</sup>Charles van Onselen, ‘The Reconstruction of a Rural Life’, pp 510-513.

<sup>161</sup>See, for example, the distinction drawn between Nate Shaw and Kas Maine, and *All God’s Dangers* and *The Seed is Mine* by Colin Bundy in the review article, ‘Comparatively Speaking: Kas Maine and South African Agrarian History’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol 23, No 2, June 1997, pp 367-8.

memory into a written academic product - as History and Biography - under his authorship and copyright. No attempt was made to engage with the *history* of his own life that Maine told.<sup>162</sup>

Van Onselen's designation as author, biographer and historian, as a result of the multiple translations and appropriations of oral discourses into history, masked the more complex and mediated authorial process and relations of research involved in the production of Kas Maine's life through the work of the ODP. In the first place, research assistant and field interviewer, Maletse Nkadimeng who had conducted more than 80% of the interviews with Kas Maine and his family, and who had co-authored the first biographical article on Maine in 1983 was relegated to the position of *agterryer*-in-chief, who had lent Van Onselen "his eyes and ears" for fourteen years:

he never hesitated to crisscross the Transvaal in search of data that might have struck him as boring, crass, irrelevant, insensitive, repetitive, vague or plain stupid.<sup>163</sup>

If Maine's testimony was assessed as a storehouse of facts, then Nkadimeng was certainly taken to be the fact collector, the assembler of authentic experience in the vernacular and the compiler of Maine's memory for its date with history.

Moreover, the ironic consequence of this 'epic' attempt at "restoring Kas Maine to the historical record"<sup>164</sup> was the deepening of his subordinate status through being named, categorised and naturalised as marginal and typologised as special.<sup>165</sup> Kas Maine was inserted into Van Onselen's history largely as "contextual device" and, in crucial ways,

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<sup>162</sup>It is interesting to note that in spite of being 'authored' by Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers* was styled as an auto-biography and was written in the first person. It was a translation of "oral stories into written literature" with Rosengarten styling himself as editor, arranger and facilitator of Shaw's narrative. Also, Rosengarten and the estate of the late Ned Cobb for whom the name 'Nate Shaw' was a pseudonym held the copyright jointly.

<sup>163</sup>Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*, p 10. The description of the ODP field researchers as '*agterryers*' comes from Bill Nasson, 'A Sharecropper's Life', p 4. Note Keegan's translation of *agterryer* as 'black groom' (Tim Keegan, *Facing the Storm*, glossary).

<sup>164</sup>Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*, back cover.

<sup>165</sup>Gary Minkley, Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, 'Thresholds, Gateways and Spectacles', p 3.

continued to be silenced within the realm of the academy.<sup>166</sup> He was placed at the centre of a history of rural social relations as resister - the “gritty and sturdy” sharecropper - through a narrative of survival against the odds within the predetermined ‘natural’ indices of subordination.<sup>167</sup> The ‘hidden past’ of Maine’s submerged experience, read transparently off individual memory, was equated with resistance.<sup>168</sup> Constrained within the ready-made, fixed category of his recovery - as sharecropper-resister - Maine was made to stand for the collective social and economic experience of rural society in twentieth century South Africa.<sup>169</sup>

### *Social history and national resistance*

These issues were symptomatic of more general problems in South African social history in which “the prior ‘great men’ were replaced by ‘great’ universal social agents and their equally masculine representatives”.<sup>170</sup> The form of Maine’s ‘recovery’ followed the formula and the categories of representation of the main lines of South African social history. Oral discourses continued to be mined for literate facts, which were inserted into a dominant genre of historical realism. This was achieved through

the autocratic author who hides his control over the text behind the third person singular, the chronological unfolding of the story that creates the illusion of a natural, temporal development; the lifelike and detailed descriptions of how it really was.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>166</sup>The phrase comes from Nicolene Rousseau, ‘Popular History in South Africa in the 1980s: The Politics of Production’, M.A. Mini-thesis, University of the Western Cape, April 1994, p 41.

<sup>167</sup>Rousseau (‘Popular History in South Africa in the 1980s’, p 42) refers to the evocative figure of the “gritty and sturdy worker”, who was crucial in the early urban and industrial concerns of South African social history, and who was erected, partly, in opposition to the categories of nationalist politics. See, for example, Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914, Volumes 1 and 2*.

<sup>168</sup>See the discussion of ‘resilience as resistance’ earlier in this chapter.

<sup>169</sup>Kas Maine was undoubtedly the subject of one of the most intense forms of scrutiny and ethnographic attention in the history of the social sciences in South Africa. One cannot help wondering about the histories of the academy - in the form of the Oral Documentation Project, Malete Nkadimeng, Charles van Onselen and others connected to the former African Studies Institute - and the mediated research process on his life that Kas Maine would have told.

<sup>170</sup>Gary Minkley, ‘First Born Rulers’, *Southern African Review of Books*, No 35, January/February 1995.

<sup>171</sup>Patrick Harries, ‘Histories New and Old’, in *South African Historical Journal*, 30 (May 1994), p 130.

Biography for social history was a means to narrate lives as individual allegories of collective experience. In addition, lives of resistance, constructed through social history, also took the form of heroic narratives and triumphal histories of political struggle. These attempted to show how “the struggles, successes and failures ... contributed to the subsequent mass mobilisation and popular and political struggles against apartheid”.<sup>172</sup>

This seeming shift to an approach in which life histories and submerged experience were taken as the connection between the past and political struggle, and between social and political history, was evident from Luli Callinicos’ popular synthesis of historical research on the Witwatersrand in the 1940s.<sup>173</sup> This publication showed that the histories of resistance told by social history were not incompatible with histories of ‘the struggle’ constructed through ‘people’s history’ during the 1980s. In the political movement, and in the academy,<sup>174</sup> ‘people’s history’ had emerged as an attempt to connect the search for hidden history into the struggles for ‘people’s power’ and ‘people’s education’. ‘History from below’ had been mobilised in support of building a national movement based on resistance politics of the 1950s. In the notion of ‘struggle’, national and class teleologies had been collapsed into one of the people. History was ‘national struggle’ and the past contained a “great store of lessons” which had to be recovered.<sup>175</sup>

In her study of the 1940s, Callinicos examined the social history of the Witwatersrand through the life stories and experiences of six people, a cast of characters who had worked on the Rand. Each biography was constructed as a tale of an individual, unique life whose purpose was to give face and voice, alongside others, to the social and political histories

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<sup>172</sup>Luli Callinicos, *A Place in the City: The Rand on the Eve of Apartheid*, back cover.

<sup>173</sup>Luli Callinicos, *A Place in the City*.

<sup>174</sup>The University of the Western Cape, in particular, witnessed the emergence of a ‘People’s History Programme’, whose objective was the proliferation of layers of ‘barefoot historians’ recording the ‘hidden history’ of oppressed communities within the Western Cape. Located within the academic programme of the university, it also sought to transcend the boundaries of the academy.

<sup>175</sup>See for example UWC History Department/Education Resource and Information Project, *Let Us Speak of Freedom*, Vols 1 and 2, Bellville, undated. See also Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin, *Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986. See Gary Minkley, Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, ‘Thresholds, Gateways and Spectacles’ for a discussion of people’s history and the hidden past.

told in the book. The lives of these faces with voices were not taken to be histories, but, as with other studies, were treated as prior to history - sketches or portraits through which to illustrate economic, social and political processes which were regarded as 'historical'. Each life, in their category of recovery, was made to fit standard themes of South African social history, as they had crystallised on the industrialising Rand in the 1940s. Biography became a means to narrate lives as individual allegories of collective experience and social history. These were connected to a historical narrative of national resistance, organised political bodies and national leaders, who drew on the "culture of resistance" of "ordinary people".<sup>176</sup>

'History from below' brought together culturalist constructions of experience, class and consciousness and nationalist teleologies of the people and the struggle, to generate a grand narrative of resistance and the nation. Indeed, intonations of a newfound concentration on the deeds and qualities of political leaders by leading social historians<sup>177</sup> were an extension of this narrative. It may well be that the seemingly contradictory impulses of histories 'from below' and histories of leadership were indeed compatible. This compatibility was to be found in the notion of 'hidden history' and the conception of pasts subordinated by oppression and exclusion from the historical record and which were deemed to be in need of recuperation. It also lay in the categories and subject positions - individual and collective - constructed by historical models framed in terms of a 'domination versus resistance' dichotomy. South African resistance histories came to be peopled with "coherent and confrontational subjects", who had stability bestowed upon them by the firm boundaries constructed around them.<sup>178</sup>

The compatibility of these different histories of resistance also emerged through the dominant realist mode in which they were written and assembled. Different genres of

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<sup>176</sup>Luli Callinicos, *A Place in the City*, pp 58-72.

<sup>177</sup>See the work of Callinicos, Lodge and Beinart referred to at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>178</sup>Jenny Robinson, '(Dis)locating Historical Narrative: Writing, Space and Gender in South African Social History', *South African Historical Journal*, No 30 (May 1994), pp 149-150. Robinson included La Hausse's ambivalent category of the 'picaro' in her set of criticisms of subject construction by social historians.



resistance history sought to provide a detailed understanding of 'what happened' in the framework of chronological narrative, adding in incremental fashion to our store of information on resistance. This realist mode was most apparent, however, in the ways in which different resistance histories drew on photographs to show how things 'really were' and to give 'real faces' to their resistance subjects. Virtually all of them, from the documentary histories of the Karis and Carter school, to the social historians associated with the History Workshop and the ODP at the University of the Witwatersrand treated photographs as 'universal truth tellers'. The dominant perception of photographs was that they had inherent qualities of objectivity and empirical accuracy, and that they reflected reality in a neutral way.<sup>179</sup>

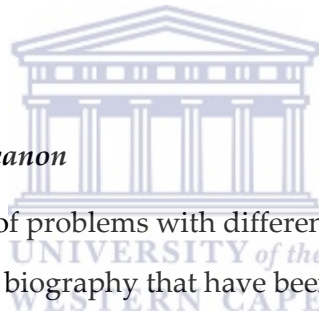
Almost no attempt was made in South African resistance histories to understand different genres of photography from missionary, and ethnographic, to portrait, both public and private, and the histories and sociologies of these photographic modes. Moreover, nowhere in South African resistance literature was there any engagement with issues of meaning and representation in photographic images: what meanings and imaginaries were intended through image-making, what pictures 'want', what audiences were intended, and how these meanings, desires and audiences changed over time.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup>A vast and growing literature has addressed and challenged these perceptions. For a selection, see Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973; John Berger, 'Appearances', in John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling*, New York: Pantheon Press, 1982; W.J.T. Mitchell, 'What Do Pictures Really Want?', *October*, No 77, Summer 1996; Arjun Appadurai, 'The Colonial Backdrop', *Afterimage*, March/April 1997; Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann, 'Photography, History and Memory', in Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester and Patricia Hayes (eds), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1998); Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photography and the Performance of History', *Kronos*, No 27, November 2001.

<sup>180</sup>For a discussion of the circuits of distribution and different uses of photographs and resultant changes in meaning in South Africa, see Ciraj Rassool and Patricia Hayes, 'Science and the Spectacle: /Khanako's South Africa, 1936-7' Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes and Gary Minkley (eds), *Deep Histories: Gender and Colonialism in Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002); see also See Tina Smith and Ciraj Rassool, 'History in Photographs at the District Six Museum' and Patricia Hayes and Andrew Bank, 'Introduction', *Kronos*, No 27, November 2001. For a discussion of meaning in South African photographs, see Santu Mofokeng 'The Black Photo Album/Look At Me, 1890-1900s', *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, No 4, Spring 1996.

Instead, photographs continued to be inserted into texts as visual manifestations of the people, events and landscapes that fill the resistance histories. At times, they were designed to stand as visual evidence, interacting with written text on the same page. And so, Luli Callinicos, for example, made use of ethnographic images purely as a means to identify individuals referred to, without beginning to address the discursive framing of such images and the forms of mediation involved in their production.<sup>181</sup> This illustrative, or ‘documentary’ usage, as with others, was accompanied by a caption that sought merely to describe the photograph as an objective visual description of real life. Another startling example was the use of a photograph taken by Alfred Duggan-Cronin, probably in 1926, to depict what was described in an accompanying caption as “a herd boy in the Leribe district”.<sup>182</sup> This image was provided to enable readers to visualise what one of her subjects, Naboth Mokgatle, might have looked like. The very same photograph was used in another study by Callinicos to depict a herdboys in Oliver Tambo’s district, Kantolo, near Bizana in the Transkei.<sup>183</sup>



### *Transcending the biographic canon*

Notwithstanding the myriad of problems with different genres of resistance history in South Africa and the forms of biography that have been produced within them, in the early 1990s, a few biographical studies began to push the boundaries and transcend the formulae of their intellectual frameworks. Three biographical projects produced by Belinda Bozzoli and Mmantho Nkotsae, Paul la Hausse and Bill Nasson at this time began to look at the production of lives and issues of identity in ways that went beyond other studies in methodological terms.<sup>184</sup> It is ironic that the projects by Bozzoli and Nkotsae

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<sup>181</sup>See, for example, the photograph on p 7 captioned ‘One of Martha’s sisters at home, in Ndebele costume’ said to come from a family album of one of the subjects, Martha Masina.

<sup>182</sup>Luli Callinicos, *A Place in the City*, p 14. I saw this photographic image in an album in the Duggan-Cronin Gallery in Kimberley.

<sup>183</sup>Chris van Wyk and Luli Callinicos, *They Fought for Freedom: Oliver Tambo*, Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1994, p 3.

<sup>184</sup>Belinda Bozzoli with Mmantho Nkotsae, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983*; Paul la Hausse de Lalouviere, ‘Ethnicity and History in the Careers of Two Zulu Nationalists: Petros Lamula (c.1881-1948) and Lymon Maling (1889-c.1936)’, Ph.D dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, July 1992; Bill Nasson, *Abraham Esau’s War: A Black South African War in the Cape, 1899-1902*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1991. La Hausse’s dissertation was published in revised form as *Restless Identities: Signatures of Nationalism, Zulu Ethnicity and History in the Lives of*

and La Hausse were completed by scholars closely associated with both the History Workshop and the Oral Documentation Project of the former African Studies Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand.

*Women of Phokeng* was the outcome of a specific project which developed within the ODP at Wits in 1982, and which focussed on the lives and experiences of black South African women. This project sought to find ways of balancing biography and generality, of examining life histories, while retaining a commitment to materialist theory. Indeed, for Belinda Bozzoli, the life history approach did not mean the abandonment of “materialist ways of thinking and ordering things”. In the process of research, after biographical interviews had been conducted with elderly women in different parts of the Transvaal, it was decided to focus on women from one area, Phokeng, and show “in a rich and in-depth fashion” how they “were affected by the vast changes of the twentieth century”.<sup>185</sup>

For Bozzoli, materialist theory required a smaller-scale set of criteria, which could not be “derived from the grand theory downwards”. The life stories contained the “pointers” to the ways in which they themselves may have been explained.<sup>186</sup> At the same time, generalisation about migration patterns, experiences of womanhood, work and protest was an objective. As Bozzoli explained:

The difficulty will be in capturing both the uniqueness of individual lives and ways in which they have been told, and the more general nature of the experiences of these women: to talk of Mrs M, a resolutely conservative woman who was also a factory worker, who consistently sought respectability but also retained a cynicism about politicians and trade unionists; of Mrs S, a pass campaigner and militant; a ‘self-employed’ woman who values tradition; and at the same time to capture the common basis from which both migrated, both suffered, both fought for their individual place in a harsh society.<sup>187</sup>

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*Petros Lamula (c.1881-1948) and Lymon Maling (1889-c.1936)*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000).

<sup>185</sup>Belinda Bozzoli, ‘Migrant Women and South African Social Change’, pp 90-94. This paper tried to assess the first three years of the research project.

<sup>186</sup>Belinda Bozzoli, ‘Migrant Women and South African Social Change’, p 93.

<sup>187</sup>Belinda Bozzoli, ‘Migrant Women and South African Social Change’, p 95.

Much like with other research conducted within the ODP, Mmantho Nkotsoe, a Setswana-speaking university graduate, had been employed and trained as field interviewer. It was she who developed a “striking rapport” with Phokeng women after she had spent a period interviewing women from different villages. Being from a neighbouring area, Nkotsoe showed considerable empathy and sensitivity towards the interviewees, and her knowledge of rural Setswana, her close connections to the women and her youth gave the life stories a “special character” of “intimacy and interactiveness”.<sup>188</sup> As with Maletle Nkadimeng and *The Seed is Mine*, the personal qualities and research skills of Mmantho Nkotsoe were the essential mediating elements between the worlds of the white university and the rural black village, which made the research project, and the flows of historical and social knowledge between these sites possible.

Likewise, the life story interviews were put to use for conventional social history purposes: as sources of evidence for understanding the way of life and sexual division of labour in sharecropping households, for understanding family relations, ethnicity, schooling, women’s migrancy, the conditions of domestic service, and social life in Sophiatown and Alexandra between the wars. Also, the life stories could be read as sources revealing evidence of hidden forms of consciousness.

However, there were important elements of this study that began to transcend the empiricist and realist methods of social history. Rather than being styled as a study of ‘what really happened’, with oral history - translated and transcribed - utilised as illustrative quotations, the life stories were approached as texts “imperfectly reflecting lives, and more accurately revealing ‘cultural and psychological myth’”. As texts and through literary methods of analysis, the life stories were approached variously as “documents, narratives, stories, histories, innocent ramblings, interlinked fragments of

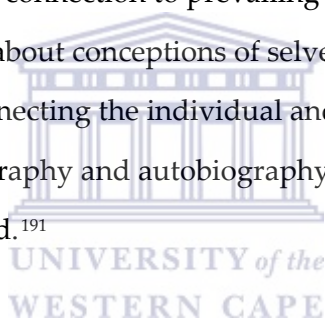
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<sup>188</sup>Belinda Bozzoli with Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng*, pp 7-11. Interestingly, Nkotsoe had also conducted oral research for Shula Marks in her biographical project published as *Not Either An Experimental Doll*.

consciousness, conversations, and/or recitals of fact".<sup>189</sup> Each mode of examination revealed different meanings. In the process, the evolving subjectivity of the informants was examined through

an exploration of one of the more intimate private domains within which power is fought over, and consciousness born - those of personal life, family, community, and experience.<sup>190</sup>

What was particularly important and useful about the conception of lives in this project was achieved through the notions of 'life worlds', 'life cycles' and 'life strategies'. It is around the 'life strategies' of the women, in particular, that their consciousness was organised. This was shaped in their childhood, drawing upon pre-industrial circumstances and later, adding to it from the "exigencies of life" on the fringes of the city. The consciousness and social identity of the women emerged as fragmented, each fragment with a history and a connection to prevailing discourse. This conceptualisation reflected deeper theorisation about conceptions of selves and the production of identities, beyond merely connecting the individual and the social. This began to raise the relationship between biography and autobiography and touch on the biographical ways in which lives were lived.<sup>191</sup>



In examining the political careers of two 'second-tier' Zulu nationalist leaders, Paul la Hausse produced a study of nationalist politics and culture, and contradictory identities and affiliations. He explored the world of the cultural intermediary and political broker "moving between the worlds of the powerful and the powerless at a moment of profound social and economic rupture". Through the political and intellectual careers of

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<sup>189</sup>Belinda Bozzoli with Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng*, p 6.

<sup>190</sup>Belinda Bozzoli with Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng*, p 3. In the process as well, the important place of Mmantho Nkotsoe received firmer acknowledgement - as more than just *agterryer*. Although it is clear that Bozzoli took responsibility of authorship in the 'writing-up' phase (particularly with Nkotsoe having left the project in the last stages) and that the ODP division of labour between field interviewer and researcher was enforced, it seems as if the decisiveness of Nkotsoe's place in the evolution of this project was noted, even if as part of an examination of the interviews as 'texts'. It also seems as if an intervention at a late stage, perhaps by the publishers, or by the publisher's manuscript readers, may have contributed to Nkotsoe being placed as subsidiary (if not joint) author. Nevertheless, some, like Charles van Onselen himself, continued to refer to Bozzoli as the sole author of *Women of Phokeng*. See Charles van Onselen, 'The Reconstruction of a Rural Life', p 514.

<sup>191</sup>Belinda Bozzoli with Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng*, pp 235-242.

Petros Lamula and Lymon Maling, La Hausse examined the dilemmas of social class, debates about the Zulu nation and the construction of Zulu nationalism, the nature of political culture and mobilisation and the composition of political leadership. He was particularly concerned with their careers between 1920s and 1936, a period representing a “key moment in the re-construction of Zulu ethnic identity”.<sup>192</sup>

At one level, La Hausse’s study was a recovery project of social history, seeking to rescue from obscurity the lives of two nationalist intellectuals who had been members of an educated but unpropertied elite. It was an account of the struggle for *kholwa* respectability within relations of racial paternalism and dependency, and the role of the educated cultural intermediary. As in some of his other studies, biography was utilised as a mirror, reflecting the contradictions of Natal’s fractured African middle classes. These were subjects who illuminated the political and cultural dilemmas of their social class. La Hausse’s study was also attuned to social context. He examined the significance of Lamula and Maling’s careers in the context of “changing local politics, culture and society [which] structured their populist imagination”.<sup>193</sup>

Nevertheless, there were interesting ways in which La Hausse’s study moved beyond conventional biography. He was interested in the powerfully historicist form of consciousness which underlay the nationalist imaginings of Maling and Lamula, in their quest for self-definition and collective identity through a search to redeem the past. This took him into an examination of the construction of self-images and self-definitions through writing as well as the scripting of life stories on the part of ‘people’s leaders’. Through an exploration of forms of cultural transmission between literate nationalist leaders and ‘ordinary people’, La Hausse was able to examine the uses of and struggles over the written word.

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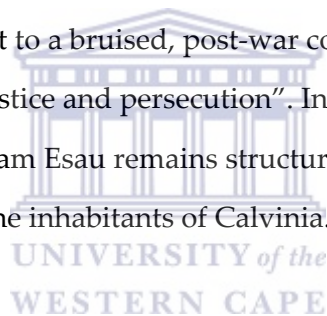
<sup>192</sup>Paul la Hausse de Lalouviere, ‘Ethnicity and History in the Careers of Two Zulu Nationalists’, p 6.

<sup>193</sup>Paul la Hausse de Lalouviere, ‘Ethnicity and History in the Careers of Two Zulu Nationalists’, p 37.



A foray into biography in the work of Bill Nasson also reflected a move beyond the conventional techniques of social history for examining lives through an exploration of cultural themes in the production of identities.<sup>194</sup> At one level, Nasson was concerned to trace the life story of Abraham Esau, a carpenter and smith from Namaqualand who had died in the South African war at the turn of the century. Esau's life was a story of "resistance, incarceration and execution" in a war between British imperialism and Boer republicanism which "turned with abrupt and explosive force into a desperate, undeclared civil war between rural whites and rural blacks".<sup>195</sup>

For Nasson, however, biography also became a means to address issues of oral remembrance and storytelling in relation to memory and tradition, myth and legend in the making of rural and cultural identities. While the war had made Esau a leader, this did not explain his martyrdom after his death. Instead, the martyrdom of Abraham Esau offered an integrating element to a bruised, post-war community and filled a need in Calvinia for a "symbol of injustice and persecution". In oral remembrance and storytelling, the presence of Abraham Esau remains structured into "the projection of an alternative identity" among the inhabitants of Calvinia.<sup>196</sup>



In the early 1990s, there were clear indications of greater methodological complexity in research on life histories, and that it was possible to move beyond the limiting notions of the stable, coherent individual, as well as the individual as unit of the collective.

Biographical work by Bozzoli and Nkotsoe, La Hausse and Nasson demonstrated fruitful ways of potentially going beyond documentary and realist approaches to lives through their examinations of 'life strategies', the self-scripting of lives and the cultural production of lives through martyrdom, myth and memory. These represented steps in the direction of fundamentally altering the categories through which we think about

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<sup>194</sup>See Bill Nasson, *Abraham Esau's War*, Chapter 7; Versions of this chapter have also been published in other places. See 'The War of Abraham Esau 1899-1901: Martyrdom, Myth and Folk Memory in Calvinia, South Africa', *African Affairs*, Vol 87, No 347, April 1988 and 'Abraham Esau's War, 1899-1901: Martyrdom, Myth, and Folk Memory in Calvinia, South Africa', in Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (eds), *The Myths We Live By*, London: Routledge, 1990.

<sup>195</sup>Bill Nasson, 'The War of Abraham Esau, 1899-1901', pp 239-40.

<sup>196</sup>Bill Nasson, 'Abraham Esau's War, 1899-1901', pp 118-125.

individuals and lives to take account of identity performances, the inherent instability of subjects, and the place of narrative in the production of lives.

From the late 1990s and in early 2000s, these possibilities of transcending social history's conventional framings were taken a step further in the biographical research of Stephen Clingman and in the methodological challenges posed by Clifton Crais for the study of South African political history.<sup>197</sup> From the late 1990s, the lines between the academic and the public arenas began to be blurred. This boundary crossing took a number of forms. Certain academic publications, such as Clingman's study of Bram Fischer's life, began to shake off scholarly conventions in order to reach larger audiences in the public domain. Also, memorial biographical tributes to national political leaders sought to emulate the form of the academic monograph, and to engage with academic settings of production, in spite of scholarly insufficiencies.<sup>198</sup>

Nevertheless, at this time, some heritage institutions, such as the District Six Museum, began to claim an independent location as a space of *public* scholarship, where complex, theoretically informed studies of life histories in Cape Town's past began to be generated in exhibitions and publications. This was part of a fundamental shift that had begun to occur in South Africa in the mid-to-late 1990s, in which the academy had

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<sup>197</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998); Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>198</sup> Elinor Sisulu's study of the political lives and relationship of the Sisulus, *Walter & Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002) is an interesting example of this phenomenon. Here, the designation of Elinor Sisulu, the Sisulu's daughter-in-law as author belied a more complex form of authorship that gave rise to this book. Complex authorship tends to be characteristic of many biographies produced in the public domain. In Sisulu's case, this authorship included having a principal editor as well as consulting editors. Sisulu had graduate academic training, and had fellowships at Harvard and UCT, and gave a lecture at Wits University, as part of the production of this study. Yet, the theoretical and methodological scope of this study was quite limited, in spite of her direct and almost unlimited access to the Sisulus, and the laudable intention to produce a biographical study that examined the personal and political. In the end, the main value of this book lay in its documentation of political lives of "legendary South African leaders" (<[www.sahistory.org.za/pages/chronology/thisday/2002-05-18.htm](http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/chronology/thisday/2002-05-18.htm)>), in a story of "patience, hope, enduring love and ultimate triumph", and to a lesser extent, in its examination of how an "all-embracing sense of family" had informed politics (p 14).

ceased to be the major site for the production of history.<sup>199</sup> Academic programmes in historical and cultural studies began exploring flows of knowledge between the academy and the public domain.<sup>200</sup>

The study of political life histories was a key feature of this genre negotiation. The state's policy research institute, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) took a clear interest in resistance auto/biography.<sup>201</sup> Another manifestation of this boundary slippage between the academy and the public domain was the inauguration of the South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) and its 'Road to Democracy' Research Project, which saw a political project of resistance history for nation-building draw upon academic skills and resources.<sup>202</sup> While research on resistance life histories was a key

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<sup>199</sup> This argument is developed in Ciraj Rassool, 'The Rise of Heritage and the Reconstitution of History in South Africa', *Kronos*, No 26, August 2000; see also Carolyn Hamilton, Nsizwe Dlamini, Leslie Witz and Ciraj Rassool, 'Production of History post-1994', *The Cambridge History of South Africa* Contributors' Meeting, UCT, 10-11 December 2002.

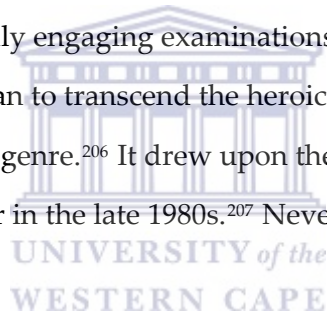
<sup>200</sup> The Project on Public Pasts in the History Department at UWC was set up to explore these mediations and transitions. Another expression of this was the emergence of the Post-graduate Diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies, offered in partnership by UWC, UCT and the Robben Island Museum. Its co-ordinators argued that this programme was located 'between' the academy and the public sphere.

<sup>201</sup> The HSRC was one of the publishers of Raymond Mhlaba's personal memoirs, a publication that was seen as "a significant addition to the people's history of South Africa" (<[www.hsrc.ac.za/about/annualReport/2001](http://www.hsrc.ac.za/about/annualReport/2001)>). Indeed the book emerged partly out of a project constituted within the Democracy and Governance Group of the HSRC, which took responsibility for the research, co-ordination and compilation. With Thembeke Mufamadi as project leader, other scholars and academics who had some involvement were Yvonne Muthien, Meshack Khoza, Bernard Magubane, Sifiso Ndlovu and Rok Ajulu. Published as a narration to Mufamadi (formerly Orie), this auto/biography, which emerged out of a complex authorship process, and whose formal authorship conventions are ambiguous, also drew upon Mufamadi's academic biographical research from the early 1990s. See Thembeke Mufamadi (researcher), *Raymond Mhlaba's Personal Memoirs: Reminiscing from Rwanda and Uganda* (Cape Town and Pretoria: Robben Island Museum and HSRC, 2001); see also Thembeke Orie, 'Raymond Mhlaba and the Genesis of the Congress Alliance: A Political Biography' (M.A. Thesis, University of Cape Town, April 1993).

<sup>202</sup> This project was initiated on 21 March 2001 partly in response to perceived shortcomings of the TRC Report. Its initial mandate was to develop as broad a picture as possible of the 1960s, a period critical to the history of resistance, in which political organisations had been banned, and which was mainly understood as a period of 'silence'. While the project was constituted through the political domain (after discussions with the private sector), it drew upon academic resources, and sought authority in the academic domain. Because of its mandate the aims of the project were largely documentary in nature, and it also fell squarely within the ambit of developing a national history which would be "a definitive and all-embracing history of our struggle" and a "monumental tribute to those to whom we owe our liberty". Much of the research was intended to take the form of life histories of political activists, "to highlight the role of less well-known (but significant) – as well as well-known figures in the struggle for liberation". The project would thus rely "on undocumented sources, in particular the

element of its main project, SADET also gave support to Elinor Sisulu as she was preparing her manuscript on the Sisulus.<sup>203</sup> The HSRC, in turn, gave support to SADET by seconding a senior researcher to “help provide strategic research leadership to the national project”.<sup>204</sup>

In the late 1990s, as life history research was emerging as a key feature of studies of South African resistance history in the interstitial spaces between the academy and the public domain, David Philip publishers brought out Stephen Clingman’s long-awaited study of Bram Fischer’s life. In spite of being a tome of 500 pages, the publishing intention was to reach a wider - even if serious - readership beyond the academy. With the book uncluttered by the academic convention of footnotes, the publishers promised an “extraordinary story” of a “pioneering anti-apartheid leader”.<sup>205</sup> In spite of its seeming popular character, Clingman’s study was indeed one of the most theoretically informed and methodologically engaging examinations of a South African life of resistance politics, which began to transcend the heroic narrative framings of the emerging struggle biography genre.<sup>206</sup> It drew upon theoretical formulations he first put forward in a conference paper in the late 1980s.<sup>207</sup> Nevertheless, as we shall see, the



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oral histories of actors in the liberation struggle”. Five volumes were planned: on the 1960s, on the 1970s, the 1980s, the 1990s, the negotiated settlement, and would incorporate a focus on biographical profiles (Thabo Mbeki, ‘Address at the Launch of the South African Democracy Education Trust’ <[www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/2001/tm0321.html](http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/2001/tm0321.html)>; South African Democracy Education Trust, ‘Request for participation in oral history project of SADET’, Circular Letter from Prof Ben Magubane, Project Leader, n.d.; Sifiso Ndlovu, personal communication).

<sup>203</sup> Elinor Sisulu, *Walter & Albertina Sisulu*, p 9.

<sup>204</sup> <[www.hsrc.ac.za/about/annualReport/2001](http://www.hsrc.ac.za/about/annualReport/2001)>. It is also interesting to note that HSRC-based researcher and biographer, Thembeke Mufamadi, was also seconded to the Nelson Mandela Foundation. See <[www.hsrc.ac.za/media/2001/4/20010410.html](http://www.hsrc.ac.za/media/2001/4/20010410.html)>.

<sup>205</sup> ‘Book Information: Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary by Stephen Clingman’ (Flyer, n.d.). The lack of footnotes may have been explained by the fact that Clingman was a literary scholar and not a historian. Clingman’s previous book was about Nadine Gordimer’s novels. See Stephen Clingman, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986). In spite of the lack of formal footnotes, the book had general notes at the end indicating the sources for each chapter, as well as a comprehensive and formal bibliography.

<sup>206</sup> Ironically one of the co-publishers of this book was Mayibuye Books, one of the main sources through which the conventional, masculinist struggle biography proliferated in the 1990s. See Chapter Four.

<sup>207</sup> Stephen Clingman, ‘Biography and Representation: Some Analogies from Fiction’, History Workshop Conference, University of the Witwatersrand, February 1987. See the discussion of this paper in Chapter One.

study did not go far enough in the theoretical and methodological questions it posed about biographical production.

Clingman's book was a detailed study of the chronological unfolding of Bram Fischer's thought, consciousness and feelings, and his gravitation towards socialism, understood within the context of the trajectories and disjunctures of family history. The study has been interspersed with an organisational history of the politics of socialism and nationalism, and how these coincided with or were addressed by events or decisions in Fischer's life. Clingman's account is a no-holds barred narrative that does not conceal the difficulties and contradictions of the young Fischer's initial immersion in "physiognomic theories" of "racial morality", and of the simultaneous - though contradictory - presence in his young adulthood of enlightened relations with black people as well as ones regulated by master-servant ties, in an "almost feudal" mix of "intimacy and inequity". While this study has tried to reconstruct the minute biographic details of events, thoughts and deeds, of Fischer's life spent "in the doubled intensities of a legal and political career", Clingman also presented this account in a way that did not subordinate the personal and intimate to the political and public. Indeed this study goes beyond all other studies of South African resistance lives in examining the unfolding of a personal, relationship, and thus transgressing the convention of separating the supposedly 'rational' and 'affective'. Clingman's work is a biography of a political, intimate and sexual *relationship* between Fischer and Molly Krige, and their "complex fields of divergence as well as attraction" and also a study of his relationships with his children.<sup>208</sup>

Clingman's study has tried to analyse the seeming contradictions and ironies constituted by the apparent disjunctures between Fischer's family history and prospects on the one hand, and his politics on the other. Fischer's background was that of an elite Free State family and Boer struggles against British colonialism. His grandfather, Abraham, had opposed both Plaatje and Gandhi. His education as a Rhodes scholar had given him a

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<sup>208</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, pp 47, 103, 171, 379.

“vintage pedigree”, and a potential for privilege, which he turned his back on. In spite of these seeming contradictions across generations, Clingman argued that Fischer’s communist political choices and activism were indeed grounded in a family politics of “conviction and principle”. Fischer had inherited “a tempered resolve” and “a deep impulse to reconciliation, negotiation and peace” from his grandfather. His support for violence in the early 1960s had “historic precedents” in the struggle of Boer republics against British colonialism, as well as in his father Percy’s support for the 1914 rebels. As an Afrikaner, Fischer wanted Afrikaners in general to “find fulfilment and self-identification within the larger context of South African belonging”. Fischer’s life trajectory and patterns of biographic causation accorded to it were narrated in terms of lines of descent and family genealogies of principle and commitment, and in the “examples, gestures, styles [and] ways of being in the world” that he had inherited.<sup>209</sup>

In this emplotment, Clingman also sought to examine key moments of transition and catharsis in the unfolding of Fischer’s life and beliefs. Fischer’s decision to support the turn to violence in the early 1960s had been one which “went to the core of his being”, and which “initially he had not wholly believed”. Indeed, it seemed to mark “a boundary”, away from his “vision of reconciliation ... reciprocity and mutuality”, and, while Fischer sought to avoid “disintegration into futile violence”, “in the end he paid the absolute price”.<sup>210</sup> In October 1964, after he had been charged under the Suppression of Communism Act along with 11 of his comrades, Fischer was released on bail in order to make it possible for him to travel to London for a Privy Council appeal. After having given an undertaking that he would return to face trial, in spite of escalating repression and the “increasingly thin line between accused and defence”, Fischer returned to face trial, notwithstanding the protestations of his SACP comrades in London. Fischer had convinced his comrades of his argument that “the time had come when leaders ought not to leave but be prepared to stake everything”. While it was necessary to reconstitute the SACP inside South Africa, it was also important “to find a way of playing a

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<sup>209</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, pp 27, 109, 286.

<sup>210</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, pp 287, 335.



continued political role". It was "necessary for someone among the whites to demonstrate a spirit of real revolt".<sup>211</sup>

After Gerard Ludi, the security policeman who had infiltrated the movement and Piet Beyleveld, the central committee member who had co-operated with the police, presented incriminating evidence when the trial resumed, Fischer chose to abscond and to go underground. He wanted "to demonstrate that no-one would meekly submit to our barbaric laws". It was necessary to stem the tide of "seepage" overseas. And it was "not only blacks in South Africa" who should "make sacrifices or risk everything for the cause of freedom". Fischer chose to live in disguise, under a false name, "among the unseen and invisible world, in the way that blacks were normally unseen and invisible to whites". His choice of a "displaced identity" was a "radical statement of the possibility and necessity of a new and undivided world". Fischer found it troubling that "the essential character" of his actions required "translation", even to close colleagues, such as lawyer, George Bizos, who had enquired whether his nine months underground "had been worth sacrificing his family, his profession, and everything else". It should have been "no more unnatural for a white man to make sacrifices for a new and free world in South Africa than it was for a black".<sup>212</sup>

Apart from its frankness in presenting analyses of contradictory aspects of Fischer's life, and its bold attempt to address the politics of the personal, Clingman's study also attempted to assess aspects of Fischer's life history in terms of style and image, and identity and symbolism. It is these observations that took the study quite tantalisingly into the domain of the analytical.<sup>213</sup> Clingman did oral history research on Fischer the lawyer, and his "half-apologetic", even "self-deprecating" legal style, one that seemed strategic and skilful in its capacity to elicit "honest replies". In the 1950s, the Treason Trial had become "the medium into which his personal and political identity" had

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<sup>211</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, pp 339, 345, 358.

<sup>212</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, pp 358, 376, 380, 401-2.

<sup>213</sup> Indeed, Clingman has shown that it is possible for enormous empathy with one's subject – in the text he refers to Fischer as 'Bram' – to be accompanied by critical analysis.

“merged inextricably until 1961”. When Fischer went underground after deserting from his trial in 1964, his preparation had included devising plans for disguises, safe houses and “contact routines”. In a “play with images”, and amid rumours of plastic surgery, Fischer had resorted to a false name, the evocatively chosen Douglas Black, and spent most of his time “in solitude in an identity that wasn’t altogether his”.<sup>214</sup> While on the run, his life became the stuff of rumour and legend, with fantastic suggestions of where he had moved to, how he had been disguised, and what racial and other identities he had adopted.

In an overall assessment, Clingman suggested that Fischer’s “greatest effects were symbolic rather than practical”. While underground and wanted by police, Fischer had become “the ‘Red’ equivalent” of the ‘Black Pimpernel’, the name given to Nelson Mandela, when he had been on the run in the early 1960s. Despite “all the opportunities and temptations of the world to which he was heir”, Fischer became known for his demonstrated commitment and “living solidarity with the oppressed”. To Blacks, argued Clingman, Fischer had become “a nearly mythic figure, the one white man prepared to signal his devotion to justice with his life”.<sup>215</sup> Indeed, for Clingman, Fischer’s identity had been defined by the fact that he had “obeyed the moral laws of the gods and not of men” and by his ability to sustain identity “in circumstances which make that no longer possible”. As a symbol, Fischer became “the reverse image of Nelson Mandela”. Mandela was “the hero resurrected from the underworld”, the “embodiment of renewal combining youth and age, in whom the cycle of rebirth came through to its redemptive fulfilment”. In contrast, Fischer was “the one who had to succumb”, taking “the burdens of his people upon him”, “paying for their sins as an Afrikaner, dying because there was no place for him except in some non-existent future”.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, pp 240, 247-8, 354-367.

<sup>215</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, pp 373, 376.

<sup>216</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, pp 451, 456.

In exploring these issues of image, symbol and identity in relation to Bram Fischer's life history, and in suggesting that Fischer, as a "prototype" of the Afrikaner as South African and African, had taken on "a story of identity, its retention and extension, into the marrow of his own life",<sup>217</sup> Clingman had actualised his own arguments from eleven years previously about lives being laboratories of identity.<sup>218</sup> As useful as these issues may be for thinking about political biography in South Africa, it may have been possible for Clingman to go to the next level, to think about issues of biographic production and contestation in relation to Bram Fischer's life. Indeed the possible building blocks of such an examination were present in Clingman's research. He noted, for example, how Fischer's life had "migrated into fiction" in novels by Mary Benson, André Brink and Nadine Gordimer.<sup>219</sup> Clingman also briefly noted how Fischer's life had been memorialised through the creation of the Bram Fischer Memorial Library at the Legal Resources Centre (where Fischer's daughter, Ilse, worked as a librarian) and the inauguration of the Bram Fischer Memorial Lecture in Johannesburg.

There were other possibilities for exploring questions of biographic production. During his trial, Fischer presented a five-hour address (like Mandela) from the dock, "separating fact from fiction" as he dealt with the supposed evidence against him, and "weaving his own story against the backdrop of a broader political history". In this auto/ biographical presentation, given under the coercive conditions, Fischer traversed a range of issues, including his childhood, his membership of the Communist Party, its relationship with the ANC and uMkhonto we Sizwe, his belief in the rationality of Marxist understandings of the history of societies, his belief in the necessity for racial co-operation, and how necessary it was for Afrikaners to protest against discrimination. While this autonarration of Fischer's life became unavailable due to his banning, two *repressive* biographies had been published soon after Fischer's conviction and

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<sup>217</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, p 456.

<sup>218</sup> Stephen Clingman, 'Biography and Representation'.

<sup>219</sup> Mary Benson, *At the Still Point* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991, first published in 1969); André Brink, *Rumours of Rain* (London: W.H. Allen, 1978); Nadine Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter* (London: Cape, 1979). Benson had worked with Fischer during the Treason Trial in the 1950s, and had spent time with him while he was underground (Mary Benson, *A Far Cry: The Making of a South African*, Randburg: Ravan Writers Series, 1996).

imprisonment in Pretoria, which drew upon security police surveillance and the trial evidence to demonise Fischer and glorify the 'expertise' of the security police.<sup>220</sup> Indeed, narrations of Bram Fischer's life were produced since the 1960s under different circumstances and for different purposes: the auto/biography of principled rebellion, the biography of repression, and the biography of resistance as national memory.

But the key issue that cried out for analytical treatment was the rich collection of family correspondence and related material, which had been "entrusted" to Clingman by Ruth and Ilse Fischer. This was the material that, alongside oral history interviews, "[underlay] much of what [was] told" in Clingman's account. It may be that any more complex discussion of this collection was precluded by the decision to give only general and indirect references, and to follow certain "economies" with sources.<sup>221</sup> However, this matter extends beyond mere acknowledgement of the value of sources. Clingman himself had noted that it was Ilse who had saved her parents' old letters, which Fischer had wanted destroyed.<sup>222</sup> She had also kept other mementoes and documents, including rare legal texts, which Fischer had collected. Indeed, Ilse and Ruth Fischer had become the keepers of Bram Fischer's memory, without which Clingman's biography would not have seen the light of day. By 2002, these letters and documents were designated as the "Fischer family archives", and Ilse and Ruth Fischer had also mediated further biographic work on Bram Fischer's life.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Gerard Ludi and Blaar Grobbelaar, *The Amazing Mr Fischer* (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1966); Chris Vermaak, *Braam Fischer: The Man with Two Faces* (Johannesburg: APB-Publishers, 1966). Ludi was the security policeman who infiltrated the underground Communist Party, and who gave evidence against Fischer, while Vermaak was a crime reporter, who reported on the apparent triumph of the police in breaking the "intrigue and deceit (sic)" of Fischer and his "co-conspirators" (backcover). Two impressions of Vermaak's book were produced in 1966 in the context of an increasingly *kragdadig* apartheid order. Perhaps in order not to accord these publications any respect, Clingman did not refer to these 'repressive biographies', except in his bibliography.

<sup>221</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, p 461. In case any academic quibble may have arisen about his 'economies' of sources, Clingman promised to assist enquirers with "more detailed notations, references and directions".

<sup>222</sup> Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, p 379.

<sup>223</sup> Perennial political biographer, Martin Meredith, was granted access to the correspondence, and produced a popular biography of Fischer's life with Fischer's daughter's assistance. See Martin Meredith, *Fischer's Choice: A Life of Bram Fischer* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2002). This book of 164 pages was described as "more accessible" than Clingman's study,

While Clingman's study has posed the most serious methodological challenges for South African political biography, Clifton Crais has raised fundamental questions about the field of South African political history and resistance historiography, more generally. Crais has argued for a wider approach to understanding the domain of politics, a view that has implications for prevailing approaches to understanding political lives and biographies.<sup>224</sup> Less concerned with institutions and policies, and the trajectories of "elite politics", Crais' research sought to examine "an intimate history of the emergence and transformation of power's exercise and of people's experience of subjugation". In trying to understand how people constructed meaning "in the face of power", Crais focused his attention on "the conceptual world of people" that had "remained largely unspoken" and that had been driven from the archival record. This was a world in which people understood the exercise of power and authority as expressions of evil and the occult, giving rise to a critique of the state that utilised "indigenous grammars relating to magic and misfortune". In this subaltern politics which "unfolded as a form of conversion", magic and witchcraft "created the connective cultural tissue linking perception to action".<sup>225</sup>



In shifting the focus away from nationalism as a secular phenomenon of the African elite and the literate middle classes, which had been shaped by "liberal modernist sensibilities", Crais tried to reconstruct the imaginaries of a subaltern nationalism that was "not simply derivative", and that had "little to do with the bourgeois rights of the individual". Its roots lay in "indigenous" conceptions of power and authority, in "the belief that supernatural forces pervaded the world" and in "the ancient conversations"

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and was recommended for "those people who are not students of politics, or of history, but are interested in what goes into the making of remarkable people" (*Cape Argus*, 17/1/03).

<sup>224</sup> See Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*. See also other studies by Crais: 'Of Men, Magic and the Law: Popular Justice and the Political Imagination in South Africa', *Journal of Social History*, 1998, 'Introduction' and 'Conquest, State Formation, and the Subaltern Imagination in Rural South Africa', in Clifton Crais (ed), *The Culture of Power in Southern Africa: Essays on State Formation and Political Imagination* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003).

<sup>225</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, pp 5-13, 122.

Africans have had about power, authority, healing, virtue and wickedness.<sup>226</sup> In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Makhuluspan rural social movement in the Transkei, which emerged to put a stop to stock theft, appropriated and mimicked the categories, institutional practices and language of the state as it “concentrated on healing the open wounds of the community”. Its struggle against thieves was also concerned to support “ongoing community attempts to control and eradicate people who used magic to do harm”.<sup>227</sup>

The Congo groups that emerged in the 1940s, based on local male associations and the growth of migrancy, became a powerful force in organising resistance to policies of stock culling and rehabilitation and in directing struggles over the legitimacy of chiefs. As an “alternative site of political imagining”, they “gave voice” to a politics based on “the ancient and enduring problem of authority and social health” and that sought to confront evil and to “bring health to the world”.<sup>228</sup> By the late 1950s, as “anti-stock-theft crusades” spread and violence “washed over” much of the Eastern Cape, the Congo became “a powerful centre of political critique” and a “competing node of political authority” in Pondoland. The expressed grievances in meetings and the rituals of punishment and killing that ensued in 1960 unleashed a rebellion against Bantu authorities and apartheid collaborators. The actions of the Congo were marked by “incendiarism”, dismemberment of corpses, the use of herbs and ritual specialists, and the employment of fire, and these suggested that “magic and witchcraft formed an important feature of the revolt”.<sup>229</sup>

In arguing for a culturalist approach to understanding resistance, Crais has moved the focus away from the secular to the quotidian, from the institutional to the subaltern, from political policy to cross-cultural analysis. Crais’ work has been unusual in its attempt to think about politics and resistance history in a more conceptual way. Here, in the unfolding terrain of subaltern nationalism, social movements “appropriated facets of the

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<sup>226</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, pp 28, 143-144.

<sup>227</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, pp 173-174.

<sup>228</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, pp 182-193.

<sup>229</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, pp 188-206.



state they contested”, as the colonised sought “to penetrate the hidden abode of colonial power and to create a space within which to critique the authoritarian state”. This was a history of hybrid political forms and of appropriation and mimicry, of the intertwining of power and resistance, which sought to go beyond the convention of “how the thrust of the colonial state was met with the riposte of the oppressed”. Crais hoped that this approach would complicate and revitalise older conceptions of history ‘from above’ as well as history ‘from below’.<sup>230</sup>

While biography was not an overly apparent feature of Crais’ research, this altered framework incorporated concepts of personhood and resistance lives. Crais was interested in those “who did not occupy the more fortunate positions within colonial society”, and those “who did not lead but who sometimes participated in organised oppositional politics or formed local social movements of their own that contested the state and its functionaries”. Crais defined these people - “the poor who were hounded as they struggled to make ends meet”, and who “hovered on the edge of landlessness and poverty” - as the “subaltern”.<sup>231</sup> Their biographies were not simply those of ‘sturdy’ resisters at the local (and supra-local) level, whose life trajectories, as rational subjects, could be understood in terms of a Cartesian incremental modernity.

Instead, leaders of local social movements, such as Ntlabati Kwalukwalu of Mount Ayliff, evinced a hybrid and seemingly contradictory political consciousness, whose character was rooted in indigenous grammars. In addition, their ideas and practices were understood beyond a bifurcated notion of domination and resistance. Ntlabati, who had been stripped of his position of headman in the 1930s, led resistance by the Congo to stock culling and rehabilitation in Mount Ayliff in 1947, and yet continued to lay claim to chiefship. Ntlabati’s political trajectory, however, was not a reflection of some “backward-

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<sup>230</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, pp 137, 144, 229. Strangely, at no stage has Crais discussed the methodological and theoretical implications of his use of evidence led under the coercive circumstances of criminal trials for understanding ‘subaltern’ consciousness. In addition, questions need to be asked about how one can think about the notion of evil more historically and analytically, as a means of historicizing indigenous categories.

<sup>231</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, p 11.

looking” peasant consciousness. He had emerged as a leader of the fight against rehabilitation by a social movement that simultaneously seized ‘traditional’ institutions of chiefship and appropriated institutional forms of the state, as well as the political symbols of secular nationalism, giving rise to a “polymorphous polity” that had acquired popular legitimacy. His was a subaltern politics that wanted the moral reconstruction of chiefship, rather than its destruction and that sought the cathartic healing of society rather than the “seizure of power”.<sup>232</sup> Nlabati could not simply be typecast as heroic resister.

Crais’ framework for political history sought to understand resistance lives in terms of “the intertwined histories of state formation and popular culture”. Here, the state and its effects were “translated into indigenous concepts”. Crais tried to draw attention away from “secular vision[s]” of the state and society, whose “conception of social reality” had been “borrowed from the West”.<sup>233</sup> Secular nationalism was driven by “liberal modernist sensibilities”, which were framed in terms of a “register of radical individualism”. African political elites “scarcely understood” the sentiments and conceptions of subaltern nationalism, which had “perplexed and troubled” them, and which they had “disdained and dismissed”. Nevertheless, it was this “prophetic nationalism”, which “intersected with, and substantially radicalised, more conventional elite-based formations such as the ANC and the ICU”.<sup>234</sup> Subaltern social movements, according to Crais, engaged with formal nationalist political organisations from a relatively autonomous position, based on indigenous concepts.

Crais’ argument for a culturalist analysis of the political took the form of a shift away from modernist, secular institutions and conceptions of resistance in search of resistance in an indigenous idiom. Secular nationalism, by implication, was left to the attentions of documentary and social historians. Crais failed to address how histories of secular modernist politics could be reconceptualised in cultural terms beyond the framings of documentary and social history. This is a lacuna that this dissertation seeks to address, by

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<sup>232</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, pp 180-193.

<sup>233</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, pp 137, 144, 229.

<sup>234</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, p 144.

focusing on the creation of systems of representation, the emergence of organisational rituals and symbols and the development of biographical relations, as a means of reconfiguring the modernist political formation as an institution of knowledge production. One aspect of these knowledge processes and relations involved the evolution of conceptions of personhood, and the narration and dissemination (and contestation) of biographies of political leaders as part of political agitation and mobilisation.

In spite of these methodological challenges, in the mid-to-late 1990s and in the early 2000s, conventional, approaches to biography continued to rear their heads in the academy. These studies examined political lives through untheorised notions of leadership and personhood, and sought merely to establish and assert the significance of their subjects through chronological narrative and arguments framed in terms of empirical recovery of a lost history. The research ranged from the leadership abilities of Oliver Tambo and the forgotten achievements in education and politics of Z K Matthews to the importance of A W G Champion, the significance of Albert Luthuli and the legacy of Gandhi.<sup>235</sup> Ruth First's "vital role in the long struggle against racial oppression" was reflected upon in a series on "prominent" South Africans.<sup>236</sup> Imam Abdullah Haron was commemorated in a seminar titled "Leaders, Legends and People".<sup>237</sup> Biographies of 21 political leaders were

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<sup>235</sup>Luli Callinicos 'The Great interpreter: Images of O.R. Tambo', History Workshop Conference: Democracy Popular Precedents Practice Culture, 13-15 July, 1994; Paul Rich, 'Z K Matthews and the Democratic Theme in Black South African Politics', History Workshop Conference: *Democracy: Popular Precedents Practice Culture*, 13-15 July, 1994; Paul Rich, 'A W G Champion and Black Politics in Natal, 1925-1951', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20th Anniversary Conference: *Paradigms Lost, Paradigms Regained? Southern African Studies in the 1990s*, University of York, 9-11 September 1994; John Hendricks, 'The Significance of Albert Luthuli in the Struggle for Democracy in South Africa' (Unpublished Paper, 1996); Brian M du Toit, 'The Mahatma Gandhi and South Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 34, No 4, 1996.

<sup>236</sup>Don Pinnock, *Voices of Liberation, Volume 2: Ruth First*, Pretoria: HSRC Publishers, 1997, back cover. This book, containing a biographical essay and a selection of First's writings drew on Pinnock's conceptually muddled and technically flawed doctoral study, 'Writing Left: Ruth First and Radical South African Journalism in the 1950s', Ph.D dissertation, Rhodes University, 1992. The first volume in this series was a study of the "key ideas" which Albert Lutuli had "contributed to liberation thinking" in South Africa. See Gerald J Pillay, *Voices of Liberation, Volume 1: Albert Lutuli*, Pretoria: HSRC Press, 1993, Foreword.

<sup>237</sup>'Leaders, Legends and People', A Joint Seminar Organised by the Departments of Arabic and Religion of UWC to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Abdullah Haroon, South African Cultural History Museum, 3 September 1995 (Flyer).

documented as part of a study of popular religion in South Africa.<sup>238</sup> Heather Hughes attempted to address the absence of a “proper biography” of J.L. Dube by examining a further element in his range of ambiguities, viz. his membership of the Qadi chiefdom, while Cissie Gool’s life history and early political development were recovered through a feminist perspective.<sup>239</sup>

In the 1990s and early 2000s, modernist conventions of biography continued to characterise much research on lives of national and local leaders, as well as studies of ordinary people, as part of a growing national discourse about overcoming silences in the historical record, and mounting notions of history as lesson. What occurred in this work, as with their predecessors, was a ‘double’ or ‘compound modernism’, involving an encounter between modernist historical methods – of the recovery of lost histories through constructing an incremental chronological narrative and placing new facts on record – with modernist imaginaries of political institutions and national or local leaders, or individuals understood as bearers of pre-determined group identities. More broadly, this was the paradigm of the documentary, which sought to ‘fill gaps’ by recording narratives of resistance lives as verified truth. Indeed, the project of social history was itself driven by archival and empirical demands, as individuals were assigned to group identity categories of recovery.

Drawing on a genealogy that went back to Karis and Carter, these studies reflected a growing interest in political leadership and the lives of resistance leaders as means of addressing the political field of democracy and the nation in South Africa. In the mid-1990s, however, the flagship publication of South African resistance biography was the life history of Kas Maine by Charles van Onselen. This book may not have focused on the career of a ‘great man’ or a nationalist leader, but it served to create a symbol of resilience

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<sup>238</sup>Charles Villa-Vicencio, *The Spirit of Freedom: South African Leaders on Religion and Politics*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. Pioneer resistance biographer and documentary historian, Thomas G Karis, wrote the Foreword to this book.

<sup>239</sup>Heather Hughes, ‘Doubly Elite: Exploring the Life of John Langelibalele Dube’; Patricia van der Spuy, ‘Not only “Dr Abdurahman’s younger daughter”: A feminist exploration of early influences on the political development of Cissie Gool’, Ph.D Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2002.

and survival against the onslaught of virulent racism and disruptive capitalism. Both images of resistance - that of democratic and visionary leadership and that of the 'nobility of the ordinary' - fed into the post-apartheid biographic moment and provided a sense of history in the service of the nation.

In the face of these approaches, Stephen Clingman has shown how it is possible to ask more complex questions about life history, symbolism and identity. Clifton Crais, on the other hand, has chosen to move the resistance goalposts and has shifted attention away from the modernist to the quotidian as the basis of understanding lives of politics. These challenges arose as struggles continued to unfold over the appropriate lines of enquiry in historical representation, over the tasks and challenges of a radical history in South Africa after apartheid. These struggles unfolded inside and outside the academy, as sites and forums beyond the university seminar room emerged as critical domains for contesting public pasts. For us to enter the terrain of the cultural politics of biography means engaging in a wider debate over the definitions of the individual, the nature of the subject, and the search for new forms of identity and subjectivity. To this we add an essential focus upon the politics of biographic production as a means of transcending the unmediated, stable, oppositional subjects of resistance narratives. This would include examining such questions as biographical relations, the conditions and impetus of production, as well as biographic contestation. Understanding life histories beyond the realm of the real will enable us to acknowledge that we are productions, and that the stories we tell have to do with the stories we wish people to know about ourselves as we make sense of the hybridities from which we are constituted.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EXEMPLARY LIVES, LONG WALKS AND BEYOND: PUBLIC HISTORY, BIOGRAPHY AND NATION BUILDING IN SOUTH AFRICA

During the mid-1990s, the field of political auto/biography as a mode of negotiating the South African past experienced a period of growth, even a boom. This escalation in biographical production and a new focus on the deeds and actions of individuals did not only take place in the academy. It also occurred in almost all spheres of historical production in the public terrain. It is possible to see the mid-1990s as having been a peculiar 'biographical moment' in South African historical studies. The circumstances of political transition to 'democracy' saw the re-entry into public life on South African soil of political leaders, many of advanced age, after years in exile or imprisonment. With nation-building projected as a new imperative in South Africa after apartheid, the individual and the biographical life came to take on renewed centrality in the public domain in the mid-1990s as histories of resistance were morphed into histories of national reconciliation. The 'miracle' of the new South Africa and the demise of apartheid - so this new narrative went - had been made possible by the 'wisdom' of heroic leaders, and especially by the 'special magic' of Nelson Mandela.

In the mid-1990s, this biographic narrative was constructed in almost every sphere of public culture and through virtually every medium of historical representation. The result was the celebration and garlanding of leaders in the form of biographies in print and visual media, aimed at South Africans and the international market through publishing, television programming and tourism development. Publishers attempted to transform educational publishing by focusing both on the biographies of great political leaders as well as life histories of 'ordinary people'. Television became a key medium for the proliferation of historical documentaries, which sought to recover histories of resistance



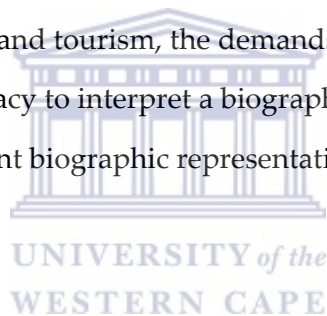
and reconciliation in South Africa. One of the central elements in this visual history was a focus on the narrated lives of political leaders, who were seen as having contributed to the demise of apartheid and the reconstruction of society. Related to this, the deaths of liberation movement leaders also led to intense public biographic engagement through the narration, evaluation and contestation over the meanings of their lives. One of the key settings for these debates and disputes was the spectacle of the mass public funeral, a number of which occurred live on television.

In the mid-1990s, apartheid's museums and heritage institutions embarked on initiatives to create an impression of change and renovation. In addition, new museums and projects began to emerge as part of the transformation of heritage. A significant amount of the heritage work of these bodies involved a concentration on political biography and life history, as the recovery methods of resistance history and social history seeped into the domain of public history. From the late 1990s, the creation of new national museums such as the Robben Island Museum and the Nelson Mandela Museum saw the more purposeful entry of conventional political biography into the domain of national heritage. The belated democratisation of heritage resources management involved a renewed search for sites of significance associated with black lives and resistance pasts, especially those of political leaders. These in turn formed the basis of new heritage trails and tourist routes. The process of heritage transformation also saw direct intervention by government through a parallel programme of Legacy Projects, a key feature of which was political biography as lessons of history. At the centre of all this biographic activity has been the life of Nelson Mandela, whose 'long walk' came to symbolise the new nation's past.

This chapter explores the features of this biographic approach that found expression beyond the academy in South Africa from the mid-1990s. It examines how modes of biographic narration were incorporated into the rituals of governance, political transformation and public policy. It argues that an examination of the range of biographic activity in the domain of public culture, and an understanding of the nature and conditions of biographic production are crucial to understanding the place of biography and the notions of the remarkable individual in the stories of resistance recovered as

constructions of national history. In considering all this biographic attention, it is also important to analyse the relations of cultural production through which biographies were produced, claimed and asserted and the biographic genealogies that these narrations drew upon.

Here we also suggest that these public biographic productions have not been without contest. In significant cases, in national heritage institutions as well as community museums, the discursive and methodological boundaries of these public histories were subjected to important challenges. While heritage projects continued to serve up new discourses of the heroic leader who delivered the new nation from apartheid's evil, and of reconciliation, South Africa's 'special offering' to the world, almost every sphere of heritage production has seen controversy and contestation. These contests have been fuelled by tensions within and between heritage institutions over the politics of memory, the imperatives of commerce and tourism, the demands of intellectual property, and claims on authority and primacy to interpret a biographic legacy. They have also seen the plots and methods of dominant biographic representations in museums subjected to significant critique.



This chapter suggests that the domain of heritage and public history requires serious examination, for it is here that attempts were being made to fashion the categories, images and stories of the post-apartheid nation. From the mid-1990s, it seems that the responsibility for the ideological work of national-identity formation, and the task of the creation of 'good citizens', seemingly shifted away from the schools to heritage institutions and mediums of public culture. Far from us having seen a retreat from history, the place of the past was redefined in the spaces of public history and heritage construction. Some academic historians began to rethink the conventions, hierarchies, routines and spaces of their discipline's teaching and research procedures.<sup>1</sup> Others long

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<sup>1</sup> On these matters, see the issues raised by Tim Nuttall and John Wright, 'Exploring beyond History with a Capital "H"', South African and Contemporary History Seminar, University of the Western Cape, 8 October 1998. See also the arguments about South African history and domains of production and representation in Gary Minkley, Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, 'Thresholds, Gateways and Spectacles: Journeying through South African hidden pasts and histories in the last decade of the

accustomed to clear hierarchies between primary and secondary source, and 'history' and 'heritage', tried in vain to hold on to the idea of a magnanimous flow of historical knowledge from the academy to the community in the form of popular history texts, and in the direction of schools through 'translation' into school textbooks. Convinced by the certainty of their expertise and their 'mission', some historians were not willing to dirty their hands in the supposedly inferior area of heritage, understood as a terrain of myth-making, omission and error.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter I argue that, contrary to views expressed within conventional approaches, 'heritage' in South Africa was not merely some lesser zone. Rather, it emerged as an assemblage of arenas and activities of history-making that were as disputatious as the claims made about the character of academic history. What is required, rather, is a sociology of historical production in the academy as well as the public domain, and an enquiry into the categories, codes and conventions of history-making in each location with all its variability. In South Africa after 1994, beyond the boundaries of the academy, histories began to erupt into the public sphere in visual form. Tourism, memorials, museums, television histories, and the TRC have been arenas in which histories have emerged, characterised by the "visuality of the spectacle". These visual histories have tended to be understood merely as 'revelations of hidden heritage', previously submerged by apartheid. Professional historians, long used to a world of words - written and spoken - were being confronted with these visual histories, whose codes and conventions they were ill equipped to read. Indeed, what may have been occurring in South Africa was a

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twentieth century'; Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Who Speaks for South African Pasts?' paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the South African Historical Society: "Not Telling: Secrecy, Lies and History", UWC, 11-14 July 1999; Ciraj Rassool, 'The Rise of Heritage and the Reconstitution of History in South Africa' and Carolyn Hamilton, Nsizwe Dlamini, Leslie Witz and Ciraj Rassool, 'Production of History post-1994'.

<sup>2</sup> See for example the posting by Jane Carruthers, 'Heritage and History', AFRICA FORUM #2, H-AFRICA (List for African History and Culture), 20 October 1998. Much of Carruthers' thinking about the distinction between 'history' and 'heritage' was drawn from the arguments of David Lowenthal in *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

fundamental reconstitution of the field of history, as well as what it meant to be a historian.<sup>3</sup>

### *Leaders' lives and public history*

It took brutal and untimely death in the midst of South Africa's transition to provoke biographical assessment. The assassination of political leader Chris Hani in 1993 in the midst of political negotiations gave rise to a flood of biographical offerings in the form of tributes and obituaries in which the politics and career of this "all-round combatant",<sup>4</sup> and "highly cultured" intellectual who "spoke the language of the poor",<sup>5</sup> were vigorously fought over. In these biographical contestations over the nature of his "unique"<sup>6</sup> qualities, Hani was presented in different ways. He was constructed as "a great thinker who was playing an increasingly important role in defining South Africa's socialist agenda" and who looked forward to a conference of "all Left forces" to try to "define the nature of the socialist project".<sup>7</sup> On the other hand he was also seen as a "strategist of unrivalled quality" who "was not a theoretician" but who nevertheless "towered over the liberation struggle".<sup>8</sup> Hani, it was said, "led the people because he knew how to listen to them".<sup>9</sup> A further account chose to construct Hani as a moderate, a "fighter for peace" who had spent time convincing ANC militants not to call for war to keep self-defence units in check.<sup>10</sup>

The murder of Chris Hani and the subsequent outpouring of biographic assessment seemed to set the scene for a relentless historical concentration on the great individual in

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<sup>3</sup> Gary Minkley, Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, 'Thresholds, Gateways and Spectacles: Journeying through South African hidden pasts and histories in the last decade of the twentieth century'; Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Who Speaks for South African Pasts?'

<sup>4</sup>Lennox Lagu, 'Chris Hani: All-Round Combatant', *Mayibuye*, May 1993, p 11.

<sup>5</sup>Joe Slovo, 'Chris Hani: The Musketbearer', *Mayibuye*, May 1993, p 10.

<sup>6</sup>Raymond Suttner, 'Remembering Chris Hani', *The African Communist*, No 136, First Quarter, 1994, p 68.

<sup>7</sup>Moeletsi Mbeki, 'Death of a Socialist', *Work in Progress*, No 89, June 1993, pp 10-12.

<sup>8</sup>Rok Ajulu, 'Obituary: Comrade Thembisile "Chris" Hani', *Review of African Political Economy*, 1993, pp 2-5.

<sup>9</sup>Editorial Notes', *The African Communist*, No 136, First Quarter 1994, pp 3-4.

<sup>10</sup>Nthoana and Mbulelo Mzamane, 'Hamba Kahle Chris Hani, 1942-1993', *Southern Africa Report*, July 1993, pp 22-24. See also 'Tribute to a People's Hero' (Poster), Issued by the ANC, SACP and COSATU.

South African public history. This took a variety of forms, aimed at diverse publics and markets. Television became a visual arena for revealing histories of resistance previously 'suppressed' in the public terrain. Video histories of South Africa screened on prime time television sought to reimage the visual codes of South African national history and rewrite the script of the nation's 'transition to democracy'. With few exceptions, these documentaries took conventional forms of talking heads, focused on the stories, deeds and adventures of individual leaders, generated through the medium of oral history on video.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, video biographies of significant personalities and key leaders, concentrating on the features of their leadership and their achievements in 'lives of struggle', were screened on television on a regular basis. Most focused on leaders associated with the ANC. Walter Sisulu, for instance, was constructed as a stalwart of struggle and "father of the nation", and Chief Albert Lutuli as a leader "of the country as a whole" in documentary tributes, while Bram Fischer was presented as a beacon of non-racialism within Afrikanerdom.<sup>12</sup> Chris Hani's life was memorialised for teenagers in an upbeat television presentation geared towards transmitting lessons on leadership and achievement.<sup>13</sup> Biographical videos of Chris Hani were also distributed to the public through CNA alongside a National Geographic wildlife series and videos promoting Cape Town to tourists.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>See for example, *Ulibambe Lingashoni - Hold up the Sun - The ANC and Popular Power in the Making*, Directed by Lesley Lawson, Series Director, Lawrence Dworkin, Produced by Afravision, 1993. The first two episodes were initially screened on the pay-channel, MNet and then aborted. Subsequently, the series was screened in full on SABC TV. The producers described it (on the video cover) as "a record of the resistance against apartheid by the masses of South Africans" which "reveal[ed] ... the rich tapestry of South African history". Another example was the documentary programme, *Our Heroes* (Produced for SABC2 by Pheny Film and Television, n.d) which presented a history of resistance centred on uMkhonto we Sizwe and dedicated to "heroes" who fought for freedom "in our lifetime". This programme was screened on Day of Reconciliation, 16 December 1997.

<sup>12</sup>*Walter Sisulu: Father of the Nation*, Produced and Directed by Beate Lipman, Current Affairs Films for Channel 1, SABC, 1996; *Mayibuye Afrika: Chief Albert Lutuli - his Story*, Produced and Directed by Charlotte Owen and Peter Corbett, 1993; *The Life of Bram Fischer*, Produced by Jill Engelbrecht and Maryanne de Villiers, c. 1995.

<sup>13</sup>*Chris Hani: A Struggle, A Challenge* (SABC, 1996).

<sup>14</sup>One significant example is *The Life and Times of Chris Hani* (Afravision/Safritel, 1994). An interesting exception was the biographic video of Govan Mbeki, *Heart and Stone*, made by Cape Town film maker, Bridget Thompson, which departed from the framework of cliography to focus on Mbeki in relation to

Some space was set aside for presenting non-ANC resistance lives as hidden histories of achievement, and as exemplary records of perseverance. An example of such a documentary was the biography of Robert Sobukwe screened on SABC shortly after Human Rights Day, 21 March 1997.<sup>15</sup> It was screened to commemorate Sobukwe's leadership of the campaign against pass laws on that date in 1960 which led to the killing of 68 and injury to 186 at Sharpeville after police opened fire on a crowd of protesters. The documentary sought to remember Sobukwe as "the man who initiated the beginning of the end of apartheid". The filmmaker Kevin Harris sought to depict Sobukwe's "Messiah-like" image and his "incredible consistency in integrity". Sobukwe was, in Harris' view, "a national role model for everyone".<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps one of the most significant moments for television political biography in the 'new' South Africa was the screening of two documentaries on Steve Biko during September 1997, the month which marked the twentieth anniversary of his murder in detention. Together, these documentaries sought to celebrate the life and times of "one of our great historical figures".<sup>17</sup> Biko's son, Nkosinathi and his friend Nhlanhla Dakile made the first as a filmic journey of discovery and healing.<sup>18</sup> It focused on the memories of Biko's family and comrades, and the ways in which they came to terms with the loss of a "remarkable man".<sup>19</sup> The second documentary, made by Matsamela Manaka presented Biko as "a

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questions of family, music and the politics of the personal. See *Heart and Stone*, Directed by Bridget Thompson for Tomas Films, 1998.

<sup>15</sup>*Robert Sobukwe: A Tribute to Integrity*, Kevin Harris Productions, 1997. It drew on the biography by Benjamin Pogrand, *Sobukwe and Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1990) as well as interviews with the author. Pogrand, former deputy editor of the *Rand Daily Mail* and its erstwhile reporter on 'African affairs' was a long-time friend of Sobukwe. His efforts at image construction and his relationship with Sobukwe are important to consider in studying the relations of cultural production involved in the production of lives. See below.

<sup>16</sup>See publicity material in *Sunday Life*, 23 March 1997, p 21; See also Benjamin Pogrand, 'Prisoner, Prisoner, Prisoner + 1', *Sunday Life*, 23 March 1997.

<sup>17</sup>*Sunday Life*, 7 September 1997, p 30.

<sup>18</sup>*Bantu Steven Biko: Beacon of Hope*, Produced by Nkosinathi Biko and Nhlanhla Dakile, Quattro Media Productions, 1997.

<sup>19</sup>*Sunday Life*, 7 September 1997, p 30.



unifier and a liberator of the mind”.<sup>20</sup> For Manaka, Biko was not only the “father of black consciousness”. He was

an academic, intellectual, politician and a friend to all South Africans ... father to a beloved family and a father to the common people of his beloved country, South Africa.<sup>21</sup>

Screened around the time of the TRC hearings into the cause of his death, as well as the unveiling of a new Biko monument in East London,<sup>22</sup> these documentaries were part of a fortnight of intense biographic attention accorded to Biko to mark the anniversary of his death.<sup>23</sup> In casting the “revered South African democrat”<sup>24</sup> as father to the country and as a figure through whom people were able to discover themselves, these documentaries accorded Biko the status of martyred patriarch, whose legacy served to protect the new nation and ensure the unity of its people.

Indeed, much of biographical documentary were vehicles for transition narratives of reconciliation, healing and nation-building. The life history of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chairperson of the TRC, was deemed to be this narrative’s embodiment.<sup>25</sup> Arnold Stofile’s biography, located within a genealogy of ANC political leaders in the Eastern Cape, came to stand for the efforts at “building a nation” in the Eastern Cape.<sup>26</sup> The life stories of activists and middle-level leaders were presented as stories of survival and endurance in the face of torture, terror and imprisonment by the state. While he had been the Chief Land Claims Commissioner, Joe Seremane told of his commitment to PAC politics, which led to his imprisonment on Robben Island for six years. He faced death while being tortured during solitary confinement in the 1970s. During this time, he shifted from

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<sup>20</sup>*Steve Biko: Journey of the Spirit*, Written and Directed by Matsamela Manaka. Produced by Peter Trehaeven. An Ekhaya/Tent Production for SABC 1, 1997.

<sup>21</sup>*Steve Biko: Journey of the Spirit*.

<sup>22</sup>See discussion below.

<sup>23</sup>The anniversary of Steve Biko’s death was also commemorated in 1997 at the District Six Museum in Cape Town in an art exhibition, *The Legacy of Steve Biko: Twenty Years On*, organised by Agency Afrika and artists organised into a structure called ‘The Twenty Years Later Arts Collective’.

<sup>24</sup>*Friday*, Supplement to the *Mail and Guardian*, September 12-18, 1997, p 12.

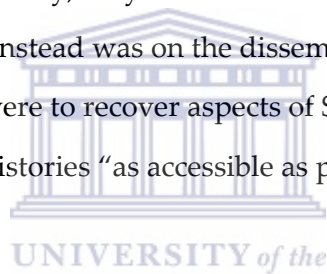
<sup>25</sup>*Desmond Tutu: Man Without Fear* (Produced and Directed by Hennie Serfontein, 1996). This programme was available for purchase on video from SABC Broadcast Enterprises.

<sup>26</sup> *Building a Nation: the Eastern Cape Province* (SABC, 1998).

advocating a politics of militant anger to advocating peace and reconciliation. His life story, as a transition narrative, was presented as a case study in new patriotism, exemplifying the possibilities of national reconciliation.<sup>27</sup>

### *Biographic mediations and museum transformations*

One of the central institutions that mediated the production of public history in the 'new South Africa' in the mid-1990s was the Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture. Described in the early 1990s as a "birthplace for culture" in Cape Town, and a "resting place for history, this was an institution that focused on "all aspects of apartheid, resistance, social life and culture in South Africa". It was set up in 1991 at the University of the Western Cape and incorporated the visual and documentary archival holdings of the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF), which had been relocated to South Africa. Despite being based at a university, very little of the Mayibuye Centre's work was academic in nature. Its focus instead was on the dissemination of public pasts. Among the objectives set for the Centre were to recover aspects of South African history "neglected in the past" and to make these histories "as accessible as possible".<sup>28</sup>



The Mayibuye Centre tried to achieve its objectives through visual and documentary archival work, an oral history collection and publishing unit. It also produced several exhibitions that travelled around the country, and its members became keenly involved in policy formulation around the transformation of South Africa's museums and heritage institutions. Much of this heritage practice culminated in the Centre's initiatives in planning for a showcase national museum on Robben Island that began with the exhibition *Esiqithini*, produced in conjunction with the South African Museum.<sup>29</sup> In all of

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<sup>27</sup>Joe Seremane: *No Man's Land*, Produced and Directed by Hennie Serfontein, 1997.

<sup>28</sup>André Odendaal, 'Let it Return!', *Museums Journal*, April 1994; *On Campus* (Official Newsletter of the University of the Western Cape), Vol 3, No 19, 21-27 July, 1995; Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture, Fourth Annual Report, 1995. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, IDAF was an anti-apartheid solidarity and information service based in Britain. It was the successor body to the Treason Trial's Defence Fund.

<sup>29</sup>André Odendaal, 'Let it Return!'; *On Campus* (Official Newsletter of the University of the Western Cape), Vol 3, No 19, 21-27 July, 1995; Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture, Fourth Annual Report, 1995.

these ways, the Mayibuye Centre was a key and influential agency of historical production in South Africa and an “active, shaping force” for the production of memory.<sup>30</sup> It was central in both the creation and management of historical images and narratives. The histories produced took shape in different mediums, each seeking to recover hidden pasts and resistance histories for the new nation.<sup>31</sup> The Mayibuye Centre was not merely a conduit for the reversal of amnesia. Instead, it was a ‘theatre of memory’, with its own “patterns of construction and forgetting” through which history was revised and revisioned.<sup>32</sup>

Alongside a heroic narrative, biography particularly of political leaders had an important place in these histories. Apart from its publications, the Mayibuye Centre also became a heritage institution to be visited by tourists and pupils in search of biographic history lessons. During 1996, schoolchildren seeking fresh accounts of the South African past during visits to the Mayibuye Centre were taken through a portrait gallery of resistance faces in South African history. Alongside the Freedom Charter, the Treason Trial and protest marches against the pass laws, pride of place in these history lessons was given to the individual resistance leader. With questions such as: “He was one of the founder members of the ANC Youth League and was imprisoned for 26 years on Robben Island. Who was he?” and “Which Rivonia trialist was imprisoned on Robben Island with Nelson Mandela and is now a member of the Senate?”, the lives of political leaders were placed at

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<sup>30</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994), p x.

<sup>31</sup>A cursory glance at the early publications of Mayibuye Books shows the extent to which popular political auto/biography featured in its efforts to recover a lost heritage. This took different forms, ranging from the edited collection accompanied by a biographical introduction, the edited ‘autobiography’ or ‘memoirs’ of political activists or those close to them, and the re-edited biography. See, for example, Zubeida Jaffer, *The Story of Bibi Dawood of Worcester* (1991); Sadie Foreman and Andre Odendaal (eds), *A Trumpet from the Housetops: The Selected Writings of Lionel Forman* (1992); Phyllis Ntantala, *A Life’s Mosaic* (1992); André Odendaal and Roger Field (eds), *Liberation Chabalala: The World of Alex La Guma* (1993); Edward Roux, *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography* (Introduced and Edited by Brian Bunting with a Foreword by Chris Hani, New Edition, 1993); Frieda Bokwe Matthews, *Remembrances* (1995); Notoo Babenia as told to Iain Edwards, *Memoirs of a Saboteur* (1995); Archie Sibeko (Zola Zembe) with Joyce Leeson, *Freedom in Our Lifetime* (1996); Eddie Daniels, *There and Back: Robben Island 1964-1978* (1998). The efforts of academics were also apparent in some of these works. Mayibuye Books produced more ‘scholarly’ works of a biographical nature in association with other publishers. See Chapter Three for an extended examination of these.

<sup>32</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p x.

the centre of South African history as well as informal citizenship training for schoolchildren.

Resistance biography was a feature of the organisation and development of the Mayibuye Centre's archive as well. This took the form of collections of personal papers of activists, consisting of correspondence, manuscripts, documents and other materials that were compiled, ordered and catalogued. More than simply objective documentary records, these collections could be seen as forms of biography that contained narratives of resistance lives and reflected different stages of intervention and strategies of production.<sup>33</sup> It may be the case that the Mayibuye Centre was no different from other archives more generally, in which collections based on personal papers were a time-hallowed orthodoxy. Indeed, it is interesting to note the extent to which biography may lie at the heart of the archive in general.<sup>34</sup> After embarking on projects to turn resistance archives into digital products, the Mayibuye Centre also planned to take their collections in political biography into the multimedia realm.<sup>35</sup>

In the early to mid-1990s, the South African reading public, especially young schoolgoers, were also served with a popular history series based largely on political biography. Presented as a historical recovery and restoration initiative, booklets in the series entitled *They Fought for Freedom* focussed on Sol Plaatje, Z.K. Matthews, Yusuf Dadoo, Mohandas Gandhi, Oliver Tambo, Helen Joseph, Steve Biko, Dora Tamana and Chris Hani among others. More than twenty publications were planned in this series. Individually and taken

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<sup>33</sup>See, for example, 'Ahmed Kathrada Collection', Compiled by Kier Schuringa (Mayibuye Centre Catalogues No 9, 1995) and 'Dr Yusuf Mohamed Dadoo Personal Papers', Compiled by Peter Limb (Mayibuye Centre Catalogues No 15, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> Although some attention is given to presence of autobiographical texts in archives, this conceptual issue of the organisation of archives is surprisingly not a focus of analysis in Carolyn Hamilton et al (eds), *Refiguring the Archive*.

<sup>35</sup>See the monumental CD-ROM series, *Apartheid and the History of the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*. This CD-ROM publication was available either as a "Concise History", with material selected especially as a "Home Edition", or as a "Comprehensive History" formatted either as an "Academic Edition" or "Library Edition". ('Quick Facts: *Apartheid and the History of the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*', Mayibuye CD-ROM Publications, October 1995 [Pamphlet]). In 1996, the Mayibuye Centre was also planning a CD-ROM production on the life of Walter Sisulu, incorporating animation and hours of recorded oral history.

together, these booklets attempted to show how leaders in southern Africa had “struggled for freedom and justice”. They sought to recover the “important roles” of leaders, who had been “largely ignored by the history books”. Educational activities appended to the end of the booklets sought to test learners’ grasp of chronology and causation in appreciating each life history, as well as their memory of the ‘biographic facts’ presented.<sup>36</sup>

The tendency in these biographical offerings was for narratives of political events to be constructed through a clear story line with emphasis placed on the deeds and decisions of leaders. Historical explanation was couched in terms of individual character and intention, and history in the form of chronological narratives of individual ‘great lives’ was presented as furnishing lessons of the past. Almost without exception, the individuals portrayed in the series were leading representatives of resistance paths associated with the ANC. Individually and collectively, the booklets focused on the construction of a national identity, stressing the ‘non-racialism’ of their subjects and their capacities to transcend racial and ethnic divisions and identities. Biography in the form of the lives, speeches and opinions of leaders formed the basis of histories of resistance and political organisations. Indeed, the individuals constructed in these resistance biographies were reduced to “hangers on which to peg ... repetitive histories of struggle”.<sup>37</sup> In similar vein, the Mayibuye Centre was a co-publisher of portable pocketbooks called ‘The Essential Series’, which sought to “[capture] the essence of South African people, places and things” mainly for tourists. Once again, political biography was a key element in these lessons of political

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<sup>36</sup>This series produced by educational publishers Maskew Miller Longman under the general editorship of John Pampallis grew rapidly between 1992 and 1995, and featured a list of ‘Great Women’ as well, such as Tamana, Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi, Ruth First and Cissie Gool. Pampallis had been the author of the history textbook, *Foundations of the New South Africa* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1991), which in hagiographic fashion, presented South African history as a long march to a triumphant ANC-oriented non-racialism. Pampallis had used an earlier version of this text, *National Struggle, Class Struggle*, in history classes at Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania. See my critical discussion of this text, ‘Foundations of a New Mythology’, *South African Historical Journal*, No 26, May 1992.

<sup>37</sup>Nicky Rousseau, ‘A Curious Flattening of History’, *Democracy in Action*, Vol 8 No 6, 15 October 1994, pp 28-29.

history, which drew together texts, documents and chronologies in search of the 'essence' of leaders' lives and politics.<sup>38</sup>

In the mid-1990s, even old museums jumped on to the new biographical bandwagon as a means of recovering hidden pasts and building the nation. The National English Literary Museum made a foray into resistance biography through the production of a travelling exhibition on the life of writer and early ANC leader, Sol Plaatje.<sup>39</sup> The exhibition was an opportunity to draw attention away from the Museum's settler colonial legacy, and made use of photographs and texts to create a chronological narrative of Plaatje's life. For the curators, this was the life of a man

who overcame the limitations of his very basic education to become one of South Africa's most distinguished writers and political leaders. It is also the story of a nation, for Plaatje lived his whole life as someone fully conscious of his place within society and his responsibility to it.<sup>40</sup>

Through this exhibition, Plaatje's life was chronicled as seamless and consistent in its resistance efforts, as a metaphor for national history, which could now be recovered after apartheid, and as worthy of being held up as pioneering and exemplary. To enable the nation to learn lessons of Sol Plaatje's life, now inscribed into national heritage, the exhibition was taken to Cape Town where it opened at the District Six Museum on Human Rights Day, 21 March 1997. It was billed as an occasion to honour "a leader of the struggle" who "devoted his life to fighting apartheid oppression".<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Among the titles were *The Essential Nelson Mandela*, *The Essential Steve Biko* (both compiled by Robin Malan), *The Essential Desmond Tutu* (compiled by John Allen) and *The Essential Robben Island* (by Harriet Deacon), Bellville and Cape Town: Mayibuye Books and David Philip, 1997. Tourists could acquire these along with *The Essential Guide to Rock Art* (by Anne Solomon) and *The Essential Evita Bezuidenhout* (by Pieter-Dirk Uys) and *The Essential Guide to Whales in Southern Africa* (compiled by Mike Bruton), as handy curios and mementoes of their visit to South Africa.

<sup>39</sup>National English Literary Museum (Grahamstown), *Sol Plaatje: Writer and Politician* (Travelling Exhibition), 1997.

<sup>40</sup>National English Literary Museum (Grahamstown), *Sol Plaatje: Writer and Politician* (Travelling Exhibition), 1997.

<sup>41</sup>*Cape Argus*, 20 March 1997.



Biography also provided the basis of attempts by the McGregor Museum in Kimberley to add new histories on to their old exhibits as part of the process of “depict[ing] all the people in the province”. In this ‘add-on’ approach to transformation, the museum “added snippets of information and occasional portraits of Kimberley’s blacks into existing displays of Kimberley’s Firsts and Kimberley’s Personalities”.<sup>42</sup> The Albany Museum in Grahamstown also tried to carve a post-apartheid position for itself by producing a biographical directory of Eastern Cape African leaders as part of its “New History” series.<sup>43</sup> Instead of a focus merely on white history and “the glorification of one group and its heroes at the expense of others”, the objective of the new series was to introduce the “linked histories of all the people of the eastern Cape”. The biographical directory, the second publication in the series, was an initiative to “provide basic information about some of the Black people who have made a major contribution to South African society and who hail from the eastern Cape”, and to “document our leaders before they are forgotten”. The result was a focus on what was described as “Xhosa leadership”.<sup>44</sup>

Trapped within these racial and ethnic premises for the production of history, the directory consisted of an alphabetised gallery of ANC leaders with a few PAC or Black Consciousness figures thrown in. The directory also contained profiles of “royal” leadership from precolonial times. In the view of then Eastern Cape Premier and former Rivonia trialist, Raymond Mhlaba, the publication was to be commended for “bridging the gap ... between the known leadership and the royalty and leadership of yester-year”.<sup>45</sup> In order to place the biographical sketches in a “time framework and context”, a timeline was provided, showing “the major historical and political events from c.600 AD to 2 February 1990”. There is also a “general historical directory” which gave information on “the major organisations and ideologies” to which it referred.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, ‘Who Speaks for South African Pasts?’, p 14.

<sup>43</sup>David R Owen, *Ubukhosi Neenkokeli: A Directory of Eastern Cape Black Leaders from c. 1700 to 1990*, Grahamstown: Albany Museum, 1994.

<sup>44</sup>David Owen, *Ubukhosi Neenkokeli*, front cover; pp 7-13.

<sup>45</sup>Foreward to David Owen, *Ubukhosi Neenkokeli*, p 5.

<sup>46</sup>David Owen, *Ubukhosi Neenkokeli*, p 13.

Significantly, the schoolgoing and popular audiences at whom the directory was aimed were invited to participate in the biographical exercise in public historical production. In the light of “profound discrepancies” in recorded information created “under the repressive conditions of the Apartheid era”, as well as the need for accuracy, a special “response and information form” was provided to encourage readers to submit correct or provide additional information for future editions. In addition, the Museum asked readers to consider who had been omitted from the gallery of leaders: “There may well be ... people not listed that you feel to be important and which should be included in the *Directory*”. However, the Museum warned that sources would need to be submitted in order that their accuracy and reliability may be scrutinised. The museum promised that all information subsequently used would be acknowledged so that “the people will be able to become part of this book about their leaders”.<sup>47</sup>

MuseumAfrica in Newtown, Johannesburg was another museum that encouraged visitor participation in the creation of resistance biographies as part of the process of institutional transformation. MuseumAfrica had emerged out of the old municipal Africana Museum, and “embarked on a completely new direction”, hoping to “transform itself into a dynamic community space” where “the diverse history of southern Africa” could be explored. This it did through a new exhibition, ‘Johannesburg Transformations’, which dealt with Johannesburg’s earliest history as well as themes of labour, politics, urban conditions and cultural expression. Inspired by the social history research of the History Workshop, this exhibition was an attempt by the Museum to chart a new course away from its reputation as “a boring, static and largely irrelevant display space for predominantly white, colonial artefacts”.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>David Owen, *Ubukhosi Neenkokeli*, pp 12-13; ‘Ubukhosi Neenkokeli Response and Information Form’ (Pamphlet).

<sup>48</sup>Deon van Tonder, ‘From Mausoleum to Museum: Revisiting Public History at the Inauguration of MuseumAfrica, Newtown’, *South African Historical Journal*, No 31, November 1994, pp 166, 177-183. See also Carolyn Hamilton, ‘Against the Museum as Chameleon’, *South African Historical Journal*, No 31, November 1994. These articles assess the displays mounted to inaugurate MuseumAfrica’s new exhibitions on its opening in August 1994 and to analyse their curatorial methods and intellectual influences.

As part of these transformations, MuseumAfrica also presented a permanent exhibition in 1996 on the 1956 Treason Trial, inspired by a series of drawings made in court by trialist, I.O. Horwitch, which it acquired in 1995.<sup>49</sup> *Tried for Treason* attempted to tell the story of the Trial through the voices of the trialists, their families, the legal teams, the press, the photographers and the police. In addition, video interviews and notebooks were used as “living history” to capture the attention and the memories of museum visitors.<sup>50</sup> A central place in the exhibition was given to political biography. An entire room was devoted to biographies of the trialists in the shape of portrait photographs and sketches, and accompanying biographical information. Significantly, visitors were encouraged to participate by adding biographical information on pads of blank paper placed underneath each photograph in the photographic gallery. *Tried for Treason* was also turned into a scaled-down, travelling exhibition so that a resistance legacy could be made available to schools. MuseumAfrica’s visitors and audiences were told that the Treason Trial had been “a turning point in the consolidation of apartheid and of resistance to it”.<sup>51</sup>

The Treason Trial also represented a key moment in the production of resistance histories through political biography and of the emergence of popular biography as a tool of political mobilisation and solidarity against repression. In the late 1950s, the Treason Trial Defence Fund was a central mediating institution in the production of solidarity biography.<sup>52</sup> The Treason Trial also generated other cultural representations, such as Alex La Guma’s vivid descriptions and “court cameos” published in *Fighting Talk* and *New Age*.<sup>53</sup> MuseumAfrica collected Horwitch’s portrait drawings as visual documents of activists and leaders who had been put on trial in the 1950s, and were inserted into a post-

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<sup>49</sup>*Tried for Treason: An Exhibition on the Treason Trial of 1956-61*, MuseumAfrica, Johannesburg, 1996; ‘Tried for Treason: An Exhibition on the Treason Trial of 1956-1961, Opening on 27 February 1996’ (Poster, MuseumAfrica, Johannesburg, 1996).

<sup>50</sup>‘Tried for Treason’ (Visitor’s Guide, MuseumAfrica, n.d.).

<sup>51</sup>‘Tried for Treason’ (Visitor’s Guide, MuseumAfrica, n.d.).

<sup>52</sup>See, for example, *South Africa’s Treason Trial*, Johannesburg: “Africa!” Publications, 1957. Anthony Sampson’s book on the Treason Trial, *The Treason Cage: The Opposition on Trial in South Africa* (London: Heinemann) was published in 1958 and contained a series of profiles of some of the Treason Trial’s prominent defendants. It also provided basic biographic data on all the accused in an appendix. Mary Benson worked in the Treason Trial Defence Fund during 1957 and this experience was crucial in foregrounding her research on South African resistance history which granted a special place to biography. See the discussion below.

<sup>53</sup> These were brought together in André Odendaal and Roger Field (eds), *Liberation Chabalala*.

apartheid history exhibition in which resistance lives formed the basis of heritage recovery.

From these biographic activities in the late 1950s, popular political biography went on to acquire an important position in international solidarity work and political mobilisation through a variety of ANC-aligned 'struggle histories' produced in exile in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>54</sup> Political biography also became a medium of political mobilisation, solidarity and propaganda by exiled and underground political movements. A key text in this vein was the biography of Communist Party and ANC leader, Moses Kotane written by Brian Bunting.<sup>55</sup> Written to commemorate Kotane's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, and published by SACP publisher, Inkululeko Publications, this study sought to trace the "immense contribution" of a "revolutionary" leader to the cause of "national liberation". Kotane's life was constructed as the story of South Africa's resistance to apartheid and racial oppression, and as a "monumental" case study in the indigenisation of Marxism. Kotane was seen as the embodiment of the "consistency between proletarian internationalism and healthy nationalism".<sup>56</sup> In the late 1970s and early 1980s, an unobtrusive, scaled-down, pocket-sized, blank covered version of the first edition of Bunting's biography of Kotane was circulated illegally in South Africa.<sup>57</sup>

This biographical study of Moses Kotane was part of a long line of solidarity auto/biographies that were produced either by political movements or as part of political mobilisation. Some were of a popular nature, while others laid claim to a more scholarly character. Possibly the first of these biographies was R.K. Cope's study of the life of labour

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<sup>54</sup>The publishing work of IDAF was perhaps the most significant.

<sup>55</sup>Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary*, London: Inkululeko Publications, 1986 (First Published in 1975), pp 1-2. This study was first published to commemorate Kotane's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was presented to him at a special birthday ceremony in a Moscow hospital, attended by members of the ANC Executive Committee, the SACP Central Committee and members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. At this ceremony, Kotane was also awarded the Isithwalandwe award for his "wise and patriotic leadership and statesmanship", and his "combination of national patriotism with a true sense of internationalism" (p 278).

<sup>56</sup>Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, pp 1-2.

<sup>57</sup> I have a copy of this publication in my possession.

leader, Bill Andrews.<sup>58</sup> Written from different political perspectives, these auto/biographies focused on the lives of resistance leaders, ranging from Albert Luthuli and Clements Kadalie to Johnny Gomas and Moses Mayekiso.<sup>59</sup> They presented partisan stories of nationalist or socialist resistance politics, or narratives of political or trade union organising. Each set out to explain or justify a set of political decisions, or to construct their subject as supportive of particular political strategies.

In many cases, the process of production was significant. Some were constructed as biographic memoirs involving the intervention of amanuenses. An example of such an auto/biography was the account of Albert Luthuli's life, *Let My People Go: An Autobiography*. Charles and Sheila Hooper, whom Luthuli described as his "amanuenses" were deeply involved in every stage of the production of this text. Each made "independent records" from dictation by Luthuli. These were then reassembled and "arranged ... chronologically" to comprise a first draft of the book. To this Luthuli added his "afterthoughts" and "occasional corrections".<sup>60</sup>

Another example of collaborative authorship in the creation of an auto/biographic text of the experience of apartheid repression was the book produced by Indres Naidoo and Albie Sachs about conditions of Robben Island. It was necessary "to convey the meaning of Robben Island through the experiences of one prisoner told extensively and concretely". In order to "finish the story as soon as possible", to "do justice to it", while making it "as accurate and readable as possible", Sachs and Naidoo worked together "during [their] spare moments, working at nights and over weekends". Together, they

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<sup>58</sup>R.K. Cope, *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W H Andrews, Workers' Leader*, Cape Town: Stewart Printing Company, c.1943.

<sup>59</sup>These auto/biographies included Albert Luthuli, *Let My People Go: An Autobiography*, Glasgow: Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1987 (First published in 1962); Clements Kadalie, *My Life and the ICU: The Autobiography of a Black Trade Unionist*, London, 1970; Helen Joseph, *Side by Side*, London: Zed Books, 1986; Labour and Community Resources Project (LACOM), *Comrade Moss*, Johannesburg: Learn and Teach Publications, 1989; Doreen Musson, *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the Working Class. A Political Biography*, Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1989. See also the biographical essay by Ray Alexander, 'Johnny Gomas as I Knew Him', *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol 15, No 5, January 1991, which fiercely contested Musson's characterisations.

<sup>60</sup> Albert Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, p 15.

“grouped the themes into chapters” and produced a narrative of “an island in chains”, a “story of resistance” in the first person “as seen through the eyes one who lived through it all for ten years”. The collaborative aspects of this book’s production went further. The manuscript had been submitted “to the scrutiny” of other former Island prisoners, and their “helpful comments” had greatly “enriched the book”. *Island in Chains* was an example of collaborative political auto/biography put to work of exposing conditions on Robben Island, with an eye to having it closed down, with all political prisoners released.<sup>61</sup>

From the 1960s, in the aftermath of the Treason Trial, Sharpeville and Rivonia, lines of dominance and ascendancy emerged within this biographical lineage, as the terrain of resistance politics was fundamentally altered and a dominant history of resistance centred on the ANC was consolidated. As the ANC established its dominance in South African exile politics, a heroic history of the ANC was created tracing a progressive process of political development, of growth leading to greater maturity and militancy as lessons of the past were learnt. The 1950s was viewed as a ‘golden age’ of political achievement on the part of the Congress movement. By the 1980s inside South Africa, the resurgent Congress movement in the form of the UDF sought to build a national movement through replicating the perceived glories of the 1950s.<sup>62</sup> In this construction of tradition, Congress was seen as embodying an “unbreakable thread” of non-racialism.<sup>63</sup> In this altered terrain, biography - as vehicle of political mobilisation - was marshalled in the service of ‘the struggle’ and the lives of ANC leaders, especially that of Nelson Mandela, became metaphors for the ‘spirit of resistance’.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Indres Naidoo and Albie Sachs, *Island in Chains: Ten Years on Robben Island by Prisoner 885/63* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1982). The references are to the Postscript by Albie Sachs and the Foreword by Francis Meli, then ANC Director of External Publicity.

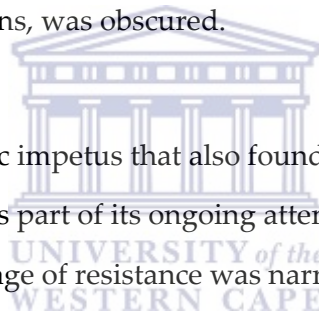
<sup>62</sup>For an example of this ‘struggle history’ produced inside South Africa in the 1980s, see UWC History Department/Education Resource and Information Project, *Let Us Speak of Freedom*, Vols 1-4, Bellville, n.d. For an example produced outside, see John Pampallis, *Foundations of the New South Africa*.

<sup>63</sup>Julie Frederickse, *The Unbreakable Thread: Non-Racialism in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1990.

<sup>64</sup>One example of a ‘solidarity history’ of resistance where a central place was given to biographies of ‘heroes of the struggle’ is Heidi Holland, *The Struggle: A History of the African National Congress*, London: Grafton Books, 1989. For an extended discussion of biographies of Nelson Mandela, see below.



It is this biographic impetus which entered the domain of public culture in the 1990s. No longer were the objectives those of solidarity propaganda and political mobilisation. Instead, these were supplanted by the purposes of nation-building and the insertion of biography into a discourse of recovery of hidden heritage and biography as lesson. The Mayibuye Centre republished Brian Bunting's biography of Moses Kotane in a new edition as a biographic lesson of an exemplary life. A new edition of *Island in Chains* was released, which incorporated 28 extra pages on his political life after his release from the Island culminating in the 1994 ANC electoral victory and his swearing in as a Senator. This time it was identified as "Indres Naidoo's book" and took its place on the shelves of bookshops among autobiographies of resistance, triumph and reconciliation. In a new introduction, Naidoo gave the book's extended narrative a motto: "From Robben Island to Exile to Parliament".<sup>65</sup> Any sense that Albie Sachs had written the book from Naidoo's narrations, and that it had been the product of collaborative labour in the work of exposing apartheid's conditions, was obscured.



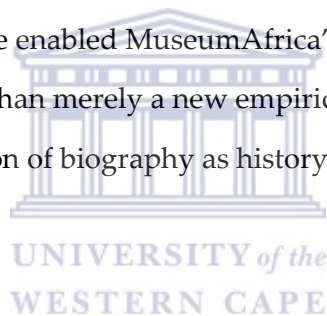
It was this changed biographic impetus that also found expression in a transforming MuseumAfrica in the 1990s, as part of its ongoing attempts to acquire a new institutional character. Once again, a heritage of resistance was narrated in relation to the achievement of victory within a celebratory nationalist paradigm. MuseumAfrica was pleased to acquire the police 'criminal' record on Walter Sisulu's political activities for the *Tried For Treason* exhibition. The dossier contained details on Sisulu's arrests and convictions for political offences between 1952 and 1964. These ranged from his arrest for failing to produce a pass book in the early 1950s to his sentence in 1963 to six years' imprisonment for membership of a banned organisation. It also contained details of Sisulu's conviction in 1964 at the Rivonia Trial and his sentence to life imprisonment on Robben Island. Significantly, the file also contained the warrant for Sisulu's release issued by the Prison's

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<sup>65</sup> Mac Maharaj, 'Foreword' to Indres Naidoo (Prisoner 885/63), *Island in Chains: Ten Years on Robben Island* (Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 2003 (first released in 2002). Note the new designation of the book's authorship.

Service in 1989, marking eventual freedom from surveillance and domination by the state.<sup>66</sup>

The police file on Walter Sisulu, however, contained much more than merely a collection of records documenting his encounters with the apartheid state's security machinery. It was also a testament to surveillance of political activists by the state. It was an account of the continuous presence of policeman, Detective Dirker who was present at almost every confrontation Sisulu had with the state, either as arresting officer or policeman in charge. Indeed, more than merely a documentary source on political activity or policing, the security police dossier can be seen as a species of biography, an instance of repressive biographical attention to an individual, as a mode of surveillance, regulation and terror.<sup>67</sup> The Tried for Treason exhibition missed out on an opportunity to go beyond the paradigm of recovery to consider genres of biographic narration, and forms of biographic mediation. This kind of focus would have enabled MuseumAfrica's process of institutional transformation to go further than merely a new empirical focus on black history, to asking questions about the production of biography as history and the changing conditions and relations of its production.



New history museums established in the mid-1990s also focused on biography and life history as part of their memory work. The District Six Museum was created in 1994 as a project that worked with the histories of District Six, the experiences of forced removal, and with memory and cultural expression as resources for solidarity and restitution. The focus on the history of District Six and national experiences of forced removals were at the core of the Museum's work. But its decisive features were methodological. Since its inception as a museum of the city of Cape Town, the District Six Museum became an independent site of engagement, a space of questioning and interrogation of the terms of

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<sup>66</sup>*The Mag*, Volume 2, 1996.

<sup>67</sup>See Birgitta Svensson, 'The Power of Biography', for an excellent discussion of prison life in Sweden as a training camp, testing how social norms can be imprinted and identity formed as well as the constitution of specific forms of identities and biographies through criminal policy. She investigates the ways in which the state constructed biographies of its citizens' lives through institutions like the prison. We can extend Svensson's argument by considering forms of surveillance by functionaries of the South African state, which gave rise to documentary records as a genre of 'repressive biography'.

the post-apartheid present, and the institutions, relations and discourses embedded in its production and reproduction. It also served as a model for a number of community-based memory projects and fledgling 'community museums' elsewhere in South Africa in areas like Lwandle in Somerset West, Crossroads and Protea Village in Cape Town, East Bank in East London and South End in Port Elizabeth. Much like the District Six Museum, these new museums emerged largely on the margins, outside the structure of national museums.<sup>68</sup>

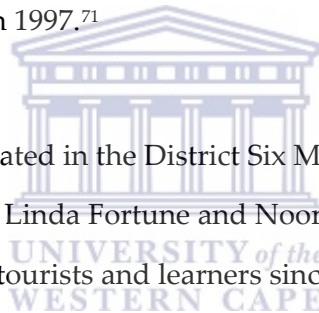
The District Six Museum operated as a hybrid space of research, representation and pedagogy, through which relations of knowledge and varied kinds of intellectual and cultural practice have been brokered and mediated between different sites, institutions and sociological domains. Its first exhibition, *Streets: Retracing District Six*, was created out of residues and materials from the landscape of District Six, and made use of documents, photographs, memorabilia and artefacts. The exhibition contained a large map painting of District Six, which spread over most of the floor space. The original old street name signs of the District were displayed in hanging columns, overlooking the map. This collection of street signs had been acquired from the leader of the demolition team that had bulldozed District Six, and who had saved them in his cellar. Displayed in the Museum, they became tangible signifiers of the materiality of the District. On the edge of the map, transparent display cases containing District Six earth and stones revealed the excavated fragments of domestic life: bottles, shards of crockery, cutlery and children's toys. Through *Streets*, with its layering of visual representation, recovered artefact and detailed documentation in the recreated spaces of the District, the Museum constituted an "archaeology of memory" which attempted to reconstruct the material fabric and social landscape of District Six in imaginative terms.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ciraj Rassool, 'Community museums, memory politics and social transformation: histories, possibilities and limits' in Ivan Karp, Corinne A Kratz et al. (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>69</sup> Peggy Delport, 'Signposts for Retrieval: a Visual Framework for Enabling Memory of Place and Time', in Ciraj Rassool and Sandra Prosalendis (eds), *Recalling Community in Cape Town*, pp 34-38; Tony Morphet, 'An Archaeology of Memory', *Mail and Guardian*, 30 February 1995; Ciraj Rassool, 'Community museums, memory politics and social transformation: histories, possibilities and limits'.

While the biographies of national political leaders may not have been its focus, life history was a key feature of the District Six Museum's memory work from the beginning. Rows of large-scale portraits of former residents, printed on transparent architectural paper, and hung from the balconies, gazed down upon visitors on the map. These portraits of prominent District Sixers and ordinary residents seemed to give the *Streets* exhibition a sense of being protected by the area's ancestors. In the hand-painted alcoves on the side of the map, photographs, drawn from albums and collections donated by former residents, bore testimony to District Six life histories and forms of cultural expression. From its inception processes of inscription, annunciation, conversation and contestation marked the Museum's memory work as former residents inscribed their biographies into the materiality of the museum on the memory cloth and the map.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, the Museum began a project on collecting oral testimonies of lives in the District and developing a 'memory booth' for ex-residents. This oral history work culminated in the creation of a Sound Archive in 1997.<sup>71</sup>



Life histories were also negotiated in the District Six Museum through the interpretive work of its education officers, Linda Fortune and Noor Ebrahim, who conducted tours and educational forums with tourists and learners since 1994. Their own life histories of family and community, and removal and restitution became important elements of the Museum's mediation of District Six's history. Their stories of their District Six lives and removals were told in the Museum through artefact, image and narrative. Both Fortune and Ebrahim also went on to become authors of District Six autobiographical books. In 1996, Kwela Books published Fortune's life story as part of an interest in women's autobiography in South Africa. After not fitting into the Kwela series, Noor Ebrahim's life story was published by the Museum itself. Kwela also published another District Six story as part of their project to recover women autobiography, namely that of Nomvuyo

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<sup>70</sup> Peggy Delport, 'Signposts for Retrieval' pp 34-38; Ciraj Rassool, 'Community museums, memory politics and social transformation: histories, possibilities and limits'.

<sup>71</sup> On the work of oral history collection in the District Six Museum, see Valmont Layne and Ciraj Rassool, 'Memory Rooms: Oral History in the District Six Museum', in Ciraj Rassool and Sandra Prosalendis (eds), *Recalling Community in Cape Town*.

Ngcelwane, whose family had had been removed from District Six in the 1960s.<sup>72</sup> In some ways, District Six lives were turned into allegories of racial pasts, as part of the construction of multicultural histories of South Africa.<sup>73</sup>

The publication of these books was realised through careful mediation, out of which three District Six life histories were presented as autobiographical products and authentic testaments of District Six lives. At Kwela Books, this mediation occurred through the editor, Anneri van der Merwe, who spearheaded the interest in women's written lives. It is not apparent what the precise nature of this mediation was, whether it involved the work of the amanuensis or whether it occurred through purposeful editing, structuring and overwriting. It is clearer how these mediations occurred in the case of Ebrahim's book, who had a number of assistants in the District Six Museum including librarians, curators, editors and colleagues (including Fortune herself) who encouraged him to put pen to paper, who gave him ideas on what to write about, and who turned his words into a structured, published text.

More than mere recovery, these books involved an active production of memory. What was achieved was in some ways a construction of District Six memory, which tended to depict the loss of a childhood paradise, as processed through the organisation of memory. District Six here, according to the research of Zuleiga Adams, was turned into a magical, depoliticised place, where the child was presumed to have been innocent and naïve. Accounts of youth rituals and childish games and experiences, and views of the adult world provided a stamp of authenticity. These elements have also been a feature of the story of District Six's destruction presented through theatre and were also a characteristic of the *Streets* and *Three Stories* exhibitions.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Linda Fortune, *The House in Tyne Street: Childhood Memories of District Six* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1996); Nomvuyo Ngcelwane, *Sala Kahle, District Six: An African Woman's Perspective* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1998); Noor Ebrahim, *Noor's Story: My Life in District Six* (Cape Town: District Six Museum, 1999).

<sup>73</sup> On the consolidation and contestation of the discourse on 'many cultures' in South Africa, see Ciraj Rassool, 'The Rise of Heritage and the Reconstitution of History'.

<sup>74</sup> Zuleiga Adams, 'Memory, Imagination and Removal: Remembering and Forgetting District Six', M.A. Mini-thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2002.

All three stories have had further life in the District Six Museum. Fortune and Ebrahim continued to narrate aspects of their stories as part of their guided tours of the Museum.<sup>75</sup> Fortune, Ngcelwane and Ebrahim's 'stories' were a focus of a special exhibition, *Three Stories*, curated in the Museum's temporary location at the Moravian Chapel in 1999 while its Buitenkant Street building was being renovated and restored. In 2000, Ngcelwane's descriptions formed the basis of an installation, *Nomvuyo's Room*, created as part of a new permanent exhibition, *Digging Deeper*. All three books became bestsellers in the Museum's bookshop with Fortune and Ebrahim's books printed many times over. Indeed, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it seemed as if these three life histories, in the form of the book, the exhibition and the guided narrative competed with each other for the attention of visitors as part of the daily transactions that occurred in the District Six Museum.

The *Digging Deeper* exhibition, which opened in 2000, signalled a more complex approach to museum display and public culture. This exhibition sought to tell the story of District Six with greater nuance. Whereas *Streets* tended to focus on public spaces and lives constructed in public, *Digging Deeper* examined the private and interior spaces of people's lives. The approach in the new exhibition avoided taking a single, safe narrative, and set out consciously to disrupt and unsettle certain conventions about District Six's past, especially the idea that social life in District Six was without conflict and contradiction. The Memorial Text at the entrance to the refurbished Museum reflected this desire to ask difficult questions: 'we seek to work with our memories, our achievements *and our shames*, our moments of glory, courage and love for one another, *and also the hurts we inflicted upon each other*'.<sup>76</sup>

Museum trustee and artist Peggy Delport had referred to the aesthetic features of *Digging Deeper*, of its "materiality, transparency, flexibility and layering" and to the "particularity

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<sup>75</sup> See Noor Ebrahim, 'Guided Moments in the District Six Museum', in Ciraj Rassool and Sandra Prosalendis (eds), *Recalling Community in Cape Town*.

<sup>76</sup> Memorial Text, in Ciraj Rassool and Sandra Prosalendis (eds), *Recalling Community in Cape Town*, p vi, emphasis added.



of softnesses and roughnesses” of its material surfaces, which offset the photographic and digitally created elements. Enlarged wallpapered and painted photographic images were presented in lifelike recreations while historical panels, timelines, and a sequence of maps presented District Six’s cultural, intellectual and political growth with attention to complexity and nuance. Handmade appliquéd and embroidered banners reflected the wide range of institutions in the public sphere of District Six in which identities and life histories were constructed: the religious and the political, the educational and the cultural. The map, cloth, street signs remained central elements of the exhibition, but with greater attention to conservation and spatial issues.<sup>77</sup>

Once again, life history featured as a central feature of the exhibition. Historical panels incorporated biographical texts drawn from oral history research. ‘Nomvuyo’s Room’ presented an installation of an interior of a District Six room, much like the lived spaces of many of the District’s poor. It drew on Nomvuyo Ngcelwane’s auto/biography as well as on life history research to convey a sense of the lived environment of the multi-use, adaptable family room. Biographic representations also began to transcend the methodological bounds of social history. Soundscapes transmitted through sound domes in Nomvuyo’s Room and other museum spaces echoed with the voices and narrations of life histories. Here the oral was a genre of historical narration, and not merely a source of evidence to be appropriated into written text.<sup>78</sup>

The enlarged portraits which hung over the upper balconies of the Museum were created this time from prints on a delicate but durable trevira fabric, a light and transparent material. Unlike previous enlarged portraits, these enabled a quality of airiness that did not block the flow of light or interfere with the unity of the museum space. Enlarged images of political leaders, Abdullah Abdurahman, Ben Kies, Cissie Gool, I.B. Tabata, Goolam Gool, James and Alex La Guma, John Gomas and Clements Kadalie, mingled with

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<sup>77</sup> Peggy Delport, ‘Digging Deeper in District Six: Features and Interfaces in a Curatorial Landscape’, in Ciraj Rassool and Sandra Prosalendis (eds), *Recalling Community in Cape Town*; ‘A Guide to the District Six Museum and the *Digging Deeper* Exhibition’ (District Six Museum Brochure, 2000).

<sup>78</sup> Valmont Layne and Ciraj Rassool, ‘Memory Rooms: Oral History in the District Six Museum’, in Ciraj Rassool and Sandra Prosalendis (eds), *Recalling Community in Cape Town*.

those of writers and dancers (Richard Rive, Johaar Mosaval), and those who were seen as “not as well known” (the Schaffers brothers, Armien Dramat) to create a representation of “a broader layer of social experience as well as the agency of ex-residents in the development of the museum project and the collection”.<sup>79</sup>

The scale, placement and arrangement of the enlarged portraits created a presence as visual biographies that acknowledged the importance of individual lives in District Six. But their lightness, airiness and movement also suggested a move away from hard realism, heroic depiction and images as evidence of the truth of lives. This was a medium that lent itself to posing questions about lives rather than celebrating them. These qualities had the effect of enabling life histories to be seen in more complex ways than as fixed, given and uncontested, or as mere illustrations of historical processes and social structure. These questioning modes of display were found elsewhere in *Digging Deeper*, as opportunities were sought to pose questions about how the museum had acquired images of people, what the history of these images had been and the ways the Museum’s knowledge of people’s life histories had been preceded by prior mediation.<sup>80</sup> These forms of representation were part of a desire to ask deeper questions about biography by opening up issues about production and the mediated, storied nature of lives as well as how these life stories came to be told. In the District Six Museum, the *Digging Deeper* exhibition began to pose challenges for museum transformation in exploring methodologies for the representation of public pasts that transcended the limited recovery frames of social history.

### *The South African Gandhi*

The work that most museums embarked on in the name of transformation, nevertheless, remained bounded within realist frameworks of recovery and documentation. This

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<sup>79</sup> Tina Smith and Ciraj Rassool, ‘History in photographs at the District Six Museum’, in Ciraj Rassool and Sandra Prosalendis (eds), *Recalling Community in Cape Town ‘A Guide to the District Six Museum and the Digging Deeper Exhibition’* (District Six Museum Brochure, 2000).

<sup>80</sup> See Chapter Five for a description of the display of a 1941 portrait of I.B. Tabata in the District Six Museum’s *Digging Deeper* exhibition.

extended to other arenas of public culture. In 1999, MuseumAfrica embarked on another stage in its transformation process, when it unveiled a new permanent exhibition that focused on more than thirty sites in Johannesburg associated with Gandhi's politics and philosophy. *Gandhi's Johannesburg: Birthplace of Satyagraha* "trac[ed] Gandhi's footsteps" through the "buildings and places associated with the passive resistance leader". It was from Johannesburg where "ideas of peaceful struggle" came, which then "spread across the world". Gandhi's philosophy of Satyagraha was formed in Johannesburg in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and it was his experiences there "which helped shape his ideas". The exhibition was completed by a display mounted by the Durban Local History Museums on the "Gandhi sites" of Durban, "the other main centre where Gandhi was active".<sup>81</sup> "Considered as a whole", Eric Itzkin (the curator) suggested in an accompanying book, "these sites and the events surrounding them [were] an essential part of the Gandhi experience".<sup>82</sup>

The exhibition and book were part of a recuperative exercise in documentation, to place on public record actual material sites associated with an aspect of black social experience and resistance leadership. Part of the empirical intention was also corrective, to give public effect to research by James Hunt in accurately identifying sites and to point out where the National Monuments Council in declaring sites had committed errors in identification. This was the case with No 19 Albermarle Street in Troyville, which had been identified in haste as a site where Gandhi lived, and erroneously declared a National Monument in 1994. The Gandhi association had been made especially since this site was the area's "most exotic home" and "its curved balconies" had associations with "Oriental splendour". Itzkin's research, following that of Hunt, firmly established that it had been the "more conventional Victorian" No 11 Albermarle Street where Gandhi had lived.<sup>83</sup> By

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<sup>81</sup> 'MuseumAfrica Programme of Events', May, June, July 1999 (flyer); 'Gandhi's Johannesburg: Birthplace of Satyagraha' (Poster, MuseumAfrica, Johannesburg, 1999); Paul Tichman, *Gandhi Sites in Durban* (Durban: The Local History Museums, 1998).

<sup>82</sup> Eric Itzkin, *Gandhi's Johannesburg: Birthplace of Satyagraha* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press in association with MuseumAfrica, 2000).

<sup>83</sup> Eric Itzkin, *Gandhi's Johannesburg*, pp 61-63. The outcome of this heritage focus on Gandhi in Johannesburg was the unveiling of a Gandhi statue in that city in October 2003. By then Itzkin had been employed as Johannesburg's deputy director of Immovable Heritage.

limiting the biographic project to issues of accurate empirical identification, and by framing it within a conventional paradigm of individual greatness, once again an opportunity was missed to transcend the documentary paradigm to ask questions about genealogies in the production of images and narratives of the 'Mahatma'.<sup>84</sup>

The biographic focus on Gandhi's South African political life as part of heritage recovery also went beyond the museum and the memorial, and entered wider domains of public culture. Gandhi's resistance biography also crept into the unlikely world of South African advertising. During March 1997, as part of a drive to attract a larger readership, the newspaper *Business Day* made bold use of a narrative of Gandhi's life in an advertisement placed in other newspapers. Designed to resemble a history educational poster, the advertisement tried to appeal to readers it saw as possessing a "natural flair for independent thinking", and who "admitted to challenging convention".<sup>85</sup> The readers of *Business Day*, it went on to suggest, were

highly individualistic and sharp thinkers. Unaffected by conformity, they tend to stand out rather than fit in. Because they choose the path less travelled, they arrive quickly at solutions while their peers merely see problems. As a result, they tend to set the trend rather than follow it.<sup>86</sup>

A survey showed, the advert claimed, that *Business Day* readers were "comfortable" on their own, often making time for "introspective thought and reflection". They were people who enjoyed challenges and took risks. These were characteristics which contributed to "setting them apart from the rank and file".<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> This is not the same as the attempts to reappraise Gandhi's political work in South Africa, and to expose his ideas as those of "a petty racist, a myopic fighter for colonial freedoms". Gandhi, it has been suggested, "actively despised Africans and their way of life" (Reginald Legoabe, 'Gandhi never thought much of African people', *City Press*, 9 November 2003). For a similar stance on Gandhi, see Nhlanhla Hlongwane, 'Behind the mask of divinity', *ReviewArts*, supplement of *This Day*, 10 October 2003. See also the biographic defence in a letter of reply by Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 'Hate monger misinformed on Gandhi' (Letter), *ReviewArts*, supplement of *This Day*, 24 October 2003.

<sup>85</sup> 'It's Harder To Take A Stand When Everyone Around You Is On Their Knees' (*Business Day* Advertisement), *The Sunday Independent*, 9 March 1997.

<sup>86</sup> 'It's Harder To Take A Stand'.

<sup>87</sup> 'It's Harder To Take A Stand'.

These images of the *Business Day* reader were likened to a construction of the great and noble life of achievement matched by humility and grace, as represented by Gandhi. A path of legendary achievement and victory over colonial adversity had been set in motion, according to the advert, by the incident in 1897 in which Gandhi was thrown out of his train compartment at Pietermaritzburg station. The significance of this experience for the construction of Gandhi's life in the advert was clear:

The policeman who threw Gandhi onto that platform could never have imagined what he had started - a protest that wouldn't keep quiet for 55 years. And cost the British Empire the jewel in its crown.<sup>88</sup>

In this conventional biographical narrative, the train incident was the significant turning point moment or epiphany, which gave rise to Gandhi's life of resistance and signalled "the beginning of a legend". It set off Gandhi's policy of *Satyagraha*, which saw him spend 22 years in South Africa "championing human rights in a foreign country", and which resulted in the British quitting India in 1947 after 163 years. "But what", asked the advert of its potential readers and subscribers, "can a little brown man in a loin-cloth teach you about success?" And it suggested that it was "the courage to lead" that enabled "one man to stand up to a giant". A teleological narrative of causation in constructing the life of a legendary man who rises to greatness and who overcomes oppression was inscribed as a model of an exemplary life. In rising to "take a stand" by subscribing to *Business Day*, readers could set themselves on the path of leadership, courage and greatness comparable to Gandhi.<sup>89</sup>

Gandhi's South African years was also one of the chosen subjects when the South African oil company, Sasol, also went the biographic heritage route for its advertising in 2000. The emergence of *Satyagraha* had coincided with a realisation "that mere words [were] not enough if you wish[ed] to effect real change". Gandhi, the advert proclaimed, had gone on

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<sup>88</sup>'It's Harder To Take A Stand'.

<sup>89</sup>'It's Harder To Take A Stand'. Shaka's leadership was also utilised in *Business Day*'s 1997 biographic campaign. Readers were challenged to think about how "an impossible dream" was "often the most possible", to "set the standard high above the average", to appreciate that "respect demands sacrifice", to identify "the warrior" in them and to nurture in themselves "the courage to lead". See 'Without Challenge there is no Change' (*Business Day* Advertisement), *Sunday Times*, 7 September 1997.

to empower “millions ... throughout the world” with “the most powerful weapon” that “one can shape one’s own destiny”. Sasol too had realised that “words [were] not enough” and had invested in “social upliftment and the development of education, science and the arts” on “an ongoing basis” as a means of confirming that “true empowerment require[ed] action”. This would ensure that South Africa “[took] its rightful place” as ‘a powerhouse driving the rejuvenation of an entire continent’.<sup>90</sup>

The focus on Gandhi in the domain of public culture did not stop there. The “transforming experience” that Gandhi had on the train at Pietermaritzburg station in 1893 provided an opportunity for his biography to be inscribed in public sculpture. In 1993, at a biographic occasion to mark the centenary of this event, Nelson Mandela unveiled a statue of Gandhi. It bore the words, “My active non-violence began from that date”. The statue’s unveiling was followed by an academic conference on ‘Gandhi and his significance’, with papers on the “Gandhian heritage” and the formative nature of Gandhi’s experience in South Africa. There had been a tendency to see Gandhi primarily as an Indian figure and symbol of India’s achievement of independence from colonialism. However, the conference drew on a notion of the importance of the train experience to suggest that it was South Africa which influenced Gandhi’s view of public life and which generated in Gandhi a “true radicalism”.<sup>91</sup> Gandhi, it was suggested, could be claimed into the pantheon of South African heroic leaders.

### ***Biographic memorials, sites and routes***

More generally, the question of commemorative monuments as grand biographic memorials was not without debate and controversy. Pretoria sculptor Danie de Jager, creator of the rearing horses in Pretoria’s Strijdom Square and the Lost City’s rampaging elephant, and builder of a statue of Hendrik Verwoerd and the huge head of Strijdom that

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<sup>90</sup> ‘He empowered millions of people throughout the world by introducing them to the most powerful weapon at their disposal’ (Sasol advertisement), *Mail and Guardian*, 14-19 April 2000. Other figures in Sasol’s rainbow biographic heritage campaign were educationist, Harold Cressy, political leader Pixley Seme and anthropologist Lucy Lloyd.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Editors’ Preface’ and Judith M Brown, ‘Perspectives and Prospects’, in Judith M Brown and Martin Prozesky (eds), *Gandhi and South Africa: Principles and Politics*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996, p 3.



once stood in central Pretoria, was officially authorised at the end of 1994 to commence work on a 23 metre-high “Mandela monument”. In a project headed by the multimillionaire brothers Sol and Abe Krok, who had made their fortunes in corrosive skin lightening creams, and envisaged to cost R50-million in private sector funds, the bronze cast gigantic monument was to be modelled on then president Nelson Mandela’s hand as a “beacon of freedom” for South Africa. The disembodied hand “breaking out of jail bars” was expected to be “the biggest sculpture in the world”. The monument would also include 40 plaques depicting the “history of the Freedom struggle in South Africa”, an eternal flame in an amphitheatre, a statue of Mandela himself, and a wall with the word ‘Freedom’ written in 100 languages. A viewing balcony and a “museum of apartheid” covering 1 400 square metres were also part of the plans.<sup>92</sup>

After strong public criticism, particularly from cultural critics in the world of art, plans for the “Madiba statue” were put on ice. Critics of the initiative contended that the envisaged monumental arm echoed with a “rhetoric of totalitarian art” and was the “wrong image” for nation-building. In its “dumb, numbing gigantism”, the planned monument was “the language of dictators, not liberators”. According to Neville Dubow, it bore a “chilling” resemblance to the Victory Monument in Baghdad, which had commemorated Iraq’s war against Iran. The critics also challenged the planned monument on aesthetic grounds. It contained “an uncomfortable juxtaposition of realism and abstraction” and was “banal in its symbolism”. It was also a product of “the language of kitsch ... the instant sell ... [and] the theme park”.<sup>93</sup>

For the critics, it was the lack of artistic merit of the proposed statue as well as the process by which it was initially approved which were the problems, not the concept itself of a presidential sculpture or freedom monument. Instead of a “scheme ... devised by an individual”, what was required was research, consultation and negotiation as well as public participation and scrutiny. An acceptable monument needed to be the work of “people who know something about art”. For Neville Dubow, this was important because

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<sup>92</sup>*Cape Times*, 1 April 1996; *Mail and Guardian*, 29 March to 3 April 1996.

<sup>93</sup>*Cape Times*, 4 April 1996; *Mail and Guardian*, 12-18 April 1996.

“the president deserves a better monument. So does the country, and so does the embodiment of the concept of freedom”.<sup>94</sup> Although this was a controversial case, fuelled by debate over the language, aesthetics and process of memorialisation, as well as the wisdom of costly memorials, there remained a strong commitment to memorialising the lives of individual resistance leaders and heroes of the liberation struggle as part of a new public history.

This commitment made itself felt as the terrain of national monuments and heritage resources management also underwent a process of transformation. Resistance biography found its way into changing heritage resources policy as the lives of individual men were narrated into a public history of resistance and reconciliation as significant national leaders and heroes. In 1992, a small house in Angel Street, Kimberley, once the home of Sol Plaatje, was declared a national monument. This step was seen as deserving of “a special place in the history of conservation practice in South Africa”, as attention began to be focused on places of significance for the black community.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, after a long search by the National Monuments Council (NMC) involving detailed documentary, photographic and archaeological research, the burial site of Enoch Sontonga, composer of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, was finally identified on a plot in the Braamfontein Cemetery. On Heritage Day, 1996, in a special ceremony convened by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST), Sontonga’s grave was declared a national monument, during which Nelson Mandela unveiled a “fitting memorial”.<sup>96</sup>

In another example of resistance biography as heritage, the house in Ginsburg, near King William’s Town, to which Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko had been banned, was

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<sup>94</sup>*Cape Times* 4 April 1996, 8 April 1996; *Mail and Guardian*, 12-18 April 1996.

<sup>95</sup>Colin Fortune and Leigh Deyzel, ‘Sol Plaatje House: A Monument to a Great South African’, in International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) National Committee, *Monuments and Sites: South Africa*, Colombo, Sri Lanka: ICOMOS, 1996, p 127.

<sup>96</sup>Genevieve Walker, ‘A Memorial to Enoch Mankanyi Sontonga’, in International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) National Committee, *Monuments and Sites: South Africa*, p 135; ‘Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika: the Story’ (Poster), Issued by DACST and NMC, 1996. The landscaped park in which Sontonga had been buried was renamed Enoch Sontonga Memorial Park and the road running past the park has been renamed Enoch Sontonga Avenue. See *Briefing: Recent Developments at DACST*, Volume 1, pp 12-13.

declared a national monument on 12 September 1997. At the same time, the cemetery where Biko had been buried was declared a garden of remembrance, the John Vorster Bridge over the Buffalo River in East London was renamed the Steve Biko Bridge and a statue of Biko was unveiled by Nelson Mandela outside the East London City Hall.<sup>97</sup> When the “larger-than-life” brass statue of Steve Biko was unveiled, it became “the first grand memorial to an anti-apartheid hero in a new South African city landscape still dominated by images of white men”.<sup>98</sup>

The R200 000 statue had been commissioned by the Biko family as well as former editor and Biko biographer, Donald Woods and was created by Johannesburg sculptor Naomi Jacobson. It was partly financed by movie director Richard Attenborough as well as actors, Denzel Washington and Kevin Kline who had worked on the movie *Cry Freedom*,<sup>99</sup> which had been based on Woods’ biography of Biko.<sup>100</sup> Also involved in funding the Biko monument were rock-star Peter Gabriel, composer of the once-banned hit ‘Biko’, and airline tycoon Richard Branson.<sup>101</sup> In spite of initial disgruntlement on the part of some young members of black consciousness organisation, AZAPO, about the memorial festivities, the occasion was used by Nelson Mandela as an opportunity to call for unity among black political parties and organisations. In this memorialisation, with Mandela’s unveiling of the new statue as its climax, Steve Biko was taken out of a paradigm of resistance and black consciousness and placed firmly within the sphere of reconstruction, reconciliation and nation-building as one of its pre-eminent symbols. This moment of unveiling by Mandela served to incorporate Biko into a unified narrative of the nation and its past.

If one considers the memorialisation of a leader through public statuary and the cultural and political rituals associated with a statue’s unveiling as a genre of ‘biography’, it becomes interesting indeed to consider the ‘production of biography’ in a case such as the

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<sup>97</sup>*Cape Argus*, 11 August 1997.

<sup>98</sup>*Cape Times*, 9 September 1997.

<sup>99</sup>Marble Arch Productions c.1987.

<sup>100</sup>Donald Woods, *Biko*, New York: Paddington Press, 1978.

<sup>101</sup>*Cape Times*, 9 September 1997.

statue of Steve Biko. As a public monument, it had been made possible through an alliance between the Biko family, the national and local state and a cohort of Biko representers ranging from journalist Donald Woods to the director and lead actors of a controversial Hollywood movie on Biko's life. It is indeed a double irony that those who had turned Biko's life into "a white man's tale"<sup>102</sup> in print and on screen, subsequently participated in commissioning and funding a new biographic depiction of Biko: a public monument in the medium of statuary. In the process Biko, who had undergone "transcendence from a martyred corpse into a celluloid hero", acquired new commemorative meaning: that of "hero of the [new] nation".<sup>103</sup>

The Biko statue also became a focus of public controversy. The Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging moved quickly to deface the new sculpture with rightwing graffiti hours after its unveiling,<sup>104</sup> while discussion and debate ensued almost immediately in the Eastern Cape and elsewhere in South Africa over its artistic merit and aesthetic qualities. The press reported that many people had complained that the statue was "uninspiring" and bore "no resemblance to the Black Consciousness leader". Most people canvassed had felt that "a true likeness of Biko should have been portrayed" and that a "local sculptor" should have been commissioned.<sup>105</sup> A Johannesburg reader of *The Sunday Independent* complained that the style of the sculpture was "colonial realism", the cast bronze materials "archaic". The "white, middle aged" artist was not able to honour Biko's memory through "African aesthetics and African values".<sup>106</sup>

A number of art critics and "experts" echoed this view that the value of the sculpture had been diminished by the statue's lack of resemblance to Biko as well as the inappropriateness of the sculptor. Border Technikon teacher, Nombi Mpako, felt that the body was out of proportion and saw "no likeness whatsoever to Biko". Rhodes

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<sup>102</sup>See the discussion of the cultural politics of *Cry Freedom* in Mandla Langa, 'Why Biko Film Became a White Man's Tale', *Sunday Independent*, 31 August 1997.

<sup>103</sup>The inscription on the seven-ton marble plinth, which bears the statue of Steve Biko, reads: "Steve Biko. Sikahlela Indoda Yamadoda. We salute a hero of the nation".

<sup>104</sup>See report in *Sunday Argus*, 13/14 September 1997.

<sup>105</sup>*Weekend Saturday Argus*, 20/21 September 1997.

<sup>106</sup>*The Sunday Independent*, 28 September 1997.

University's Mark Haywood felt that the image of Biko should have "come out" in the statue, which should have been "more representative of what the public wanted".<sup>107</sup> It is interesting that the main criticism of the statue was that the face did not resemble Biko. Indeed, as Leslie Witz suggested, much of the representational energy in commemorative depictions of Biko in visual art has concentrated on his face,<sup>108</sup> as if that enabled the integrity of Biko's body to be restored. This would explain why non-resemblance would have been so troubling. More generally, it seems as if the face may be to visual representation what biography is to history.

These criticisms could have been taken further had some attention been paid to Jacobson's career as a sculptor. Her attempt at portraying the African body as part of a transforming public culture and heritage policy had indeed been preceded by works that had depicted the body in racial and 'tribal' ways. From the 1970s, Jacobson had been responsible for producing a series of ethnological - even anthropometric - studies in bronze and cement fondu of 'tribal' heads and faces from colonial Namibia.<sup>109</sup> It is a consideration of this genealogy that leads one to pose questions about Jacobson's seemingly successful transition to post-apartheid memorial sculptor commemorating heroes of the struggle. As a result of her work the grand statue of Steven Bantu Biko may have ended up as "just another Bantu".<sup>110</sup>

As part of its own transformation, the NMC embarked on a poster campaign in 1998, asking the public for assistance with the identification of sites of significance. People were

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<sup>107</sup>*Saturday Weekend Argus*, 20/21 September 1997.

<sup>108</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>109</sup>These heads are contained in the 'Peoples of Namibia Collection' at the Hunterian Museum at the University of the Witwatersrand Medical School and form part of the George Elkin Collection. They are displayed to medical students in a cabinet across the floor from the Raymond Dart Gallery of African Faces. There are seven heads in the collection: Ovahimba, Nama, Bushman, Damara, Herero, Ovambo as well as a sculpture of 'Oubaas', a 'Pituitary Midget' from Ghanzi in Botswana. For a discussion of anthropometric collections at the University of the Witwatersrand, see Ciraj Rassool and Patricia Hayes, 'Science and the Spectacle: /Khanako's South Africa, 1936-1937', in Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes and Gary Minkley (eds), *Deep Histories*.

<sup>110</sup>This quote comes from *Sowetan* journalist Mpho Lekota, with whom I discussed this matter. The inappropriate embracing of Naomi Jacobson's post-apartheid sculptural production did not end there. The Robben Island Museum acquired Jacobson's head busts of Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu. These were kept in its collection at the UWC Robben Island Mayibuye Archive.

asked to “identify sites that are important to you and your family, friends, community, neighbourhood, town or village”. Biography was a key characteristic of the NMC’s poster campaign that invited the public to participate in “a national programme to honour the founders of democracy”. Such sites, the people were told, “might include the homesteads of our leaders” or those who created democracy in South Africa.<sup>111</sup> The overwhelming responses to the site identification campaign were proposals for monuments that sought to mark sites associated with resistance leaders. Correspondents proposed sites ranging from Solomon Mahlangu Freedom Square, which had a memorial “built by the community” in the early 1990s in Mahlangu’s honour, to the site in Mount Street, District Six, where Moses Kotane had lived from 1939 and which Kotane had considered to be his home until his death in 1978. The sites of the homes of Abdullah Aburahman, John Gomas and the La Gomas were also put forward. The Border Historical Society proposed the graveyard where Walter Rubusana had been buried.<sup>112</sup>

At the end of August 1999, it was announced that a range of new monuments were being planned to recognise “the heroes of the struggle against apartheid and the history of a black majority officially deemed until recently to have no past worth remembering”. To counter the dominance of colonial and Afrikaner monuments on South Africa’s landscape, the NMC had endorsed a host of new heritage sites. This was to be one of the last acts of the NMC before the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) replaced it. Many of these monuments were associated with Nelson Mandela. The former president’s one-time Soweto home was declared a national monument, as was Pretoria’s Great Synagogue, scene of the 1956 treason trial of prominent anti-apartheid leaders.<sup>113</sup> In the meantime a novel approach to biographic memorialism was being introduced by the

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<sup>111</sup> ‘Claim Your Heritage’ (National Monuments Council Poster, 1998).

<sup>112</sup> Mamelodi Heritage Forum to NMC, 26 October 1998; Brian Bunting to NMC, 2 November 1998; Reg September to NMC, 13 October 1998; Border Historical Society (East London Museum) to NMC (posted 13 October 1998), File on Responses to NMC Poster Campaign, 1998, SAHRA.

<sup>113</sup> *Mail and Guardian* website ([www.mg.co.za](http://www.mg.co.za)), 31 August 1999. SAHRA was created in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act No 25 of 1999). The transformation of the NMC involved a shift from an emphasis on architecture and buildings to a broader focus on heritage sites. As a result of this legislation, the ambiguous concept of ‘monument’ was dropped in favour of a new language which referred to ‘heritage sites’ or ‘heritage resources’ – to broaden the focus from merely buildings with architectural significance - and ‘memorials’, which referred to monumental edifices, statues or works of public sculpture.



Ministry of Water Affairs and Forestry, in which indigenous trees were planted as “living memorials” to the ‘Guguletu Seven’ and others who died in the struggle against apartheid and to honour “those who fought in the struggle” such as Oliver Tambo and Chris Hani. These arboreal memorials were “a way of helping to heal the nation”.<sup>114</sup>

Not content to leave the process of heritage transformation to old museums and cultural institutions, a more thoroughgoing and centrally directed programme of heritage production was already under way. In 1998 the Cabinet created a parallel programme in new heritage production. A “Legacy Project” programme was constituted within DACST and an inter-departmental committee, the “National Legacy Committee” released a draft “portfolio of legacy projects” for discussion. This committee was given the task of establishing “new and diverse” memorials, museums, and commemorations.<sup>115</sup>

The Legacy Project programme was installed as the mechanism to approve and facilitate the setting up of new monuments, museums ... plaques, outdoor artworks, history trails and “other symbolic representations”. These would ensure that “visible reminders” of the “many aspects of our formerly neglected heritage” would be created. In addition, the Committee sought to present “a coherent set of principles” which would enable different initiatives to be “harmonised” and ensure “integrity, inclusiveness, balance and broad participation”. With wide distribution throughout South Africa, and with a focus on national symbols with “provincial and local participation”, the proposed legacy projects would “communicate a stimulating message of rich cultural diversity”.<sup>116</sup>

Among the 20 legacy projects suggested were a History Trail of slave resistance in the Western Cape, memorials to the women of South Africa, a memorial to South Africa’s workers, a cultural mapping of war graves and the embracing of the centenary of the Anglo-Boer war, referred to in the discussion document as the “1899-1902 war”,

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<sup>114</sup> John Yeld, ‘Plant trees for peace, says Kasrils’, *Cape Argus*, 1 September 1999; eNews, e.tv, 30 August 2001.

<sup>115</sup> ‘The Portfolio of Legacy Projects: A Portfolio of Commemorations Acknowledging Neglected or Marginalised Heritage’, (Discussion Document, January 1998).

<sup>116</sup> ‘The Portfolio of Legacy Projects’.

memorials to forced removals, a memorial to the San, and commemorations of pre-colonial heritage, the creation of missionary trails, and commemorations of events, such as the Congress of the People, 1955, Sharpeville 1960, and Soweto 1976, deemed to be “historical turning points”. Such diverse projects, it was felt, would “acknowledge and celebrate South Africa’s multi-cultural heritage”.<sup>117</sup>

It was recommended that “careful consideration” be given to representations of leaders. While “monuments to living leaders” needed to be approached “with caution”, it was asserted that there was “a universal tradition in all cultures, of paying tribute to leaders”. “Monuments to leaders” were thus encouraged.<sup>118</sup>

There are those role models who through their foresight, courage and material sacrifice, articulated, reflected and shaped popular consciousness. They inspired thousands of people to offer their own lives in the cause of a better life for all. By their nature, popular leaders represent a mass constituency, and become symbols of inspiration far beyond their borders.<sup>119</sup>

The Legacy Project programme thus emphasised the life stories of leaders and their “contribution” to “our legacy of democracy”.<sup>120</sup>

Commemoration sites and plaques would honour “great patriots” who “achieved honour against tremendous odds”. Their homes and “other significant sites associated with them” needed to be officially marked and “special, public ceremonies” were envisaged. A cenotaph “for martyrs who fell in the armed struggle” and a cultural map of war graves were proposed. The life histories of “literary ancestors”, it was felt, could be celebrated through a programme of “dedicating libraries”. In a broad-ranging proposal, a Freedom Park was proposed which suggested the development of a “dynamic multi-dimensional commemoration” aimed at telling the history of South Africa from pre-colonial times up

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<sup>117</sup> ‘The Portfolio of Legacy Projects’.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Legacy Project Discussion Document’, DACST, n.d. (c. 1997/8).

<sup>119</sup> ‘Legacy Project Discussion Document’.

<sup>120</sup> ‘The Portfolio of Legacy Projects’.

to the present. This project would “commemorate all those who fell in the struggle for liberation” and at the same time, mark the “celebration of the attainment of freedom and democracy”. It was envisaged that this project would be a symbolic expression of the themes of “Struggle, Democracy and Nation-Building”, and would “represent our past, present and future”. The components of Freedom Park would incorporate, amongst others, a memorial to victims of the struggle, a museum dedicated to the history of the freedom struggle, and an indigenous garden of reflection and meditation, possibly named after Albert Luthuli.<sup>121</sup>

Some leaders were singled out for special biographical treatment. Museums would be created as tributes to Albert Luthuli and Nelson Mandela. A Gandhi trail, “In the Footsteps of Gandhi” was to be prepared as a “tribute” to Gandhi’s life and “his bequest to the spiritual and political culture of South Africa”. It was particularly noted that Gandhi’s philosophy “resonated in the conduct of South Africa’s ‘negotiated revolution’, in the healing spirit expressed in our new constitution, and in the healing spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”. It was also recommended that a project called “The Long Walk to Freedom: The Mandela Trail” be introduced. This initiative in tourism through Mandela’s well-established biography would connect “many places of significance” associated with South Africa’s first democratic president, such as his Orlando West home, the location of his attorney’s practice, the site of his incarceration during the treason trial in the 1950s, educational institutions like Healdtown and Fort Hare, and sites such as Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia, location of the High Command of uMkhonto we Sizwe (‘Spear of the Nation’, the ANC’s military wing) in the 1960s and the Grand Parade, where he first spoke after his release in February 1990. An “overarching, historical trail” of Mandela’s “life and times” would provide tourists with “a portrait of the society in which he lived and struggled” and give a “context to his steadfast vision of a non-racial society.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> ‘The Portfolio of Legacy Projects’.

<sup>122</sup> ‘The Portfolio of Legacy Projects’. In line with this project, a tourist trail of the sites associated with Mandela’s biography was published in 2000, written by one of the authors of the Legacy Project Discussion Document, historian and heritage activist, Luli Callinicos (*The World that made Mandela: A Heritage Trail – 70 sites of significance*, Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 2000).

The implementation of the national legacy project programme proved to be far more difficult than planned. In the late 1990s, the legacy project planned to mark and celebrate the life of late ANC president and Nobel Prize winner, Chief Albert Luthuli, faltered ostensibly because of political conflict between the ANC and Inkatha in KwaZulu-Natal. As Jabulani Sithole and Sibongiseni Mkhize have shown, the Luthuli legacy project ran aground largely because of the existence of different and conflicting “images” of Luthuli, each of which emerged in “distinct political contexts”. Different organisations and individuals had produced numerous images of Luthuli since his death in 1967, and some had changed their view of Luthuli over time. Indeed, “many ‘Luthulis’ were produced for different purposes and at different times”<sup>123</sup>

The apartheid state’s security police portrayed Luthuli as “anti-Communist” and a “willing collaborator”. The Communist Party saw him initially as “a symbol of African courage, militancy and hope”, who participated in the discussions which led to the ANC’s decision to take up arms. Later the SACP “denied that Luthuli knew anything about the armed struggle. Indeed, Inkatha suggested that the exiled ANC had “deviated from what Luthuli stood for”. Inkatha had used Luthuli’s image to “bolster” their resistance claims, and tried to “monopolise” annual Luthuli commemoration services in the early 1980s. The ANC itself had given “contradictory images of who Luthuli was”.<sup>124</sup> Sithole and Mkhize’s argument could have been more productively framed as an examination of different *narrations* of Luthuli’s life. In Luthuli’s case, the consensual, celebratory national heritage envisaged by the Legacy Project Programme proved difficult to achieve. This was especially so since the early legacy projects had to be implemented as swiftly as possible within a given financial year. In KwaZulu-Natal at the end of the 1990s, an opportunity

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<sup>123</sup> Jabulani Sithole and Sibongiseni Mkhize, ‘Truth or Lies? Selective Memories, Imaginings, and Representations of Chief Albert Luthuli in Recent Political Discourses’, *History and Theory*, Vol 39, No 4, December 2000, pp 69, 84-5. This special issue of the Journal edited by Gary Minkley and Martin Legassick published papers presented to the conference, “‘Not Telling’: Secrecy, Lies and History’ held at the University of the Western Cape on July 11-14, 1999. While the difficulties of the Luthuli Legacy Project were not specifically discussed in the published version of their paper, this was an issue Sithole and Mkhize dealt with during their conference presentation.

<sup>124</sup> Jabulani Sithole and Sibongiseni Mkhize, ‘Truth or Lies?’, pp 76, 78, 84-5.

was missed to develop a complex heritage site museum centred on multiple and conflictual biographic narrations and interpretations of the significance of Luthuli's life.<sup>125</sup>

Perhaps the most extensive initiative of documentary history and resistance biography as heritage emerged in 1999 as "a non-partisan people's history project" which set out create a "comprehensive" website on South African history and cultural production. Seeking to challenge historical biases in educational and cultural institutions, the NGO, South African History Online (SAHO), embarked on outreach programmes with schools and communities and set out to organise a series of provincial history teacher workshops. Its website introduced learners and other users to a "chronology of events in South African history and culture" and to "important historic and cultural sites" in South Africa.<sup>126</sup>

SAHO's most ambitious project was also biographic in nature. This took the form of a "Lives of Courage" campaign, which sought to construct "a detailed online register to honour all those South Africans who played a leading role in the struggle for democracy". This campaign would "celebrate the lives of our nation builders". Visitors to its website were urged to participate and "contribute names and information on people who took part in the struggle" to help build "an online wall of remembrance". These could include "people who were banned, banished, executed, imprisoned [or] killed in action". SAHO encouraged South Africans to "tell us their stories and contributions" and to send in copies of letters, diaries and photographs. This would help "to put the missing pieces of our past together". In spite of its ambition and desire to be far reaching, this project of biographic recovery was framed in the conventional terms of recovery history, with little attention to conceptual questions about lives and narrative.<sup>127</sup> In 2003, SAHO also entered

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<sup>125</sup> The Luthuli legacy project was taken up again in 2003, and seemed geared towards the commissioning of a civic memorial sculpture, the production of a "head and shoulders portrait bust" and the research, production and installation of an exhibition ('Inkosi Albert Luthuli Legacy Project Call for Interest to Tender' (Advertisement, *Sunday Times*, 16 March 2003).

<sup>126</sup> South African History Online, 'Towards a people's history of South Africa' (Brochure, n.d.). Photographer and cultural activist, Omar Badsha, whose practices of knowledge production across a range of mediums have been marked by documentary frameworks of truth telling, directed the initiative.

<sup>127</sup> SAHO, 'Towards a people's history of South Africa' (Brochure, n.d.); SAHO, 'Lives of Courage Campaign Outline' (Flyer, n.d.).

into a collaborative partnership with the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in Cape Town, which had initiated a project to gather activist life histories “across ideological confines” in the Western Cape.<sup>128</sup>

During the 1990s, a biographic element also reared its head in the development of new initiatives aimed at transforming South African tourism’s political and cultural economy. The tourist industry had been given the responsibility of constructing, packaging, and transmitting images and representations of the ‘new’ society and its past to a perceived growing audience of international visitors. Tourism was seen as a system whose economic and modernising benefits had the potential to trickle down to local communities, which were previously marginalised. Under these circumstances in which community tourism had become the buzzword of tourism’s democratisation, a series of localised initiatives had emerged in different parts of the country to occupy the terrain of cultural tourism.<sup>129</sup>

A new genre, township tours, came into existence alongside other initiatives in cultural tourism such as ethnically-based cultural villages and village craft project. For the most part, as Leslie Witz and I have argued, these replicated the dominant discursive features of the tourist gaze on South Africa, and in their varied attempts to present what they maintained was ‘the other side’, they mostly got directed along similar routes that South African tourism had traversed for a long time.<sup>130</sup> New tourism initiatives were ironically also directed at the ‘rainbow people’ and their constitution as nation. The visit to the cultural locality was presented as a way to know oneself and to learn about the other and so become a nation. Acts of visiting, looking, taking in and learning in tourist

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<sup>128</sup> Omar Badsha, personal communication; ‘Memory and History’, <[www.ijr.org.za/memory.html](http://www.ijr.org.za/memory.html)>. See also Zubeida Jaffer (IJR researcher), ‘Honour the heroes of our struggle with something useful’, *Cape Times*, 6 August 2003. To set an example of generating activist life histories, Jaffer put forward her own narrated life in a book brought out by Kwela, publisher of women’s autobiography. See Zubeida Jaffer, *Our Generation* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2003).

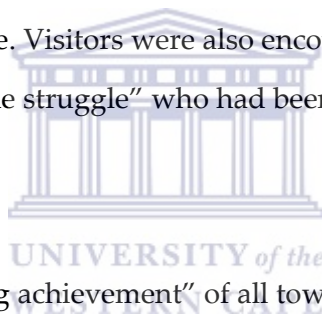
<sup>129</sup> For an extended discussion of the cultural politics of tourism in post-apartheid South Africa, see Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, ‘South Africa: A World in One Country - Moments in International Tourist Encounters with Wildlife, the Primitive and the Modern’, *Cahiers d’Études africaines*, 143, XXXVI-3, 1996.

<sup>130</sup> Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, ‘South Africa: A World in One Country’.



contemplation and celebration were to be encouraged as part of the process of nation making.<sup>131</sup>

Alongside “sensory samples of ethnic diversity” and “visual traces of apartheid’s deprivations”, township tours also offered visits to resistance memorials and heritage sites, many of which were biographic in nature. In KwaZulu-Natal, ‘Tours of Remembrance’ offered “a historical and cultural journey” through the province. Amid tours which offered an experience of “the contrasts” and “paradoxes” of Durban as well as a visit to Cato Manor, “once a bustling settlement of Indians and Africans”, visitors were encouraged to undertake historical tours of Gandhi’s Phoenix settlement at Bhambayi and visits to the Ohlange Institute, founded in 1901 by John Langalibalele Dube, first president of the ANC.<sup>132</sup> The Mamelodi Heritage Tour, planned in 2000 started at Solomon Mahlangu Freedom Square, which incorporated a sculpture unveiled in 1991 to commemorate Mahlangu’s life. Visitors were also encouraged to visit the Stanza Bopape Memorial, “another hero of the struggle” who had been killed in 1988 at the hands of security forces.<sup>133</sup>



From the 1990s, the “crowning achievement” of all township tours, however, was Soweto, where the struggle against apartheid had been “reignited in the 1970s”. Amid encounters with the physical features of Soweto’s “repetitive urban sprawl”, tourists were encouraged to visit sites that affirmed its “media-created resistance pedigree”. Sites became part of heritage routes, and these were themed as part of Soweto’s “destination culture”. In 1998, tourists were “bussed on a ‘March to Freedom’” from the Hector

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<sup>131</sup> Ciraj Rassool, ‘The Rise of Heritage’, pp 6-7.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Tours of Remembrance: A Historical and Cultural Journey through KwaZulu Natal’, Bishopsgate, n.d. (brochure). There were also other township tours of the Inanda area of Durban, which focused on biographic sites of heritage. See the descriptions of “Inanda Heritage Route” and “The Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi” in ‘A Guide to Township and Cultural Tourism in the Kingdom of the Zulu, South Africa’, Durban: Tourism Kwazulu-Natal, 2002 (Brochure). On 9 November 2003, I went on a tour of sites in the Inanda area associated with leaders such as Gandhi, Shembe, A.W.G Champion, Pixley ka Isaka Seme and John L. Dube. This tour was also ‘biographical’ in that it stressed the significance of sites such as the Phoenix settlement and the Ohlange Institute in the formation of persons. Interestingly, Langa Dube, grandson of John L. Dube, conducted the tour.

<sup>133</sup> ‘Mamelodi Heritage Route: Pretoria’s “Mother of Melodies”’, Pretoria: Pretoria City Council, 2000 (Brochure).

Pieterse Memorial Square to Vilakazi Street, where the homes of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu stood.<sup>134</sup>

At about the same time, the Gauteng Province, the City of Johannesburg and Standard Bank had formed a Soweto Heritage Trust under Nelson Mandela's patronage to promote and develop cultural and heritage tourism in Soweto. The development of heritage sites and routes would "enhance and protect" the "quality" of Soweto's environment, "instill a sense of community pride in Soweto's heritage", "contribute to nation-building and reconciliation" and offer "employment and business opportunities". The Soweto Heritage Trust made plans to turn Soweto's heritage of resistance into a more purposeful themed environment in a series of stages. It also managed to retrieve the Mandela house from the control of Winnie Madikizela Mandela, who had controversially earned money from tourist visits for a period.<sup>135</sup>

The Trust's corporate identity was styled through the adoption of a *pietà*-like visual symbol, based on Sam Nzima's iconic photograph of Pieterse's lifeless body being carried by Mbuyisa Makhubu.<sup>136</sup> For the first phase, the Hector Pieterse Memorial Square would be developed into "a vital tourism and education centre", with "walkways", "water features" and an amphitheatre. Plans were formulated to establish a visitor's centre with an exhibition and to create a "Heritage Trail" from the Hector Pieterse site to other sites such as Vilakazi Street. Related to this, plans were also made to convert Mandela's Soweto home into a museum. In the future, it was envisaged that other sites such as

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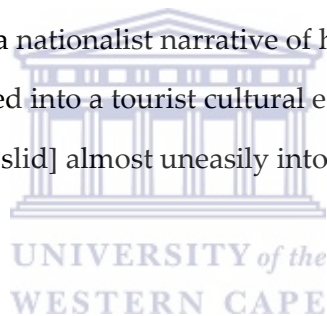
<sup>134</sup> Leslie Witz, Ciraj Rassool and Gary Minkley, 'Repackaging the Past for South African Tourism', *Daedalus*, Vol. 130, No. 1, Winter 2001, pp 284-5; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). See also Melanie Ann Feris, 'Soweto a Growing Magnet for Overseas Visitors', <[archive.iol.co.za/Archives/1998/9807/24/tour2.html](http://archive.iol.co.za/Archives/1998/9807/24/tour2.html)>.

<sup>135</sup> 'Soweto Heritage Trust', Johannesburg, n.d. (c.1998), brochure; Charlene Smith, Winnie pocketing museum earnings', <[archive.iol.co.za/Archives/1998/9803/3/winn.html](http://archive.iol.co.za/Archives/1998/9803/3/winn.html)>; Themba Sepotokele, 'Scramble to defuse Winnie museum row', <[archive.iol.co.za/Archives/1998/9803/6/spat0203.html](http://archive.iol.co.za/Archives/1998/9803/6/spat0203.html)>.

<sup>136</sup> 'Soweto Heritage Trust'. This image became so powerfully associated with history and culture in Soweto that it also entered a new Soweto forum of celebrity, glitter and showbiz, when Hector Pieterse-like *pietà* statuettes were presented as 'Soweto Awards' to honour prominent Soweto residents from different walks of life ('The Soweto Awards', SABC 3, 8 June 2002).

Morris Isaacson High School, Regina Mundi Church, Freedom Square and Kliptown could be developed “into an integrated Heritage Route”.<sup>137</sup>

The inscription of resistance heritage in Soweto in the late 1990s was of a very different cultural and discursive order from the transient memorials and monuments erected in the mid-1980s in Soweto and other townships around Johannesburg and Pretoria. Over four or five months in 1985, as a creative energy expressed itself amid the chaos of violence and repression, peace parks were created, one element of which had mimicked images seen in town squares. These had been named after political leaders such as Tambo, Sisulu, Mandela and Biko. Amid a flowering of civic art, a sculpture of Steve Biko was created out of debris and “whatever materials people could find”.<sup>138</sup> In the 1990s, the memorial biographic impetus had shifted from one that had inserted fragile markers of resistance politics into a landscape of poverty and repression to one that cast multiple stories of violence and resistance into “a nationalist narrative of heroism and sacrifice”.<sup>139</sup> This narrative was in turn mobilised into a tourist cultural economy where “the sites of resistance and remembrance [slid] almost uneasily into the world of cultural difference”.<sup>140</sup>



This was the tourist economy that the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum had to contend with when it opened on 16 June 2002 with photographic and audio-visual displays of “the struggle of the youth against the injustices of apartheid”. Through “archive, documentary and photographic footage”, the Museum told “the story of the June 16 uprising and the shooting of 13-year old Pieterse”. The “legendary” photograph of Pieterse being carried by Makhubu was not shown inside. Instead one of the other five

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<sup>137</sup> ‘Soweto Heritage Trust’, Johannesburg, n.d. (c.1998), brochure.

<sup>138</sup> See Steven Sack’s discussion of Soweto’s Peace Parks of 1985 as well as footage of a Biko memorial in the video, *The Writing’s on the Wall: The Role of Culture in South Africa* (Produced by Mark Newman for Pakathi Films with support from Kulturhuset Stockholm and Sida, 1998). See also Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989), pp 88-9. By 1986, the SADF had destroyed the parks on the pretext that they had been used to hide arms.

<sup>139</sup> Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, “‘I Saw a Nightmare...’: Violence and the Construction of Memory (Soweto, June 16, 1976)”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 39, No 4, December 2000, p 44.

<sup>140</sup> Leslie Witz, Ciraj Rassool and Gary Minkley, ‘Repackaging the Past for South African Tourism’, p 286.

in the sequence of six shot by Nzima was enlarged and put on display. In the Museum, a series of “interleading spaces joined by ramps” was created to move visitors closer to Nzima’s photograph. Large square windows above the ramps gave visitors views of some of Soweto’s “significant sites”: Orlando Stadium, Orlando Police Station as well as several schools. While panels of text gave “eye-witness accounts and background viewpoints”, much of the story of the day was presented on TV monitors, which relayed footage shot by international television news crews. A “Death Register” in “one of the few walled-in rooms” recorded the names of children who died between June 1976 and the end of 1977.<sup>141</sup>

Although Pieterse’s mother, Dorothy Molefi, expressed her pride that there was “a museum for Hector” and that children would be “learning about him in history”, the Museum was also about understanding the events of June 16 1976.<sup>142</sup> Although the Museum was created in Pieterse’s name, near the corner of Vilakazi and Moema Streets, where he had fallen, it recognised that another boy, Hastings Ndlovu, had actually been “the first child shot on that fateful day”. Nevertheless, it was Nzima’s photograph that “came to represent the tragedy of the day”. The Museum also faced a serious biographic challenge in that the family did not possess “a single snapshot of their famous son”. All the images in their possession had been lent to journalists at the time of Pieterse’s death and were never returned. Pieterse’s sister, Antoinette Sithole, who had been photographed by Nzima running alongside Makhubu and Pieterse, was employed by the Museum to give guided tours to visitors.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> ‘Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum: lest *we* forget’, City of Johannesburg, Department of Marketing and Tourism, August 2002 (Brochure); Lucille Davie, ‘Hector: the famous child whose face is unknown’, <[www.joburg.org.za/june\\_2002/hector.stm](http://www.joburg.org.za/june_2002/hector.stm)> ; Caroline Hooper-Box, ‘Selling history of Soweto to residents part of drive to instil culture of domestic tourism’, *Sunday Independent*, 2 November 2003. Nzima’s iconic image was displayed outside the Museum in the memorial precinct.

<sup>142</sup> Lucille Davie, ‘Hector: the famous child whose face is unknown’. The difficulties of mediating the interests of families of the memorialised dead, whose memorials also involved a public interest, were also reflected in disputes over the creation of memorials to the Gugulethu Seven and Trojan Horse victims in Cape Town and to the Cradock Four. These were disputes over consultation, processes of decision-making and the appropriateness of memorial forms. See Nyame Goniwe, ‘Dealing with the Past: A Memorial for the Cradock Four’, *New South African Outlook*, Vol.2, No. 3, Winter 2000 and Gershwin Wannenburg, ‘Gugulethu Seven insulted’, *Sunday Times Metro*, 29 October 2000.

<sup>143</sup> Lucille Davie, ‘Hector: the famous child whose face is unknown’.

The Museum was really inaugurated, not by the fact of Pieterse's killing, but by the power of Sam Nzima's photograph. The Hector Pieterse Museum was in fact a museum about the visual representation of Pieterse's death, and of the power of the Nzima image in provoking historical interpretation. The Hector Pieterse Museum also took the unusual position in South African public culture of boldly declaring itself to be a museum of representation. The Museum recognised that the representation of the story of June 16 was "an ongoing process", and committed itself to being "open to different interpretations of the day". Chief curator Ali Hlongwane felt it was necessary for the Museum to be "sensitive to differing accounts", and "to adapt the displays to take note of those accounts". The Museum was continuing "to record people's stories", and with this, "add[ing] to its displays". Exhibits were thus continually being adapted, with pictures rearranged, and wording on labels changed.<sup>144</sup>

One powerful example of an addition to the displays at the Hector Pieterse Museum was the introduction of a panel on Hector Pieterse's family name and identity transformations. This showed an unusual willingness on the part of the Museum to examine difficult pasts. For the most part of 25 years after his death, Pieterse had been known as 'Hector Petersen'. The adoption of 'Pieterse' by the Museum was thus a correction of the record. The new display panel also showed that the original family name had been 'Pitso', and that the name 'Pieterse' had been taken on by the family as part of an effort to 'colouredise' their identity. This was the background to the process by which 'Zolile Pitso' had become 'Hector Pieterse'.<sup>145</sup> In opening itself up to processes of historical interpretation, the Hector Pieterse Museum has shown that it is possible to be a museum of historical representation and contestation, which can move beyond merely

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<sup>144</sup> Lucille Davie, 'Hector: the famous child whose face is unknown'; Lucille Davie, 'Hector Pieterse Museum to charge entrance fee', <[www.joburg.org.za/nov\\_2002/nov28/hector.stm](http://www.joburg.org.za/nov_2002/nov28/hector.stm)> .

<sup>145</sup> Sifiso Ndlovu, Personal Communication, 8 November 2003. Ndlovu, who had published a book about his student experiences of June 16, had been the project's main researcher. See Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, *The Soweto Uprising: Counter-memories of June 1976* (Randburg: Ravan Writers Series, 1998).

“celebrat[ing] heroic national deeds” in spite of being a “state-sanctioned” institution created to turn the site of Pieterse’s death into a destination.<sup>146</sup>

To ensure that it would not merely be a destination with an informative display, the Museum had started a research project staffed by volunteers, who would “go out into the immediate community with tape recorders”. People who were present at the student marches on June 16 1976 were encouraged “to record their experiences”. The Museum had also started to develop its archives, which had begun to be used by school learners and researchers. While tourists formed 90 percent of visitors by the end of 2002, Hlongwane was confident that the measures adopted together with a “public awareness programme” would ensure higher numbers of South African visitors, especially Sowetans.<sup>147</sup> In spite of it having been created mainly as a tourist site by the City of Johannesburg through the operation of consultants, the Museum was adamant that it would not be a passive display environment. Moreover, its main researcher, historian Sifiso Ndlovu, stressed that while consultant architects (Mashabane and Rose) and a historian (himself) had been engaged to create the museum building and the display, it was significant that both he and Phil Mashabane were Sowetan by birth, and that in many ways what had emerged at the Hector Pieterse Museum had been an instance of “local heritage management”.<sup>148</sup>

### *Burial and contested biographics*

Another arena in which public political biography was shaped through memorialisation and remembrance was the theatre of the mass public funeral. One element of the rituals of funerals as spaces of mourning and forums for coming to terms with death is the funeral tribute. In religious and other settings, this ritual generally offers an appointed person(s) or volunteer(s) the opportunity to reflect on the life and achievements of the deceased

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<sup>146</sup> Alan Lipman, ‘This is not the way to honour heroes of ‘76’, *Sunday Independent*, 18 January 2004.

<sup>147</sup> Lucille Davie, ‘Hector: the famous child whose face is unknown’; Lucille Davie, ‘Hector Pieterse Museum to charge entrance fee’.

<sup>148</sup> Sifiso Ndlovu, Personal Communication, 8 November 2003. This seemed in sharp contrast to the plans for Kliptown’s Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication, the renamed site of the adoption of the Freedom Charter at the Congress of the People in 1955. There the heritage theming of the site was planned to occur through a different model of institution building, one that gave more weight to the professional credentials of the consultant.



through biographic presentation. But biography is enmeshed with other rituals of death as well. Autopsies and inquests try to construct narratives of transition from life to death. Burial entails interring the body into the land so that social and cultural identities are inscribed as permanent markers into the landscape.<sup>149</sup> The site and materiality of the grave, the design of the tombstone and its inscriptions constitute commemorative memorials, the biographic and the funereal rolled into one.<sup>150</sup> The social and cultural processes of remembrance associated with each stage of the funereal process from death to burial and after contain biographic elements connecting the dead to a memory of life and to the lives of the assembled mourners. Indeed, biography can be seen as the essence of memorial.

Mass state funerals of Chris Hani, Oliver Tambo and Joe Slovo constituted biographic arenas in South Africa during the mid-1990s. They may have been ritual ceremonies of the state, but they connected genealogically with a memory of mass political funeral processions of the 1980s, which had become a feature of political expression under apartheid's repressive conditions with restrictions on political gatherings.<sup>151</sup> The biographic nature of state funerals continued to express itself with the deaths of senior



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<sup>149</sup>For an excellent study of a dispute about burial in the Kenyan context, see David William Cohen and E.S. Atieno Odhiambo, *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa*, London: James Currey, 1992. After S.M. Otieno's death in 1986, his corpse lay unburied in the City Mortuary in Nairobi as a struggle for control over his bodily remains ensued in seven legal settings over five months. These struggles were accompanied by large street demonstrations. At the centre of the dispute were questions about who would bury S.M.'s body and where that burial would be. These issues were also the subject of debate in the streets, in bars, in the press and in academic seminars. In the process, powerful contestations emerged over Luo and Kenyan culture and history, over the meaning of 'tradition', 'custom' and 'modern'. As a result of these debates and disputes, S.M.'s dead body was "invested with life" (p 33) and became a "metaphor for history" (p 96). The case was "a most significant moment in the construction of a Kenya nation" (p 92) and a "laboratory for the study of the production of history and the sociology of power in contemporary Africa" (p 12).

<sup>150</sup>On graves as signs see David Bunn, 'The Sleep of the Brave: Graves as Sites and Signs in the Colonial Eastern Cape', in Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin (eds), *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. 'Requiem', the Fourth Story ("Quarto Racconto") of the film *Kaos*, directed by Paolo and Vittorio Tavani, deals with a struggle over the location of a cemetery between the occupants of a portion of land and the landowner. The landowner denies the occupants the right to construct a cemetery on the land and bury their dead for fear that that would mean a permanent inscription of their identity and history.

<sup>151</sup>Garrey Dennie's doctoral research studied politics of mourning ritual in South Africa. See Garrey Dennie, 'The Cultural Politics of Burial in South Africa, 1884-1990', Ph.D Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1997. See also Dennie's article, 'One King, Two Burials: The Politics of Funerals in South Africa's Transkei', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 11, 2, 1992.

government ministers and ANC members, such as, Alfred Nzo, Joe Modise, Govan Mbeki and Walter Sisulu in the early 2000s. In the setting of the mass sports stadium, crowds assembled to partake in funeral formalities. The order of events, speeches, tributes, and solemn cultural offerings constituted elements of the spectacle. The presence of a military guard ensured the authority of the state. The crowd, gathered as mass audience encircling the events, as occasional mass choir, and as the assembled nation in mourning completed an orchestrated public biographic occasion. The passage of the body as part of a funeral cortege into the stadium at the beginning of the programme and its passage thereafter to the burial site were part of the final chapter of the biographic narrative.

The post-apartheid South African state did not adopt the memorial model of the Heroes' Acre as the burial site for national leaders. Nevertheless, burials of ANC and SACP leaders in a section of Avalon Cemetery in Soweto have given rise to an undeclared, informal Heroes' Acre, seemingly set aside for leaders of a certain status. Govan Mbeki had rejected this burial form. When he died in 2001, at his insistence, he was "buried among paupers" in the "dilapidated old cemetery" in Zwide, one of Port Elizabeth's "most abject townships". "Scores" of VIPs - the diplomatic corps, government "elite" and "new black moguls" - who had come to bid 'Oom Gov' farewell and to pay their respects to his son President Thabo Mbeki, were made "to drive their air-conditioned cars along a dirt road past a squatter camp", through a "tight human avenue of very poor people". In spite of the pomp and ceremony of his funeral, Govan Mbeki was laid to rest amid graves of the poor, marked by "tin notices stuck onto metal staves". His grave became "a symbol ... of the rareness of [the attainment of] ... status", and of the fact that "so many of his people do not come anywhere close to sharing it". In the setting of the Zwide cemetery, Govan Mbeki's grave presented "an image of need but also of unflagging spirit in the face of it".<sup>152</sup>

Similar tensions between humility and ceremony, and private remembrance and public ritual marked the funeral proceedings for the burial of Walter Sisulu after his death in

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<sup>152</sup> Mark Gevisser, 'Unflagging spirit in face of need sums up Oom Gov's message', *Sunday Independent*, 9 September 2001.

2003. Thabo Mbeki expressed the poignancy of Sisulu's death: "Because he was a humble person, not many people knew the centrality of his contribution to South Africa". It was Sisulu who had "introduced" Nelson Mandela "to a life of politics" and who had taught him about the ANC. In his "enduring friendship" with Mandela, Sisulu had become "the mentor, the counsellor, the political guide, the confidant". His qualities of "humility, courage, conviction, self-respect and vision" enabled him to play "a behind-the-scenes role in the emergence of Nelson Mandela as the leader who was to take the initiative in negotiating his jailers out of power".<sup>153</sup>

Sisulu had refused to take up prominent positions in government and parliament, which had been offered to him. As a result, according to Mandela, Sisulu "had not received the international accolades and recognition he had deserved". Sisulu was "the quintessential unsung hero".<sup>154</sup> In spite of being a private citizen, Sisulu was accorded the honour of an official state funeral, which was broadcast live on television. Anecdotal accounts of the funeral proceedings told of the difficulties some members of the Sisulu extended family had in gaining access to the podium. This had occurred because of security arrangements, which had been invoked because of the presence of heads of state and other dignitaries at what was a public occasion. Ceremony and protocols of state at times clashed with the need for family mourning. However, the strains and tensions of the occasion were soothed by Desmond Tutu, who lifted the formal, sombre mood when he called for a celebration of Sisulu's life of commitment and service.

The death in 2001 of Joe Modise, former MK Commander and Minister of Defence, raised questions about how to manage biographic controversy. Just days before his death, Modise was the recipient of a "flood of extravagant tributes", including the Order of the Star of South Africa (Gold Class) "for meritorious service". In the two weeks between Modise's death and funeral, narratives of his public life were asserted and contested in the

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<sup>153</sup> Thabo Mbeki, quoted on eNews, e.tv, 6 May 2003; 'Our history is stamped with Sisulu's vision', Editorial, *Sunday Independent*, 11 May 2003; Ranjeni Munusamy, 'Nelson, is that you?', *Sunday Times Insight*, 11 May 2003.

<sup>154</sup> Ranjeni Munusamy, 'Mandela's wish for his fallen friend', *Sunday Times*, 11 May 2003; 'Our history is stamped with Sisulu's vision', Editorial, *Sunday Independent*, 11 May 2003.

press. Writing in the *Mail and Guardian*, journalist Drew Forest noted that Modise had “cut his political teeth” in the 1950s campaigns against Bantu education and removals from Sophiatown, and that he had been “closely associated” with the ANC’s turn to guerrilla warfare, having been MK chief since 1965. However, the fact was that “he was neither a good nor respected guerrilla commander” and his government record was that of “a reluctant and largely absent defence minister”. It was “hard to find a significant MK success for which Modise could claim credit”. He had been accused of “keeping a safe distance from the action” and “a lack of concern for MK troopers”, and in these respects he was contrasted with Chris Hani. Even the ANC’s Motsuenyane Commission into abuses in ANC camps found that Modise had “failed to exercise due oversight”.<sup>155</sup>

Credited with having brokered military discussions between the SADF and MK in 1991, Modise was seen as having gotten too close to “defence force top dogs” quite early. His “inherent hawkishness” had been the cause of a “drift” from the emphases in the 1996 Defence White Paper on arms control, a “defensive military posture” and lower expenditure on defence. Arms procurement became Modise’s “baby” and, “strongly sympathetic to the generals’ agitation for new military toys”, he drove the arms package through cabinet in the face of resistance from some ministers and from Parliament’s defence committee. The integration of MK and the SADF, for which Modise had been credited, had really been “driven” by others, including then Defence deputy minister Ronnie Kasrils. Modise’s “arms hobby horse” had seemingly “alerted him to new opportunities”, paving the way for “enormous business contracts”. Arms investigators deemed his involvement in a company “that had benefited from the procurement” as “extremely undesirable”. As a whole, Forest concluded that “the ‘meritoriousness’ of Modise’s contribution” was “open to question”.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Drew Forest, ‘A man with an ambiguous past’, *Mail and Guardian*, 30 November to 6 December 2001. In similar vein, Modise was also seen as having “made many enemies and lost the respect of many soldiers” when he “oversaw the brutal crushing” of the mutiny by post-Soweto recruits in ANC camps. See Mondli Makhanya, ‘An old fighter takes the last salute’, *Sunday Times*, 2 December 2001.

<sup>156</sup> Drew Forest, ‘A man with an ambiguous past’.

In contrast, Ronnie Kasrils, Modise's former deputy defence minister, suggested that Modise had been "a role-model and icon of the struggle for freedom". Undoubtedly aware of biographic controversy and turmoil around Modise, Kasrils attempted to set the record straight about Modise's resistance past, political work and moral credentials. Crediting Modise with a "unique and illustrious" contribution in the integration and establishment of a "credible defence force", Kasrils depicted him as "a no nonsense commander" who was "unafraid of dirtying his hands". Moreover, Modise had been "a warm, friendly human being" with "a heart of gold". Kasrils's account of Modise's career provided a list of political and military achievements, of having organised bases and camps "throughout the Frontline States" and "training for MK cadres in a dozen African and socialist countries", and having "commanded" the "incursions" by ZAPU and MK into Rhodesia in 1967-68.<sup>157</sup>

Modise, Kasrils suggested, had "helped to mastermind" the military attacks on the Sasol oil refinery, the Voortrekkerhoogte military base and Koeberg nuclear plant as "armed propaganda" aimed at undermining the apartheid regime and inspiring the people. Modise, Kasrils suggested, had been meticulous in his political administration as Defence Minister. "Sensitive to charges of nepotism", Modise had held back from advocating the cause of Jackie Sedibe for promotion to general, as Sedibe was his "lifelong companion and devoted wife". Instead, it was Kasrils, as Deputy Minister, who had pushed her promotion through. As Minister of Defence, Modise ensured that the SANDF "would be representative of the country's demographics". It was he who had produced the "policy basis and framework" for the new defence force in the form of the Defence White Paper. The Defence Review that Modise had produced was "regarded as the most transparent and consultative in international experience". These steps had been adopted by Parliament and formed the basis of the arms procurement programme. Loyal and devoted, Kasrils noted that the accusations against Modise of corruption around arms procurement had been rejected shortly before his death.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ronnie Kasrils, 'Modise: A soldier and a gentleman', *The Star*, 30 November 2001.

<sup>158</sup> Ronnie Kasrils, 'Modise: A soldier and a gentleman'.

Modise was buried with military honours in a semi-state funeral. At the funeral, the ongoing biographic disputes surrounding Modise could not be ignored. Thabo Mbeki rose to Modise's defence against critics, who "opposed Modise while he lived [and] who continued to oppose him as he lay in his grave". In his biographic defence of Modise, Mbeki showed his awareness of the fallibility of political and moral greatness. Modise's critics, he suggested, were people who worked "to ferret beneath the mounds of the graves to find the negative things with which they infuse to evil spirits of the night they will strive to conjure". In contrast to these "macabre" depictions, Mbeki insisted that those "who had the privilege to experience the comradeship of Joe Modise" would "tell the story of a man of courage". This would be a story of "a thinker ... a person of loyalty to his cause, his principles, his fellow fighters, his comrades".<sup>159</sup>

Biographic turmoil continued to erupt in the public domain, and not only in biographical assessments at times of death. The conviction and imprisonment of former UDF and ANC Western Cape leader Alan Boesak in the late 1990s on charges of the theft of donor funds intended for social causes constituted a biographic interruption, with his biographical path coming unstuck. In a narrative switch, garlanding and celebration had turned to ostracism and pity.<sup>160</sup> The moral elements of political biography's narration were also contested during the 2003 Hefer Commission of Enquiry into accusations that Director of Public Prosecutions and former UDF leader, Bulelani Ngcuka had been an apartheid era spy. The forum of the Commission constituted a theatre of all-out biographic war, as the

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<sup>159</sup> *Cape Argus*, 10 December 2001. In 2003, Thabo Mbeki flew to the eastern Cape in 2003 to attend the funeral of Kaiser Matanzima, who had been buried "as a hero". Matanzima had been regarded by CONTRALESA as "one of the heroes of the liberation struggle". Mbeki was taken to task for praising a Bantustan "stooge" and "quisling chief", who had "dispensed patronage to his cronies while he grew fat from colluding with an oppressive regime". See Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya, 'Kaiser Matanzima: Saint or Sinner?', *Mail and Guardian*, 20-26 June 2003; Alie Fataar, 'Not worthy of a hero's burial', *Cape Argus*, 27 June 2003; Mathatha Tsedu, 'Bizarrely, Mbeki snubs his old comrades and praises a stooge', *Sunday Times*, 29 June 2003.

<sup>160</sup> Boesak had argued that he had taken the fall for the ANC, which had abandoned him and refused "to accept collective responsibility" for money which had been used "for struggle activities". On his release from prison, Boesak made an unsuccessful plea to Thabo Mbeki to "consider his past contribution" and pardon him. At the same time, Boesak refused to accept an award from the ANC for "his contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle" during the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary UDF celebrations (*Cape Times*, 25 March 1999; *Cape Argus*, 21 August 2003). Other political leaders who experienced a moral switch in their biographic narratives through accusations of having spied or having become corrupt were Peter Mokaba and Tony Yengeni.



narratives and moral trajectories of the resistance biographies of Ngcuka and his accusers, especially former Transport minister, ex-Robben Islander and underground resistance hero, Mac Maharaj, came under public, forensic scrutiny. At stake in these proceedings was whether some people had “abuse[d] their past contribution to the attainment of freedom as a licence for their own corruption and greed”.<sup>161</sup>

Ngcuka may have been vindicated by the proceedings and Maharaj may have emerged “with his own reputation in tatters”.<sup>162</sup> But these were not merely empirical issues that could be decided through access to the surveillance and intelligence archives of the apartheid state and the ANC. The Commission also marked more than merely a watershed in South Africa’s democracy of the demise of the age of the “Old Activist” and the rise of the age of the “New Mandarin”.<sup>163</sup> If it was possible for a biography of resistance to take an immoral turn to corruption and even personal gain, then this also raised questions about the very terms of that resistance biography, and how it came to be narrated in the first place. The turmoil surrounding Allan Boesak’s status as struggle hero had constituted a biographic crisis in South African public culture in which doubt began to be raised that greatness was something inherent. Now the possibility of moral deviation posed challenges for the discourse of the heroic leader and perhaps even for the morality of political biography itself.

### *A biographic order*

In spite of these biographic dilemmas and travails, the concepts of greatness and exemplary lives had seemingly seeped into the very veins of South African state and society since the 1990s. Heroic biography became part of the order of society, and biographic concepts of history expressed themselves in virtually all spheres of life. The rituals of state were conducted with keen attention to biographic memory. In February 2004, Thabo Mbeki walked “in the shadows of imposing posters of African greats and

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<sup>161</sup> Bulelani Ngcuka, Declaration to the Hefer Commission of Enquiry, 10 December 2003, reproduced in the *Sunday Times*, 14 December 2003.

<sup>162</sup> Anthony Holiday, ‘An affair of masks and shadows’, *Cape Times*, 14 January 2004.

<sup>163</sup> Mark Gevisser, ‘Yesterday’s men grasp their last at Hefer’, *Sunday Times*, 7 December 2003.

pioneers of African unity” on his way to delivering the state of the nation address in Parliament. Posters of Jomo Kenyatta, Leopold Senghor, Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere were among those displayed as “a way of appreciating their gallantry and ... heroic feats”, which benefited “not only their countries but Africa and the world at large”.<sup>164</sup>

The conferring of national orders on community leaders, struggle veterans and “icons of the anti-apartheid struggle”, both living and dead, ensured that heroic biographies of resistance were incorporated into the ceremonies of government. In 1999, Nelson Mandela conferred the Order of the Southern Cross (gold), then South Africa’s highest honour, on the late ANC presidents Albert Luthuli and Oliver Tambo. Govan Mbeki, Steve Biko and other veterans of the struggle were given awards “for meritorious service in the general public interest”. A few years later, a transformed system of national orders had been created, including one in Luthuli’s name, the Order of Luthuli, which recognised “contributions to the struggle for democracy, nation building, human rights, justice, peace and conflict resolution in Africa”. In 2004, Cissy Gool and Charlotte Maxeke were honoured posthumously in a ceremony that recounted their political achievements as service to society. Other posthumous awards went to Alfred Nzo, Archibald Gumede and Matthew Goniwe.<sup>165</sup>

To ensure that deceased leaders would not face any “danger” that their “role ... would be underplayed or forgotten, political parties and organisations ensured that regular ceremonies of biographic maintenance and other forms of memory work were instituted. A commemoration held at Joe Slovo’s grave by members of the SACP in 2004 was geared at building a memory of “South Africa’s most celebrated communist”. In arranging the exhumation of Anton Lembede’s remains from Newclare cemetery and their ceremonial reburial at his home in Mbumbulu in KwaZulu-Natal in 2002, the ANCYL narrated Lembede’s biography into the memory of the democratic political order. In 1999, The ANC conducted its birthday celebrations by projecting Thabo Mbeki, its president, in

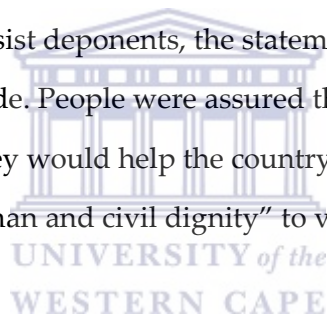
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<sup>164</sup> *Daily News*, 6 February 2004.

<sup>165</sup> *Cape Argus*, 11 June 1999; *Cape Times*, 4 February 2004; *Cape Times*, 2 December 2003.

visual terms as part of a presidential pantheon and the inheritor of a leadership tradition.<sup>166</sup>

In the 1990s, more generally, biographies of repression, violence, suffering and survival were inscribed into the very sinews of the institutional workings of social transformation. The submission of evidence of gross violations of human rights to the TRC required the construction of a story of by a deponent of his or her own experience or that of another person in a formal statement. These statements of “killing, torture, severe ill-treatment, abduction and disappearance” that occurred “in a political context” between 1960 and 1994 were made following a narrative order prescribed on a *pro forma* violations statement form. This included specific details about the violation, the details of the victim, including organisational involvement, the political context or circumstances, the event, perpetrators, possible witnesses, resulting medical and legal processes, and physical, psychological and financial consequences. To assist deponents, the statement form provided examples of detailed descriptions as a guide. People were assured that in making their statement about an experience of violation, they would help the country “come to terms with the past” and contribute to “restor[ing] human and civil dignity” to victims of abuses.<sup>167</sup>



In the statement, the person also had to supply information on previous statements made about the violation to any other body as well as any supporting documents that would assist the TRC in understanding the experience described. Designated TRC statement takers and others who facilitated the official submission of the story of violation were asked to assist in ensuring forensic completeness by checking that the statement had been “completed as fully as possible”, and to make any observations of the process of taking the statement that may have been necessary. Significantly, deponents were also asked to indicate what their expectations were of the process “for individuals”, “for the Community” and “for the Nation”. They were also asked to consider any “symbolic acts

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<sup>166</sup> Vukani Mde, ‘Comrades pay tribute to Slovo’, *This Day*, 7 January 2004; *Cape Times*, 21 October 2002; ‘For 87 years we acted together for change. Now we must move forward even faster to achieve our goals’ (ANC Advertisement), *Sunday Times*, 10 January 1999.

<sup>167</sup> ‘Statement concerning Gross Violations of Human Rights’ (Pro Forma statement form (Version 5, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, December 1996).

which will help us remember the past, honour the dead, acknowledge the victims and their families and further the cause of reconciliation".<sup>168</sup>

Deponents were informed that the submission of the statement could, if they agreed, also be delivered at a public hearing and may also result in their name appearing in the final commission report.<sup>169</sup> The construction and performance of biographies of terror on terms set by legislation, policy and practice were thus central features of the workings of the TRC. The biographic testimonies provided by 'ordinary people' were inserted by the TRC process into a national narrative of great leaders and key events of resistance to apartheid. This resulted in the "simultaneous exhumation and burial of history", creating a paradox that lay "at the heart" of the TRC's workings and public representations.<sup>170</sup>

After a long delay in attending to reparations following the submission of the TRC report, government finally decided to provide a once-off grant of R30 000 to those "survivors" who had gone through the TRC process and who had been designated by the TRC as victims. In making this decision it was reiterated that "no one can attach monetary value to life and suffering". Government also accepted the TRC's recommendations on symbolic reparations as part of "a comprehensive response". To this end, it drew attention to the legacy project of Freedom Park, where a garden of remembrance, memorial and museum would be created in Pretoria as the "main project in this regard". South Africans were also asked to ensure that "the memories of liberators such as Oliver Tambo, Chris Hani, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe and Steve Biko live[d] on in the minds of generations to come".<sup>171</sup>

The submission of land claims in terms of the Restitution of Land Rights Act No 22 of 1994 also had a biographic character and required the construction of life history. A claimant,

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<sup>168</sup> 'Statement concerning Gross Violations of Human Rights'.

<sup>169</sup> 'Statement concerning Gross Violations of Human Rights'.

<sup>170</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Leslie Witz and Gary Minkley, 'Burying and Memorialising the Body of Truth: The TRC and National Heritage', in Wilmot James and Linda van de Vijver (eds), *After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000), pp 116, 123.

<sup>171</sup> 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission Handbook', Government Communications, July 1993. This document, presenting Government's response to the TRC Report, was distributed in Post Offices in all official languages.

especially one who had been a long-term tenant, needed to submit “a mini-family history essay” as part of the “comprehensive background statements” that had to be lodged with a completed claim form. The Land Claims Commissioner recommended that aspects that needed to be framed in the biography of forced removal were: “life before ‘forced removal’”, “life at the time of the Group’s interference” and “life since forced resettlement”. In addition to any documentary evidence that claimants might have, such as rental receipts, municipal accounts, clinic cards or certificates of occupation, they were also advised that the submission of “oral testimony” was also permissible. The Act made it possible for claimants to submit oral evidence as well as evidence that a court might regard as hearsay. The claimant’s narrated life history would therefore “place on public record for the benefit of future generations what actually transpired when the Group Areas Board intervened in the old way of life”.<sup>172</sup>

In a number of cases, biography re-emerged at later stages of the land claims process, particularly at the stage of its culmination in the successful handover of houses. In District Six, the handover of homes to the first two returnees Dan Ndzabela and Ebrahim Murat occurred in a victorious civic ceremony, which saw the return in narrative terms as a victory over adversity, and as an opportunity to rebuild community. The handover of keys by former president Nelson Mandela in February 2004 occurred on a day that constituted a grand biographic occasion. Ndzabela and Murat told an assembled audience gathered in the ‘Homecoming Centre’ of their District Six pasts, their subsequent township lives and their hopes for the future. These narratives were repeated in a brochure produced by the District Six Museum. The struggle of Ndzabela and Murat to return was presented as “both a personal and political journey marking the spirit and dignity of the dispossessed, and their quest to be reunited with the land they lost”. Mandela presented them with their keys in front of homes adorned with specially

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<sup>172</sup> ‘Ex-tenants who were victims of removals under the Group Areas Act have land restitution rights too!!’ (Office of the Regional Land Claims Commissioner, Western and Northern Cape, 4 June 1996).

commissioned monumental portraits of all the designated returnees.<sup>173</sup> This was biography of repression and dispersal turned into biography of triumph and return.

The process of demobilisation and reintegration of former MK and APLA guerrillas in the mid-1990s occurred as part of a process of tallying and rationalisation to create a united defence force. Some were to be incorporated into the new national military while others would be demobilised into civilian life. This process was also connected to the payment of demobilisation gratuities of varying amounts depending on years of service. Biographic methods were employed to determine who could be defined as a 'combatant' through the compilation of a Certified Personnel Register (CPR). There were a number of difficulties in compiling lists. MK and APLA had not kept detailed records of their members and in many cases membership had been anonymous, with members known by pseudonyms.

When the CPR was finalised, many former MK and APLA combatants had been excluded from the list, and were thus unable to secure demobilisation gratuities. Those excluded continued to vouch for their combatant status by constructing their biographies on an "MK/APLA Data Collection Form", which requested material information about the person's military career, including courses and camps attended, military responsibilities and present occupation. In addition three contactable referees had to be provided who would be able to attest to the person's military history.<sup>174</sup> A related biographic process involved the determination of who fell into the category of 'struggle veteran'. The Special Pensions Act (No 69) passed in 1996 required the state to pay pensions to "people who had made sacrifices" in the cause of establishing democracy in South Africa. These special pensions were intended for those who had given "full-time service in a liberation movement" or who had been imprisoned, banned or forced into exile, and who had thus been unable to provide for their own pensions. A special board set up to adjudicate

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<sup>173</sup> See the District Six Museum brochure specially produced for the occasion, 'The Return' (Cape Town, District Six Museum, 11 February 2004); Nazma Dreyer, 'Mandela hands over symbolic keys to elders of District Six', *Cape Times*, 12 February 2004. The portraits had been commissioned by the City of Cape Town.

<sup>174</sup> Lephophotho Mashike and Mafole Mokalobe, 'Reintegration into civilian life: The case of former MK and APLA combatants', *Track Two*, Vol. 12, Nos. 1 and 2, September 2003; 'MK/APLA Data Collection Form' (SANDF, n.d.).



applications had to make a biographic determination of an applicant's veteran status. By August 2000, thousands of struggle veterans entitled to special pensions had not received a cent.<sup>175</sup>

As the discourse of heroic leaders was consolidated, biographic narration and self-narration became regularised as part of the forums and structures of political transformation and reconstruction. Biography was inscribed as an essential element of public life, as a means of comprehending the order of society and the attainment of democracy. Biographic narration became part of the process of living itself. If however you were filled with self-doubt along with the many South Africans who "suffer[ed] from a collective inferiority complex", then Oliver Tambo's daughter, Tselane Tambo, was on hand to assist with building "self confidence for the masses" through "the first Grooming School in Africa". Through courses in personal presentation, etiquette, elocution and diction, communication skills, power-dressing, and leadership and drive, the Grooming School would enable South Africans to develop their "social skills that [would] uplift their sense of self-worth" and "project an image of power and authority".<sup>176</sup> More than a school to effect people's transition into corporate culture, this initiative was like an agency in person production, assisting people to narrate their lives in a society in transition.

Rituals of life narration permeated the spaces of civic life outside the formal institutions of politics and the state, as South Africans became habituated to a discourse of survival, triumph and exemplariness. The lives and feats of "pioneers" were honoured as part of local heritage festivals. In 2002, in the township of Langa in Cape Town, 25 "luminaries" among its residents, who had "contributed to the community's upliftment" and who had "put the community on the map" were honoured with awards amid celebrations of its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.<sup>177</sup> The annual Soweto Awards, billed as one of the main events of the Soweto calendar, was inaugurated in 2001 to "honour the heroes of the sprawling township" and

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<sup>175</sup> Robert Brand, 'Struggle vets wait in vain for pensions', *Cape Argus*, 25 August 2000.

<sup>176</sup> Sandile Memela, 'Self confidence for the masses', *Hola*, 25 April 1999.

<sup>177</sup> Eric Ntabazalila, 'Langa, rich in history, hosts variety of events to celebrate its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary', *Cape Times*, 13 September 2002; Erick Ntabazalila, 'Langa luminaries to be honoured with awards', *Cape Times*, 20 September 2002.

“its famous sons and daughters for achieving greatness under trying circumstances”. In 2002, its large, televised banquet held at the Sandton Convention Centre marked a meeting of black empowerment, celebrity chic and events management, putting a new elite face on the biographic narrative of triumph over adversity. The award of mini-Hector Pieterse statuettes to the recipients signalled the appropriation of resistance history into this elite narrative.<sup>178</sup>

Biographies of greatness, leadership, service and exemplary lives were also unleashed through the medium of the heroes’ competition. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, readers of the *Sunday Times* were invited to nominate persons as their “Hero of the Century” in a competition sponsored by Castle Lager and managed by advertising and marketing agency, Ogilvy and Mather. Over a few months, readers were invited to nominate their heroes in a range of categories that included the prestigious competition for the “Hero of the Struggle”. To help readers choose “the individual who best personifie[d] the struggle for democracy in South Africa”, the *Sunday Times* offered readers an alphabetised list of biographic suggestions. In selecting the winner, Nelson Mandela, one reader picked up a prize of R1 999, and another lucky reader stood to win R20 000, for correctly selecting the overall Hero of the Century from the different category winners.<sup>179</sup> In the tracks of all manner of millennial competitions to find the “man of the millennium”, “person of the century” and “history’s greatest maker”, South African newspapers, radio and television stations, provincial governments and corporate sponsors held their own campaigns to identify the ‘greatest South Africans’, the ‘woman of the year’ and even exemplary citizens of a “City of Angels”.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> ‘How times have changed’ (editor’s comment), *Pretoria News*, 5 June 2002; ‘The Soweto Awards’, SABC 3, 8 June 2002.

<sup>179</sup> See hybrid article-advertisements in the *Sunday Times*, 2 May, 9 May and 30 May 1999.

<sup>180</sup> Bonny Schoonakker, ‘Madiba: The millennium man’, *Sunday Times Insight*, 19 December 1999; *Time*, 31 December 1999 (Special Issue: Person of the Century); ‘Calling all Angels: City of Angels Nominations’ (Advertisement of campaign sponsored by the *Cape Argus*, South African Airways and ABSA), *Tatler*, 27 May 2004. In the latter campaign, persons sending in nominations were asked to “give a short synopsis of the nominee’s contribution to society” and why they thought the person “deserv[ed] to be honoured”. In 2001, the Eastern Cape Province held an award ceremony sponsored by insurance group Metropolitan to honour “23 sons and daughters of the Eastern Cape” who had “achieved in the fields of politics, the anti-apartheid struggle, academics and business”. Nelson Mandela “took home the coveted “Icon of the Century” award, while the late Govan Mbeki was

In April 2003, the Nelson Mandela Foundation honoured 1500 “veterans who contributed to the liberation struggle” at a luncheon in Sandton that turned into “a day of singing, dancing and remembering”. The veterans from the ANC, PAC and AZAPO reminisced by viewing film footage of resisting crowds, as dancers dressed as school pupils entertained them in a performance reminiscent of the film *Sarafina*. During an afternoon when resistance memory and heroic biography merged with the glitz and glamour of entertainment, Jacob Zuma, Ronnie Kasrils and Stanley Magoba danced on stage with singers Abigail Kubeka and Yvonne Chaka Chaka to the delight of the guests. Flanked by two national flags, flags with the insignia of the liberation movements were carried on to the stage by children as President Thabo Mbeki lit a flame in celebration of almost ten years of democracy.<sup>181</sup>

While all guests were reminded that this was also a time to remember fallen heroes like Tambo, Sobukwe, Biko and Hani, the veterans were saluted as “the living legends of our liberation struggle”. As a result of “their heroic deeds”, it was possible to “look back with pride and celebrate with unrestrained joy”. The celebratory biographic occasion was convened under the patronage of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, which had become the principal mediating institution that produced, maintained and deployed political biography in the service of nation building. In the 1990s, Nelson Mandela’s biography, styled as a ‘long walk to freedom’, came to stand for the national narrative. The Nelson Mandela Foundation had inherited a genealogy of Mandela biographic production in which narrations of Mandela’s life had been deployed for different purposes. It is to this cultural history of Nelson Mandela’s biography that we must now turn.

### *Nelson Mandela, auto/biography and the new nation*

Nowhere was the preoccupation with biography and the attributes of political leadership as a mode of understanding the past in the new South Africa so acute as in the case of

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named as the recipient of the Legend award for his efforts in the struggle against apartheid. See <[www.dispatch.co.za/2001/10/15/easterncape/CMANDELA.HTM](http://www.dispatch.co.za/2001/10/15/easterncape/CMANDELA.HTM)>.

<sup>181</sup> SABC 3 News, 6 April 2003; *Cape Times*, 7 April 2003.

Nelson Mandela. The late 1980s and the early 1990s saw a veritable ‘scramble’ for Nelson Mandela’s life as biographies in virtually every medium were produced. While Mandela had acquired near-Messianic status during his imprisonment, it was the “cultural production of the Messianic Mandela” that became a fundamental feature of South Africa after his release.<sup>182</sup> In the process, Nelson Mandela’s life history came to be inscribed into the South Africa’s process of nation making as the seeming embodiment of its heritage and immortal guarantor of its future.

Among the most prominent biographies of Mandela that were readily on hand in the 1990s were those by Fatima Meer and Mary Benson.<sup>183</sup> While both had first been published in the 1980s (Meer’s in 1988 and Benson’s in 1986) as exercises in publicity around Mandela’s imprisonment and the cause of the ANC, each had been republished a few times, especially as Mandela’s life took on new value with his release. Long-time ANC publicist-historian, Benson’s biography was ‘updated’ to include Mandela’s election as president, and was republished in 1994. Both biographies were claimed as authentic. Meer’s book claimed in its title to be the ‘Authorised Biography’, while former *Drum* editor and early Congress biographic narrator, Anthony Sampson, referred to Benson’s book as “the authoritative ... life story”.<sup>184</sup>

This scramble for Mandela’s life in the mid-1990s was to be seen in other mediums as well. A number of photographic biographies were produced and older ones from previous biographic treatments were dusted off. One which IDAF had produced to coincide with his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and 25 year in prison was substantially revised and enlarged.<sup>185</sup> The

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<sup>182</sup>This began immediately on his release on 11 February 1990, in spite of his seeming indifference to the assembled international media and his attempts to shake off the redemptive conception of him as prophet. See the excellent essay by Rob Nixon, ‘Mandela, Messianism, and the Media’, in his book, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp 175-192.

<sup>183</sup>Mary Benson, *Nelson Mandela*, London: Penguin, 1986; Fatima Meer, *Higher than Hope: The Authorised Biography of Nelson Mandela*, London: Penguin, 1990 (first published in Johannesburg by Skotaville in 1988).

<sup>184</sup>Quotation on frontcover of Mary Benson, *Nelson Mandela*.

<sup>185</sup>IDAF, *Nelson Mandela - His Life in the Struggle: A Pictorial History*, London: IDAF, 1988. Another biographical publication produced to commemorate Mandela’s 70th birthday in 1988, which made use of photographs, was that put together by Alf Kumalo with an accompanying text by Es’kia Mphahlele.

booklet was organised as a chronological account with photographs based on Mandela's childhood and early years, followed by images of the 1950s grouped around the themes of defiance and the Treason Trial. Photographs from the phase of underground politics and armed struggle were followed by images from the Rivonia trial and subsequent incarceration on Robben Island. The photographic narrative then centred on uMkhonto we Sizwe campaigns in the 1960s, resistance inside South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s and repression by the apartheid state. The publication culminated in a sequence of images reflecting the commemoration of Mandela's life and work, campaigns for his release, and events held overseas in solidarity with anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa and anti-colonial struggles in Namibia.<sup>186</sup>

The Mayibuye Centre distributed this photographic booklet and its exhibition version in the 1990s after IDAF's relocation to South Africa and the incorporation into the Centre of its resources, archival holdings and publishing interests. Under these new conditions, and after the release of Nelson Mandela, as well as his election as president, these pictorial biographies took on new life and were incorporated into a new vision. During 1996 and 1997, they were sold at the Mayibuye Centre's Robben Island Exhibition and Information Centre located near the entrance to the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront alongside other Mandela auto/biographical materials.<sup>187</sup> These included *The Struggle is my Life*, based on Mandela's assembled speeches and writings alongside historical documents and accounts by fellow prisoners of Mandela in prison. Originally published in 1978 by IDAF to celebrate Mandela's 60th birthday, this new edition commemorated Mandela's 76th birthday and the new era of South African history, marked by Mandela's election as

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See Alf Kumalo, *Mandela: Echoes of an Era* (Text by Es'kia Mphahlele), London: Penguin, 1988. Another 70th birthday biographical text is the *Free Nelson Mandela Festival Concert Book*, London: Penguin, 1970.

<sup>186</sup> This publication was also produced as a portable exhibition of photographs on 14 poster-size sheets for schools, libraries and community centres. See *Nelson Mandela – His Life in the Struggle: Portable Exhibition of Photographs* (London: IDAF, 1988).

<sup>187</sup> The temporary Robben Island Exhibition and Information Centre (which closed in early 1997) was seen as the first practical step by the Mayibuye Centre's 'Gateway Project' initiative in the direction of the development of a fully fledged museum of apartheid at the Waterfront, which would provide an embarkation point for visitors to Robben Island.

president.<sup>188</sup> Older Mandela biographies were drawn into a lengthened master narrative, one that culminated in the formation of a new nation, characterised by reconciliation and cultural diversity - a democratic 'World in One Country'. In this new national history, the conflicts of the past, as told through a resistance narrative, now belonged to all in the new multicultural nation of ethnic diversity.

The monumentalisation of Mandela's life history in the new South Africa came about initially through the publication of the 630-page *Long Walk to Freedom*, released in 1994 as Nelson Mandela's 'autobiography'.<sup>189</sup> Advertised in British underground rail stations as offering a narrative of a life which progressed 'from tribesman, to terrorist, to statesman', *Long Walk To Freedom* became a bestseller many times over, sold in bookshops from its own specially designed display units, and was even distributed by mail order alongside the latest in kitchen appliances and gym technology. It became the undisputed primary cultural icon of the 'new South Africa' and even found its way into conservative white homes in the quest to extend the process of nationing in South Africa.

Mandela's 'autobiography' also took on new life and was substantially abridged to be more accessible "to the millions of marginally literate South Africans". The majority of Mandela's followers, it was argued, "could not benefit from the original". The "essentials of the biography" were thus extracted after lengthy negotiations between the publishers, and over four months, sections were rewritten into "simpler English" before the new version, one-sixth of its original length, was handed over to Ahmed Kathrada "for checking".<sup>190</sup> This "short cut to a long walk" was seen as a worthwhile read for those who wanted "to get some historical facts straight and a sense of Mandela's remarkable life in a

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<sup>188</sup> *Nelson Mandela: His Speeches and Writings, 1944-1990* (Bellville and Cape Town: Mayibuye Books in association with David Philip, 1994). A companion volume, *Nelson Mandela Speaks: Forging a Democratic, Non-Racial South Africa* (Cape Town and Bellville: David Philip and Mayibuye Books, 1994) was also produced.

<sup>189</sup> *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994).

<sup>190</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Abridged Edition; Abridged by Coco Cachalia and Marc Suttner), London and Braamfontein: Little, Brown and Nolwazi Educational Publishers, Macmillan, 1996.



single sitting”.<sup>191</sup> However, it was also seen as having created a “sanitised history in which Mandela becomes the struggle and the struggle becomes Mandela”.<sup>192</sup> The well heeled could instead have chosen the “elegant walk to freedom”.<sup>193</sup> *Long Walk to Freedom* was made available “with scenery” in an illustrated edition, and a limited number was also made available as a *de luxe* version “quarter bound by hand in Wassa goatskin”.<sup>194</sup> In this version, the pages were gilt edged and each volume was “individually boxed in a lined boxcase”. A specially commissioned portrait, signed by Nelson Mandela was included in each copy of the limited edition.<sup>195</sup>

In spite of the styling of all the versions of *Long Walk* as autobiographies, it is clear that they were auto/biographies, combining both autobiography as well as biography. The main book originated in writing that Mandela had begun secretly in 1974 while on Robben Island. In spite of discovery and confiscation by the authorities, a copy had been safely taken off the island. Mandela continued work on the manuscript after his release in 1990. It was co-Rivonia trialist and co-prisoner, Ahmed Kathrada, who was acknowledged as having spent long hours “revising, correcting and giving accuracy to the story”. Mandela also acknowledged the collaboration of Richard Stengel and his assistant Mary Pfaff “in the creation of this book, providing invaluable assistance in editing and revising the first parts and in the writing of the latter parts”. Interestingly, Gail Gerhart was thanked for “her factual review of the manuscript”.<sup>196</sup>

All these interventions, as well as those in subsequent editions, by professional assistants, editors, comrades, academics and publishers imply a more complex production and authorship than the notion of ‘autobiography’ acknowledges. *Long Walk* was published in the autobiographic convention of the first person, but this may also be a reflection of a marketing and business strategy, and the value attached to Mandela’s life story, packaged

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<sup>191</sup>Philippa Garson, ‘Mandela Book Abridged for Easier Reading’, *Mail and Guardian*, 11 to 17 October, 1996.

<sup>192</sup>Terry Eager, ‘Suddenly it’s a Hop, Skip, and Jump to Freedom’, *Sunday Times*, 10 November 1996.

<sup>193</sup>Anthea Bristowe, ‘And Now, the Elegant Walk to Freedom’, *Sunday Times*, 22 December 1996.

<sup>194</sup>Flyer on *The Illustrated Long Walk to Freedom* (De Luxe Edition), Exclusive Books, 1996.

<sup>195</sup>Flyer on *The Illustrated Long Walk to Freedom* (De Luxe Edition), Exclusive Books, 1996.

<sup>196</sup>*Long Walk to Freedom*, Acknowledgements.

as autobiography, in what was presented as Mandela's own words. In important ways the text was Mandela's. However, the scale of intervention entailed in interviewing, overwriting, rewriting, editing, adding, abridging and reordering suggests that in crucial ways, the production of Mandela in *Long Walk* was as much biography as autobiography, the two operating together. Nevertheless, it is the autobiographical 'I' that gave *Long Walk*, the epic life story of struggle, sacrifice, resilience, survival and victory, its authoritative and sacrosanct quality and status of truth.<sup>197</sup> It also served to produce Mandela in perhaps the most personal way, enabling for the reader not only a first-hand encounter with "one of the great moral and political leaders of our time",<sup>198</sup> but also an experience of emotional closeness and direct communication with the *pater familias*.

Moreover the text itself, once published acquired its own biography. This happened in relation to who read it, where it was circulated and the meanings that were attached to it as a cultural product and icon by layers of South Africans and outsiders seeking to understand South Africa and its leader.<sup>199</sup> The transformation of *Long Walk* into further forms, from hard back to soft cover, abridged and illustrated and its entry, in these changed forms, into worlds of reading and imagination different from the original were part of the biography of the book. The auto/biographical text, now with its own biography, had taken on a life of its own, as icon, cultural object and national symbol. Encounters in the act of reading with a narration of the South African past told through Mandela's life resulted in new readers being incorporated into the nation. This incorporative nationalism drew on different readership markets of different versions. Even outsiders, readers from other countries, were able to participate, and through reading, they could simulate the fantasy of becoming members of Mandela's nation.

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<sup>197</sup>A similar case of auto/biography was the 'autobiography' of Sam Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma* (London: PANAF, 2001), which was prepared by long-time sympathiser with Namibian nationalism and SWAPO publicist, Randolph Vigne.

<sup>198</sup>*Long Walk To Freedom*, Dust Cover.

<sup>199</sup>In a poll of British readers run by Channel 4 TV and a bookstore chain, *Long Walk To Freedom* made it (at 90th) into the top 100 of the UK's "best books of the [twentieth] century". See *Sunday Times*, 16 February 1997.

In 1999, Anthony Sampson, who had been commissioned a few years before, published the 'authorised biography' of Mandela. As *Drum* editor in the early 1950s, Sampson had known Mandela and his colleagues, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo, and in 1952 had commissioned Mandela's first ever written article. Sampson's book on the Treason Trial had been one of the first biographical studies of ANC leaders. With Mandela's blessing, Sampson was able to write "the most comprehensive account" of Mandela's life, having conducted hundreds of interviews with family, friends, political colleagues as well as former Robben Island warders and former National Party cabinet ministers. What emerged was "a masterly, authoritative biography" whose "human story" was seen as "a fitting complement" to *Long Walk to Freedom*. The significance of Sampson's study was its argument that it was during his imprisonment on Robben Island that Nelson Mandela emerged as a person with leadership qualities. It was prison that transformed Mandela "from 'raw revolutionary' into a consummate statesman dedicated to reconciliation".<sup>200</sup>

In the 1990s, the image of Nelson Mandela as survivor and victor, leader and conciliator, and as the nation's father was being pursued at full steam. New biographies, in almost every medium, made their appearance. An illustrated children's book styled Mandela as "the Rainbow Man" whose story would inspire future leaders.<sup>201</sup> A CD-ROM, *Nelson Mandela: The Symbol of a Nation* comprising slides, archival film footage, text, music and voiceover was produced as a biographical tribute and for the benefit of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.<sup>202</sup> A biographic papyrus wall calendar was made as part of the official apparel sold during the official national Mandela 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations in

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<sup>200</sup> Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: The Authorised Biography* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1999), dustcover. Sampson himself had previously described Mary Benson's biography as the "authoritative" work. It was also he who had encouraged Benson to write the history of the ANC that was published as *The African Patriots: The Story of the African National Congress of South Africa*, (London: Faber, 1963) and revised and republished as *South Africa: The Struggle for a Birthright* (London: Penguin Books, 1966). In the early 1960s, Sampson, the ex-editor of *Drum* in South Africa, was a journalist with *The Observer* in London that carried a number of articles on apartheid and resistance in South Africa. By the 1990s, Sampson was the distinguished author of more than twenty books including a biography of Macmillan.

<sup>201</sup> Lionel J Maxim, *Madiba: The Rainbow Man* (Cape Town: Asjen, 1997). This booklet was partly sponsored by Vodacom and other companies. It was produced with the support of and partly for the benefit of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.

<sup>202</sup> *Nelson Mandela: The symbol of a nation* (CD-Rom), created and produced by Q Data Consulting, n.d. (c.1997), box cover, inside cover flap.

1998.<sup>203</sup> Cartoonists working for a range of newspapers in South Africa including Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro), and Francis, Dugmore and Rico constructed cartoon scenes which commented on various narrated various periods and arenas of Mandela's life, or had cartoon characters comment on events and narratives. Sometimes, individual cartoons constructed and simultaneously commented on well-worn narrations.<sup>204</sup> Mandela's biography was even depicted on a tea towel as a "journey ... from Robben Island to the rainbow nation".<sup>205</sup>

More photographic studies and coffee table books were produced as different publishers with corporate backing entered the market in Mandela's life.<sup>206</sup> The world of film was not left behind in the scramble for Mandela's life, and Mandela was made to make a "long walk to the box office".<sup>207</sup> A number of cinematic biographies were made in the late 1990s. The first to arrive at the South African box office was *Mandela*, a feature length documentary made by Jo Menell and Angus Gibson. Made primarily for overseas audiences, it covered familiar themes, from Mandela's career in the ANC through the Robben Island years to his eventual release.<sup>208</sup> Described as a "praise song" and a "love letter", which "never questions Mandela's actions nor interrogates his motives",<sup>209</sup> South African viewers were alerted to the value of "the more 'human' aspects of the film". They would be able to see shots of Mandela talking about his wardrobe with his advisors,

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<sup>203</sup> 'Nelson R. Mandela 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday, 18 July 1998' (papyrus wall calendar), Continental Printers, c.1998.

<sup>204</sup> See the cartoon compilation, Harry Dugmore, Stephen Frances and Rico Schacherl (eds), *Nelson Mandela: A Life in Cartoons*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1999.

<sup>205</sup> 'The Journey of Nelson Mandela from Robben Island to a Rainbow Nation' (Tea Towel), The Blue Berry Textile Company, c. 1996. The tea towel drew substantially (seemingly without acknowledgement) on the rich visual record of Mandela's public life, turning well-known photographs into sketched biographic scenes.

<sup>206</sup> Peter Magubane, *Nelson Mandela: Man of Destiny. A Pictorial Biography*, Cape Town: Don Nelson, 1996 (supported by Agfa); Charlene Smith, *Mandela* (Cape Town: Struik, 1999). Another photographic history of resistance in South Africa which tried to make capital out of Mandela's image, and based on *Drum* photographs, was Jürgen Schadeberg (ed), *Mandela and the Rise of the ANC*, Parklands: Jonathan Ball and Ad. Donker Publishers, 1990.

<sup>207</sup> *Sunday Times*, 13 October 1996.

<sup>208</sup> *Mandela* (Directed by Jo Menell and Angus Gibson, 1996). The US release of this documentary was delayed until 1997 in order to capitalise on the possibility of an Academy Award nomination. This nomination materialised and in 1997, *Mandela* took a "short walk to the Oscars". See *Sunday Times*, 16 February 1997.

<sup>209</sup> Barry Ronge in *Sunday Times*, 13 October 1996.

eating breakfast and even shaving amid scenes in which he relates “amusing” and “moving” anecdotes about his life.<sup>210</sup> Alongside the familiar chronological narrative of Mandela’s life as one of courage, strength, determination and reconciliation, scenes of intimacy, familiarity and charm served to reinforce the image of Mandela as father of the national family

Another television documentary was released in 1999 as Mandela prepared to step down as president. *The Long Walk of Nelson Mandela*, a two hour programme told the story of “the man behind the myth”, and tried to examine Mandela’s “character, leadership and life’s method” through “intimate recollections” with his friends, political colleagues and adversaries, as well as Robben Island prisoners and jailers. The two-hour long programme, also screened in two one-hour portions, was made to be screened on PBS’s Frontline, the premiere public affairs documentary platform in the United States. While some remembered the young Mandela as having had “quite an early sense of his own historic destiny”, the film explored - drawing on Anthony Sampson’s argument - how he “transformed himself in prison” into “a mature leader and statesman”. Interviews with biographers Sampson and Richard Stengel served to illuminate what had “separate[d]” Mandela from ordinary people (“his singular pursuit of his life’s mission, his unwavering moral certitude, his own sense of destiny”), as well as “what made him like the rest of us” (his “vanity, his anger, his stubbornness”).<sup>211</sup>

Feature films about Mandela’s life were also produced. One starring Sidney Poitier as Mandela and Michael Caine as F.W. de Klerk was shot in South Africa during 1996, and released under the title *Mandela and De Klerk* on cable television in the United States in early 1997. Hurriedly made, costing only \$5-million, and relying to a large extent on newsreel footage, the film was reviewed as “not an inspired piece of film making” and a “cheap walk to cable TV”. This would have been pleasing to South African filmmaker

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<sup>210</sup> *Cape Times*, 23 October 1996.

<sup>211</sup> *The Long Walk of Nelson Mandela* (Produced by David Fanning and Indra deLanerolle for Unapix Entertainment, Story Street Productions and Films2People, Directed by Cliff Bestall, 1999). See the US PBS website, <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/mandela](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/mandela)>. Interestingly, Stengel was acknowledged in the production as a Mandela biographer and “co-author” of Mandela’s memoirs.

Anant Singh, who acquired the rights to adapt *Long Walk To Freedom* for the big screen. Intending to spend \$20-million, Singh went on record as saying that he envisaged the film to be in the mould of Richard Attenborough's epic *Gandhi*.<sup>212</sup> Not surprisingly, it was not easy even for the trendiest new South Africans to keep up with such an over-concentration of celluloid and Mandela image production. There was the danger that in the mind and in memory, all these films would merge into one. Amusingly, one celebrity invited to the "world premiere" of Menell and Gibson's *Mandela* was convinced she was going to see Sidney Poitier star in a film called *The Long Walk to Freedom*.<sup>213</sup>

The claims made for biographies that they are 'authoritative', or 'definitive' and the 'authentic voice' of the autobiographical 'I' need to be understood as part of an attempt to present 'real lives' and 'authentic' experiences to reading and viewing publics. These notions also enable readers and viewers to feel that access to such authentic knowledge gives them privileged and intimate encounters with real subjects. That this was deemed to be possible in the case of Nelson Mandela in the mid-to-late 1990s meant access to the epic 'real' life story of the ultimate hero. His story of "hardship, resilience and ultimate triumph", especially as enshrined in *Long Walk to Freedom*, came to stand for the history of the South African 'nation'. It was a history of the "born leader",<sup>214</sup> the father and the nation rolled into one. This narrative was also inscribed into the museum.

The Nelson Mandela Museum, planned as part of the legacy project programme, began its operations on 11 February 2000, the tenth anniversary of Nelson Mandela's release from imprisonment. It was envisaged that this museum would house the many awards and gifts received by Mandela, and would also endeavour "to tell the story" of his life.<sup>215</sup> As a museum, it was intended to be located in three sites in the Eastern Cape. At Umtata a museum exhibition would be constructed in the renovated Bhunga ('place of discussion') Building, while a site of memorial and contemplation would be created at Mvezo village

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<sup>212</sup>*Anant Singh Profile*, SABC 3, 27 February 1997; *Sunday Times*, 16 March 1997.

<sup>213</sup>*Sunday Times*, 13 October 1996.

<sup>214</sup>Back flap of dust cover, *Long Walk To Freedom*.

<sup>215</sup>'Statement by Minister Mtshali on Legacy Projects: issued by the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology' (<[www.polity.org.za/govdocs/pr/1998/pr0615a.html](http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/pr/1998/pr0615a.html)>).



(Mandela's birth place), on the banks of the Mbashe River. Qunu village, where Mandela spent his childhood, would be the site for the development of a youth and community centre.

In the first phase of its development, the Exhibition Committee of the Nelson Mandela Museum declared that the objectives of the museum exhibition were to "illustrate the life, the times, the philosophy and legacy" of Mandela within a local, national and international context. Nation building and reconciliation would be articulated and promoted, while it would also provide an opportunity to "consolidate our democracy by providing an understanding of the processes that led to it". In the exhibition, Mandela's life became a means to "document the struggle for democracy and its context", and "trace cultural diversity and cultural mobility". Extracts from *Long Walk To Freedom* complemented by photographs, press cuttings, pamphlets, posters and video footage tried to ensure that Mandela's "thoughts and feelings" were communicated "in his own words". Mandela's museum biography was organised as history lessons for students and tourists, organised around five chronological modules. These began with Mandela's "country childhood", while others focused on his role in the liberation struggle before imprisonment, "the Dark Years" of imprisonment, "Freedom" and "Democracy".<sup>216</sup>

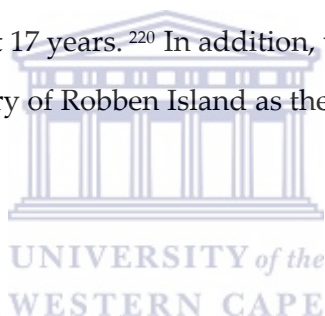
In its creation, the Nelson Mandela Museum was intended to prioritise "accessibility, broad participation, tourism promotion and community ownership". Although it was a museum that was national in status and objectives, its staffing and targeted beneficiaries were intended to be from local communities. One of the immediate benefits of its construction was the improvement of an access road and other infrastructure in Mvezo. The concept of a museum market place (as distinct from a museum shop) emerged as appropriate to the needs of local communities. It was intended that members of the local community would also benefit from operating a co-operative transportation and shuttle service between the three museum sites. The entire project was a cultural element of a Spatial Development initiative aimed at alleviating rural poverty, "stimulating

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<sup>216</sup>'Nelson Mandela Museum: Exhibition Brief and Proposal' (Exhibition Committee Discussion Document), author's possession.

development”, and “uplifting affected communities by creating sustainable employment opportunities”. The project also aimed to contribute to youth development, leadership training and the development of cultural tourism”.<sup>217</sup>

This was not the first time that Nelson Mandela’s life became the focus of national heritage in a new museum in post-apartheid South Africa. The biographical narrative of Nelson Mandela’s ‘long walk to freedom’ had driven the Robben Island Museum (RIM) since its inception in 1997. This museum, which came into being after the closure of Robben Island as a prison, had been created as the post-apartheid state’s first national museum and the pre-eminent heritage site of the new nation.<sup>218</sup> Robben Island was re-envisioned as the birthplace of the new nation as part of the “national quest for reconciliation”.<sup>219</sup> Robben Island was also listed as a World Heritage Site in September 1997. From the beginning, the central feature of museum visits was the encounter with Mandela’s biography at his cell in B-Section, where he had spent 17 years.<sup>220</sup> In addition, visits to the lime quarry served to confirm the constructed history of Robben Island as the space of survival and the



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<sup>217</sup>Nelson Mandela Museum: Exhibition Brief and Proposal’ (Exhibition Committee Discussion Document). See also press releases and speeches by Ben Ngubane, then Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology cited in Kwezi ka Mpumlwana, Gerard Corsane, Juanita Pastor-Makhurane and Ciraj Rassool, ‘Inclusion and the power of representation: South African museums and the cultural politics of social transformation’, in Richard Sandell (ed), *Museums, Society, Inequality* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp 252-3.

<sup>218</sup> Robben Island was declared a National Monument in May 1996 and was formally handed over to the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology as a declared cultural institution later that year. The operations of the Robben Island Museum began on 1 January 1997 and Nelson Mandela officially launched the Robben Island Museum as “the first major new Heritage Institution of a Democratic South Africa” on Heritage Day, 24 September 1997. The official launch took place against a backdrop of giant portraits of male heroes of the liberation struggle, Mbeki, Mandela, Sobukwe and Sisulu, with the centre spot reserved for Steve Biko who had emerged as a symbol of national unity. See *Robben Island* (Special Heritage Day Edition), Volume 1, September 1997; *Cape Times*, 25 September 1997.

<sup>219</sup>Speeches by André Odendaal and Mike Rademeyer at the opening of the Robben Island Exhibition and Information Centre, 8 June 1996; *Cape Times*, 6 June 1996; Interview with André Odendaal, *Cape at Six*, SABC 2, 30 January 1997.

<sup>220</sup> *Cape Times*, 25 September 1997. From early in its operations, RIM advertised and promoted tours to the Island through a replica of Nelson Mandela’s prison cell. One such display occurred in a Cape Town shopping mall, and encouraged visitors to “spend some time inside Nelson Mandela’s cell” (*Actual Size of the Cell that was Home to Nelson Mandela for 18 Years*, Cardboard Installation, Cavendish Square, Cape Town, January 1997).

“triumph of the human spirit”, and as the birthplace of reconciliation, and of the new nation itself.<sup>221</sup>

In 1999, the tour of B-section was given a special name, the “Footsteps of Mandela Tour”, and it was presented as one of the options available to visitors to the former maximum-security prison. Clearly, it was expected that most tourists would converge upon this option, which was planned to take place every 15 minutes, with tours to be filled on a “first come first served basis”.<sup>222</sup> The visit to Mandela’s cell came to constitute a kind of pilgrimage, with visitors seeking out the possibilities of a redemptive experience. On busy days, with different tour groups guided into the former maximum-security prison through different entrances, the passageway in B Section often became a congested bottleneck as Mandela’s cell was turned into a sacred photographic opportunity.

The 1994 Jürgen Schadeberg photographic image of Mandela depicted looking out of the bars of Cell No. 5 became one of the most iconic Mandela images.<sup>223</sup> RIM acquired limited rights to reproduce this image on T-shirts and sweaters in a special contract with Schadeberg. These and other biographic Mandela images have been sold in a highly commoditised museum environment alongside minted coins, ties, pens, key rings, and “authentic replica[s]” of prison cell keys and framed lime quarry rocks.<sup>224</sup> It was also in the Museum shop that the historiography of resistance was turned into heritage curios. The recreated Cell No. 5 has also been a compulsory stop for visiting dignitaries, while visiting presidents guided on the Island by Mandela himself have had the opportunity to be photographed with him inside the cell. The aura of the cell was

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<sup>221</sup>See this conceptualisation expressed, for example, in the video, *The Story of Robben Island: Cultural and Natural Heritage Site* (Directed by Terry O’Keefe, 1997), which was screened to Robben Island visitors on the two ferries, Autshumato and Makana, during the journey to the Island. See also Nelson Mandela’s address at the formal opening of RIM published as ‘Address by President Mandela - Heritage Day, Robben Island 24 September 1997’, in *Ilifa Labantu*, Vol 1, 9th edition, October 1997. Ahmed Kathrada, RIM Chair and former Robben Island prisoner used the phrase ‘triumph of the human spirit’, and it became a central theme for heritage interpretation at RIM.

<sup>222</sup>‘Welcome to Robben Island: Visitor’s Information’ (Pamphlet, 1999).

<sup>223</sup> The image has been reproduced in many places, including in Charlene Smith, *Mandela*, pp 76-77.

<sup>224</sup> T-Shirt with Schadeberg Mandela Image; Authentic replica prison key used on Robben Island Maximum Security Prison; Authentic replica stone collected at a quarry on Robben Island, Robben Island Museum Shop, Nelson Mandela Gateway, V & A Waterfront, Cape Town 2003.

confirmed when it was the site where Mandela handed over “the flame of freedom” and “the beacon of leadership” to an already installed president Mbeki in a carefully choreographed, internationally televised millennium occasion.<sup>225</sup>

Research by Fran Buntman has analysed the ways in which heritage presentations on Robben Island have reflected a process of “Mandelaisation”, by which the history and experience of political imprisonment in South Africa came to be understood in terms of the image of Nelson Mandela.<sup>226</sup> Former Robben Island researcher, Noel Solani, who conducted extensive interviews with ex-political prisoners for RIM, examined the various “mythical” images that had emerged about Nelson Mandela and his period of imprisonment on Robben Island. For example, Solani has pointed to a number of ways in which Mandela’s record on the Island was not that of a forgiver, reconciler or conciliator.<sup>227</sup> These analyses have been important in drawing attention to the ways in which images of heroism, leadership and reconciliation were constructed of Nelson Mandela.

It is the research on prison memory that Noel Solani did with his colleagues, when he was a researcher at RIM, that led to the launch of a significant exhibition in A-Section that broke new ground in Robben Island’s cultural economy, taking some attention away from the Mandela experience. Called *Cell Stories Exhibition and Archive*, this exhibition was innovative in the ways in which prison cells were turned into multimedia memory spaces, which served to connect personal prison mementoes, on loan to the Museum, to prisoner oral histories. It was coupled to a working oral history archive, based in the old A-Section prison library and intended to enable visitors to engage the exhibition at different levels of complexity. Perhaps the most important feature of this exhibition was that it deliberately

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<sup>225</sup> Jyoti Mistry, ‘Trafficking Politics in Cultural Guise: South Africa’s Coverage of Millenium 2000’, in A Bove (ed), *Questionable Returns* (Vienna: I.W.M. Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol. 12, 2002).

<sup>226</sup> Fran Buntman, ‘Politics and Secrets of Political Prisoner History’, Biennial Conference of the South African Historical Society, “Not Telling: Secrecy, Lies and History”, UWC, 11-14 July 1999.

<sup>227</sup> Noel Solani, ‘The Saint of the Struggle: Deconstructing the Mandela Myth’, *Kronos*, No 26, August 2000.

sought to contest the tendency for history in the public domain to be narrated mainly through 'great lives of resistance and reconciliation'.

*Cell Stories* made use of both "memories and mementoes" of ex-prisoners for the narration of lives. Thirty-nine stories were told in thirty-nine cells. By being wired to a multi-level CD system, the old prison intercom system was reconfigured as the means of activating oral histories of prison lives at the push of a button. Those cells that were not wired up for sound made use of written texts displayed on cell walls. According to curator Ashwell Adriaan, stories had been found which were "personal to individual prisoners". The curators were also careful to present "a balance" from different political organisations to which prisoners belonged. With this exhibition, two years of research and collection had culminated in a "unique record of the prison's history", one that served to challenge any idea of "a homogeneous prisoner community".<sup>228</sup> And it was significant that this critical engagement emanated from within an institution which itself constructed the hegemonic discourse of heroic leadership.

As *Cell Stories* opened on Robben Island in late 1999, it remained to be seen how the management of RIM would manage the cultural politics of this exhibition. Its launch and unveiling to the public coincided with an intention to lengthen island tours in time for the summer's peak visitor season. From November 1999, tours to Robben Island were intended to be an hour longer, offering more options, more spaces and more time to reflect. In this visiting system, it seemed that *Cell Stories* was seen as part of the creation of such 'greater options' in a pluralist exhibition system, which sought to enlarge the story of Robben Island. It also seemed that the creation of a new entranceway to *Cell Stories* from B-Block served to suggest a single narrative. However, the importance of *Cell Stories* extended beyond this. It demonstrated that it was difficult to contain images of history and heritage at Robben Island within a bounded and controlled framework, determined by the prison experiences and narrated lives of political leaders. *Cell Stories* signified the

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<sup>228</sup>Interviews with curators, Ashwell Adriaan and Roger Meintjes, cited in Ciraj Rassool, 'Stories of life sentences', *Mail and Guardian*, 26 November to 2 December 1999. See this article for a detailed description of the *Cell Stories* exhibition.

implicit acknowledgement of the need for debate and contestation over the historical meaning of political imprisonment for South Africa's public history.

Almost as soon as *Cell Stories* was created as an exhibition, the power of its heritage interpretations were undermined by the demands of commerce, as the contracted ferry company prevented any plan of a longer, more contemplative island visit. While the ethos of *Cell Stories* lived on in RIM's ongoing prison memories project,<sup>229</sup> the theming of the Robben Island experience around Nelson Mandela's imprisonment was deepened with the opening in December 2001 of the Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island. Mandela's name became a brand through which the exhibitions in RIM's mainland facility would turn the Island visitor into a pilgrim before the ferry trip began. It was also hoped that the Gateway would "in a physical way" put "the signature of Mandela and democracy on to the urban face of Cape Town".<sup>230</sup>

Moreover, RIM's early phase of being a new kind of museum without tangible, moveable collections, and whose heritage strengths would lie in ongoing interpretation of intangible memory and historic sites, ended when it acquired the collections of the Mayibuye Centre on 99-year lease from UWC after three years of negotiations. "At last we are a *real* museum with *real* collections", declared RIM director, André Odendaal, as the collections of the newly named UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives were taken into the Gateway's exhibition. The acquisition by RIM of the Mayibuye Archive ensured that it was the culminating point of a genealogy of resistance memory mediation and information "counter-offensive" work that had begun in the late 1950s in the Treason Trial Defence Fund, that was continued in exile in IDAF from the 1960s, and which was taken up in times of return and cultural rebuilding by the Mayibuye Centre in the early 1990s.<sup>231</sup> By 2003, with contests between the work of heritage interpretation and tourist commerce

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<sup>229</sup> *Cell Stories* lived on in a 2002 RIM Calendar, which explained the Museum's plans to turn its Robben Island Memories Project research into a "virtual memorial". See 2002 RIM Calendar, produced by Printing Concepts/Free Spirits and the Publications Unit of RIM's Marketing Department.

<sup>230</sup> *Robben Island Museum Annual Report, 2001-2002*; 'The Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island' (Brochure, RIM, 2001); RIM Director, André Odendaal, in *Ilifa labantu*, Vol. 6, No. 1, June 2002, p 2.

<sup>231</sup> *UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives: A Guide to the Collections of the Robben Island Museum* (Booklet, RIM, 2001), p 23.



deepening in Robben Island's cultural economy, it seemed as if the demands of tourism and the pilgrimage to Cell No. 5 in B Section had temporarily won out.

In South Africa at the turn of the millenium a biographic character was being given to the cultural landscape, with the life of leaders a central focus. Biography, conceived of in quite conventional ways, was confirmed as one of the chief modes of negotiating the past in the public domain, and was a central feature of stories of resistance and reconciliation, recovered as the basis of nation-building in the new South Africa. At the centre of all of this biographic activity, and reflected through a cluster of biographic projects, was the life of Nelson Mandela, whose 'long walk' came to symbolise the new nation's past. The Mandela Museum, the Mandela Library and Awaiting Trial Block on Constitution Hill in Gauteng - itself a Legacy Project - joined the Robben Island Museum (with Cell No. 5, B Section and the Mandela Gateway) in constituting a phalanx of public history projects at the apex of South Africa's heritage landscape. To this was added the legacy project on 'the Mandela Trail', which was given flesh through the publication of Luli Callinicos' book on the heritage site landscape of Mandela's biography.<sup>232</sup> Together these heritage initiatives and mediations tried to ensure that Mandela's 'walk to freedom' would remain the key trope for the nation's history narrated as the triumph of reconciliation.

These heritage depictions of Mandela's biography need to be understood as following on a longer genealogy of biographical work in which Mandela's narrated life came to be inscribed into South Africa's process of nation making as embodying its heritage and ensuring its prospects. These are more than just questions about image and myth. They are questions about the cultural production of Mandela's life through the medium of biography, which involved different kinds of biographical activity, different stages of the biographical process and particular circumstances within which biographical activity occurred. These are also questions about the 'relations of cultural production' involved and the intervention of experts and assistants, promoters, publicists and image-makers in biographical processes through which Mandela's life has been produced over time.

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<sup>232</sup> Luli Callinicos, *The World that Made Mandela – A Heritage Trail*.

Indeed, it seems as if there is a genealogy of such interventions going back at least to the early 1960s. Among first efforts at the production of Mandela's life through biography occurred at this time through the work of Mary Benson and Ruth First.

During 1957, for some of the duration of the Treason Trial, Mary Benson had worked as secretary of the Treason Trial's Defence Fund. By day, during the trial, Benson lunched with defendants in a garden opposite the court, while at night she dined with members of the defence team. Many years before, she had sought advice from author, Alan Paton, about African people about whom she claimed she was "still hopelessly ignorant", and about how she could meet them. She had also expressed a desire "to work with the Natives".<sup>233</sup> The Treason Trial afforded her the opportunity to give effect to such desires on South African soil.

Much of the publicity and support work surrounding the Treason Trial took shape as an emphasis on political personalities. This took the form of photographic portraiture, with Eli Weinberg's collage of group shots of all 156 accused. But it also saw the production of mini-profiles of all 156 accused alongside pen-pictures in a publicity booklet published in 1957. These were of 20-40 words in length, with information on the birth and occupation of the accused and details on their political involvement. The profiles were dominated by a more extended focus on Albert Luthuli and a more prominent portrait. Grouped together over seven pages, the mini-biographies were seen as constituting "a true cross section of our people".<sup>234</sup> It is more than likely that Mary Benson assisted in the preparation of this publication and more generally in the biographical work that was an important aspect of solidarity activities around the trial.

The Treason Trial also made it possible for Benson to forge "invaluable connections" in the Congress Movement. These were the connections and contacts that enabled her to

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<sup>233</sup>Mary Benson, *A Far Cry: The Making of a South African*, Randburg: Ravan Writers Series, 1996 (First published in 1989), pp 53, 58, 117, 127.

<sup>234</sup>*South Africa's Treason Trial*, Johannesburg: "Africa!" Publications, 1957, especially pp 18-24. Another 'biographical' publication that emerged out of the Treason Trial was Anthony Sampson's *The Treason Cage*, published in 1958.

follow the advice of Anthony Sampson and Oxford Africanist scholar, Margery Perham, and begin research in 1961 on the history of the ANC. For a whole year, Benson interviewed ANC activists, past and present, around South Africa. Much of the research that Benson had undertaken was biographical in nature and method. She had already written a biography of Tshekedi Khama<sup>235</sup> and was preparing another on Albert Luthuli.<sup>236</sup> Once again, the issues of leadership and the characteristics and peculiarities of individual personalities and personages featured centrally in the research of this self-confessed “born celebrity hunter”.<sup>237</sup>

Benson’s book which flowed from this research was a chronological account of the history of the ANC organised and periodised into the now well-worn narrative which looked at early, moderate forms of political expression and subsequent processes of radicalisation.<sup>238</sup> Each stage of the heroic narrative of resistance history constructed by Benson contained a list of mini-biographies and personality profiles of ANC political leaders over the years. Considered together, these biographical profiles and lists of the personal attributes and actions of individual ANC leaders formed a large and interesting collection.

While Pixley ka Isaka Seme had a “polish and a taste for nobility” given to him by Oxford, the Reverend Zaccheus Mahabane was “thoughtful, and slow speaking, sparely built, with a round, jolly face”.<sup>239</sup> A.B. Xuma was “a small lively man with bright large eyes”, while Anton Lembede was “arrogant yet disarming, aggressive so that he made enemies yet with an unusual ability to laugh at himself”.<sup>240</sup> The Reverend James Calata seemed to make a deep impression:

[Of] restrained personality, he had fire; a steadfast Christian, he was a patriot to the marrow of his bones; conservative, he had nerve and, clear-brained, he had a capacity for hard work.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>235</sup>Mary Benson, *Tshekedi Khama*, London: Faber, 1960.

<sup>236</sup>This was published as *Chief A Luthuli of South Africa*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

<sup>237</sup>Mary Benson, *A Far Cry*, p 21.

<sup>238</sup>Mary Benson, *The African Patriots*; See Footnote 164.

<sup>239</sup>Mary Benson, *The African Patriots*, pp 25, 55.

<sup>240</sup>Mary Benson, *The African Patriots*, pp 96; 103.

<sup>241</sup>Mary Benson, *The African Patriots*, p 86.

Oliver Tambo was “slight, dark-skinned with tribal marks engraved on his cheeks, nice looking, with neat hands”, while Nelson Mandela was “slow to rebel”.<sup>242</sup> Benson was clearly impressed by Walter Sisulu:

He, more than any other individual in the [Youth] League, and probably than any Congress leader, knew just what it meant to be ‘a native’.<sup>243</sup>

It was this biographical research on South African resistance history by Mary Benson that led to one of the first published biographical profiles of Nelson Mandela. This took place in August 1962 and the circumstances were Mandela’s arrest after he had returned from a secret tour through African countries and Britain. Benson helped draft a profile of Mandela that was used for a biographical piece published in the *Observer*.<sup>244</sup> She had encountered Mandela along with other ANC leaders like Walter Sisulu during a visit in 1952, and then again in 1957 during the Treason Trial, while she was secretary of the Treason Trial Defence Fund. During 1961, while researching the history of the ANC, Benson had met with Mandela, and conducted interviews on at least three occasions. These meetings had taken place clandestinely as Mandela had been operating underground at this time. In June 1962, Benson again spent time with Mandela, this time in London, while he was secretly out of South Africa.

At the time that these interviews were conducted, Benson had concentrated on exploring Mandela’s association with the ANC. She did not make use of a tape recorder. She had no idea “how important every detail of Mandela’s personal as well as his political life would become”.<sup>245</sup> Nevertheless, these interviews with Mandela and with others were to become important for direct biographical purposes. After being the first South African to testify before the United Nations Committee on Apartheid in May 1963, Benson followed this up the following year, in March 1964 with further testimony along with Oliver Tambo, Miriam Makeba and representatives of American anti-apartheid organisations. Benson

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<sup>242</sup>Mary Benson, *The African Patriots*, pp 104, ?

<sup>243</sup>Mary Benson, *The African Patriots*, p 105

<sup>244</sup>Mary Benson, *A Far Cry*, p 144.

<sup>245</sup>Mary Benson, *A Far Cry*, p 130.

was asked to speak about the accused in the Rivonia Trial.<sup>246</sup> Amid descriptions of the lives of African families under apartheid, the hearings of the UN Committee constituted a forum for biography and the narration of South African political lives. It would be more than twenty years before Benson's interviews with Mandela and the material gathered by her in the early 1960s would give rise to a book-length biography.<sup>247</sup>

This biographical attention on Mandela in the early 1960s was helped by Mandela himself having placed his own life into a biographical narrative. This took place in his widely publicised address to the court before he was sentenced in his trial in November 1962 on charges of incitement to strike and leaving the country without a passport. In order that the court "the frame of mind which led him to act as he did", Mandela "explained the background of his own political development, beginning with "the tales he heard as a boy". He went on to outline his political convictions and his membership of the ANC before describing how his legal career had suffered because of his colour and ANC membership. It was his conscience that had "made it imperative to oppose unjust laws". During the course of the trial, a range of organisations overseas had used the opportunity to rally support for Mandela and the struggle against apartheid. As images of his wife Winnie and his young daughters were published around the world, messages of support expressed their admiration for Mandela's "firm and courageous stand against apartheid" and assured him of "solidarity" in his "heroic fight".<sup>248</sup>

This auto-narration was replayed at Rivonia when Mandela gave "the speech of [his] life" in a five-hour address from the dock. Once again, he began with his childhood, in which he recalled boyhood tales of "historic African leaders". He explained the history of the ANC and non-violence and why it was necessary for MK to be a separate body, and in his discussion of Rivonia activities, denied he was a communist or that the ANC was dominated by the Communist Party. Referring to his own military training, Mandela outlined four "stages of violence" and explained that MK was in the process of exploring a

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<sup>246</sup>Mary Benson, *A Far Cry*, pp 145-155.

<sup>247</sup>Mary Benson, *Nelson Mandela*, London: Penguin, 1986.

<sup>248</sup> *New Age*, 15 November 1962, pp 1, 3, 4-5.

stage of sabotage before embarking on guerrilla warfare. Mandela ended by narrating his biography into the realm of heroism and sacrifice, when he connected the political dedication and ideals of his lifetime to his preparedness to die.<sup>249</sup>

Another significant process in the early stages of the production of Nelson Mandela's life was the assembly of his articles, speeches and trial addresses edited and arranged by Ruth First and published in Britain in 1965, a year after the Rivonia sentences had been handed down.<sup>250</sup> This was not merely a collection. It was a biographical project co-ordinated by First for the ANC. The polemical, agitational and strategic pieces by Mandela, produced originally either in written or oral form, were never intended to be published together. Their assembly and chronological ordering into a single text to be read as a chronological narrative of a political life as well as the attachment of a biographical essay by Oliver Tambo as an introduction to the book made this an exercise in biography.

Ruth First had been in Britain for about a year after having left South Africa on an exit permit on her release from detention for 117 days. In South Africa, her political work had mainly taken the form of committed radical journalism, particularly for the Congress Alliance paper, *New Age*. She was an activist engaged organisationally in the Congress Alliance and the Communist Party, but, as a journalist, she also had a relationship of representation with struggles against apartheid conditions and state repression. In exile, after writing about her experiences in detention, she facilitated the publication of Govan Mbeki's book on the Pondoland revolt and prepared the publication of *No Easy Walk*.<sup>251</sup>

The chronological arranging and ordering of Mandela's life by Ruth First in *No Easy Walk* saw his biography put to use in the attempt to establish the moral and political presence of the ANC in exile. Part of the political and organisational readjustment of the ANC to the

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<sup>249</sup> See Stephen Clingman's discussion of Mandela's Rivonia address in *Bram Fischer*, pp 314-316.

<sup>250</sup> Nelson Mandela, *No Easy Walk to Freedom* (Edited, with a Forward by Ruth First), London: African Writers Series, Heinemann Educational Books, 1973. First published in 1965; reprinted 1976, 1978, 1980, 1982.

<sup>251</sup> Donald Pinnock, 'Writing Left: Ruth First and Radical South African Journalism in the 1950s', Ph.D Dissertation, Rhodes University, 1992, Postscript.



new conditions of exile was the construction of a biographical presence of leaders and the establishment of their moral authority. After the Rivonia sentence, the Oliver Tambo and the ANC employed the tactic “to build up Mandela internationally as the charismatic personification of the South African struggle”. Following on from his 1962 ‘last stand’ in court, Mandela’s “stirring” Rivonia speech from the dock had “resonated throughout the world”.<sup>252</sup> The ANC realised that their cause “would be best served by putting forward a charismatic leader, someone who would capture the imagination and symbolise in his own person the struggle against apartheid”.<sup>253</sup> *No Easy Walk* produced a set of images and narrations of the imprisoned Nelson Mandela in which he was constructed in heroic terms, as pre-eminent symbol of sacrifice and toil in the face of apartheid repression, and the natural-born leader of the South African people.

Mandela’s unquestioned and unrivalled leadership was explained to an international audience by the authority of Oliver Tambo, then the ANC’s Deputy President and the chief organiser of the ANC in exile, in a discussion of Mandela’s personal attributes:

He has a natural air of authority. He cannot help magnetising a crowd: he is commanding with a tall, handsome bearing; trusts and is trusted by the youth, for their impatience reflects his own; appealing to the women. He is dedicated and fearless. He is the born mass leader.<sup>254</sup>

But this leadership granted to Mandela as if by birth was also, for Tambo, one characterised by moral authority, organic, and responsive to and rooted in the ‘people’:

He is the symbol of the self-sacrificing leadership our struggle has thrown up and our people need. He is unrelenting, yet capable of flexibility and delicate judgement. He is an outstanding individual, but he knows that he derives his strength from the great masses of people, who make up the freedom struggle in our country.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Luli Callinicos, ‘Reinventing the ANC: The Shift to Armed Struggle and Oliver Tambo’s Role in Exile, 1961-1964’ (manuscript in author’s possession), p 19.

<sup>253</sup> Luli Callinicos, *The World that Made Mandela*, pp 262-263.

<sup>254</sup> Oliver Tambo, ‘Introduction’ in Nelson Mandela, *No Easy Walk To Freedom*, p xi.

<sup>255</sup> Oliver Tambo, ‘Introduction’ in Nelson Mandela, *No Easy Walk To Freedom*, p xiii.

By 1973, when a new edition of *No Easy Walk* was published to mark Mandela's tenth year of incarceration, the unseen hero was becoming an enigma, more than ever before bearing the mantle of leadership. In a new foreword to the book by Ruth First, Mandela was eulogised as the symbol of a people in chains, his aura of moral authority sanctified by the Island experience:

Mandela, it is whispered through prison walls, is as magnetic a political prisoner as he was once mass orator and underground political commander and he continues to radiate the confidence, the strength and the moral authority that has sustained the African freedom struggle in its most difficult days, and that will, in time, bring the apartheid system toppling down.<sup>256</sup>

The biographical efforts of Benson and First seem to have been the initial steps in a genealogy of meanings constructed around Nelson Mandela. This genealogy saw biographies produced under different circumstances and for particular political purposes. Mandela's selfhood was narrated into particular discursive locations and networks of operation. Each stage saw the intervention of supporters and promoters as narrators, representers and image producers. Far from Mandela's life being simply a rather competitive space over time, various producers of Nelson Mandela's biography have had very close links with each other.

I have noted Mary Benson's close connection with Anthony Sampson. Benson described her first encounter with the late Ruth First at a South African Indian Congress conference: the "only ... other European - dark-haired, striking woman, clearly Jewish and a journalist". Ruth First, Treason Trialist in the late 1950s, would later become Benson's "valued friend". Benson also got to know Fatima Meer (and Ismail Meer) during a Christmas recess in the Treason Trial, with whom she experienced "Indian hospitality". Finally, while Jürgen Schadeberg has narrated Mandela's life through photographs, he has also photographed Benson herself.<sup>257</sup> Of course, I am not suggesting a grand 'conspiracy theory' of Mandela's biography. However, it is necessary to draw attention to the

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<sup>256</sup>Nelson Mandela, *No Easy Walk To Freedom*, Forward.

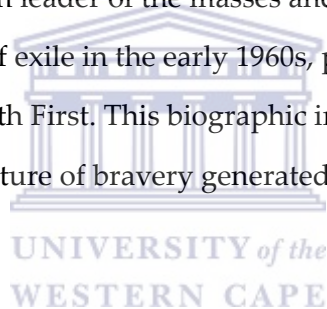
<sup>257</sup>See Mary Benson, *A Far Cry*, pp 84, 116, front cover photograph.

importance of relations of cultural production in the creation of biographic images of Mandela and the crystallisation of a terrain of image construction in this genealogy. In the connections between Mandela's biographers, there was an intermingling of the public and the private, of their own lives and the material they wrote about.<sup>258</sup>

During the late 1950s, in the early years of the Treason Trial, the image of Nelson Mandela as the born leader had not yet taken shape. His mini-biographic profile of 25 words took its place among the rest of the accused in Treason Trial publicity material produced in 1957. It was virtually hidden and there was nothing extraordinary about it. It read merely

Born 1918, the son of Chief Henry Mandela of the Transkei.  
Attorney. Was amongst those sentenced for leadership of the  
Defiance Campaign. Keen amateur boxer.<sup>259</sup>

The notion of Mandela as born leader of the masses and outstanding individual began to take shape in the early days of exile in the early 1960s, partly through the biographical work of Mary Benson and Ruth First. This biographic image drew on a narrative of daring leadership and a romantic picture of bravery generated by Mandela himself while



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<sup>258</sup>Two more examples of this relationship of representation are those between Steve Biko and Robert Sobukwe and their respective biographers, Donald Woods and Benjamin Pogrund. The relationship between former newspaper editor Donald Woods and Steve Biko gave rise to more than one biographical project after Biko's death in detention in 1977. Woods' biography of Biko (*Biko*, New York: Paddington Press) was first published in 1978 and claimed to be a "personal testimony" of the man he described as "the greatest ... I ever met" (pp 10; 60). The film *Cry Freedom*, directed and produced by Richard Attenborough (Marble Arch Productions, c1987), was based partly on Woods' biography and depicted Woods' relationship with Biko. Ultimately, both sought to foreground Woods himself as hero and brave protagonist in defying his banning order, writing the book in secret, smuggling it out chapter by chapter and evading security police surveillance. According to Biko's comrade and lover, Mamphela Ramphele, described by Woods as "that black bombshell of a girl" (*Biko*, p 47), *Cry Freedom* was an "inaccurate portrayal of Steve's political life, which Donald Woods had not understood in the short time he had come to know Steve". It also "misrepresented his personal relationships" (Mamphela Ramphele, *A Life*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1995, p 136). It has been suggested by former exile Bennie Bunsee, that Woods, in the "most vulgar" fashion, "capitalised" on his friendship with Biko by turning himself into an anti-apartheid hero and benefiting from this (*Cape Argus*, 4 April 1997). See also Mandla Langa, 'Why Biko Film Became a White Man's Tale', *Sunday Independent*, 31 August 1997. Another example is the relationship between Robert Sobukwe and Benjamin Pogrund, also a journalist. Pogrund's biography of Sobukwe (*Sobukwe and Apartheid*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers) was published in 1990 and was the product of a long friendship between the two men.

<sup>259</sup> *South Africa's Treason Trial*. Prominence, however, was given to a profile of Luthuli's life.

underground as political commander in the early 1960s,<sup>260</sup> on his auto/narrations during his trials, and on his emergence as a leader with a reputation during the Rivonia Trial in 1963-64. It also drew on the decision made by the ANC to build Mandela's image. From then on, according to Callinicos, "the image of Mandela grew steadily in stature, and was to become a successful weapon in globalising the struggle against apartheid".<sup>261</sup> More than merely the propagation of an image and the growth of a reputation, here we argue that these interventions since the early 1960s were also deliberate *biographical* acts, with Mandela's narrated biography put to the work of drumming up support for a liberation movement in exile and in framing the struggle against apartheid.

Further biographies commemorating milestones of imprisonment and celebrating birthdays were produced subsequently. The ANC ensured that it kept up a heroic story of Mandela's life in its campaigning.<sup>262</sup> Mandela biographies were also produced and distributed by IDAF, successor to the Treason Trial Defence Fund, which built upon these images and consolidated Mandela as symbol of South African survival, sacrifice and resilience.<sup>263</sup> By the 1980s, as biographies of the unseen Mandela were produced through growing campaigns in South Africa and abroad for his release, the enduring image of Mandela as leader began to take on Messianic proportions.<sup>264</sup> Through his release, it was believed that Mandela would deliver the South African people from evil. That such deliverance was perceived to take place after Mandela's release was part of the emergence of Mandela as *pater familias*, as public father of the national family. The discursive

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<sup>260</sup> Mandela released a stylised image of himself in 1962 while he was underground as a "graphic message" to the people of South Africa, "asserting his African heritage". The image was an Eli Weinberg portrait of Mandela dressed in a blanket, with beads around his neck (Luli Callinicos, *The World that Made Mandela*, p 13). Anthony Sampson has also referred to Mandela as "a master of images who knows how to project himself" (Anthony Sampson, *Mandela*, p 579).

<sup>261</sup> Luli Callinicos, 'Reinventing the ANC', p 20.

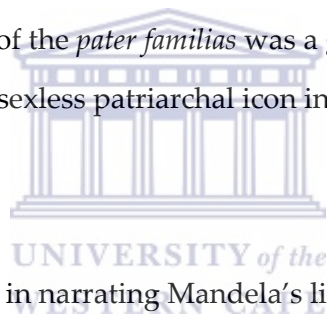
<sup>262</sup> See for example the editorial, 'Mandela – 60 Years Old', and the article 'Mandela and our Revolution', in *Sechaba*, Third Quarter, Vol. 12, 1978.

<sup>263</sup> Apart from those mentioned before, see Nelson Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life* (London: IDAF, 1986).

<sup>264</sup> This process saw the launch of the Free Mandela Campaign in 1980 in a strategy conceived Oliver Tambo and the ANC in Lusaka and included the unveiling of a "larger than life bust" of Mandela by Oliver Tambo on London's South Bank in 1985. See a photograph of the unveiling in Anthony Sampson, *Mandela*, between pp 326 and 327. See also Luli Callinicos, *The World that Made Mandela*, pp 262-263.

construction of Nelson Mandela has moved through different phases, from born leader to sacrificial hero to Messiah, culminating in symbolic father with paternal authority in the public sphere.<sup>265</sup>

Part of the discursive consolidation of Nelson Mandela's image as the nation's father involved the dislodging of Winnie Mandela. She had been the quintessential African woman, the "first lady, suffering wife, [and] assertive African woman". She had become the "dignified spectacle of injustice against Blacks". But in addition, she was also Nelson Mandela's "vocal proxy", the "photogenic symbol of her incarcerated husband". As the ANC became dominant in the public sphere in the 1990s, however, Winnie Mandela was perceived to have become too independent and unpredictable, with too many floating "uncontainable meanings". She was deposed because she was discursively unmanageable and could not be absorbed as "self-effacing first lady" into Mandela's image as the nation's father.<sup>266</sup> This image of the *pater familias* was a gendered one, in which Mandela acquired the position of near-sexless patriarchal icon in the narration of the new South African nation.<sup>267</sup>



Perhaps the key concept used in narrating Mandela's life and in connecting his biography to a history of South Africa, conceived as processual, has been the ambulating metaphor of the 'walk'. *Long Walk to Freedom* gives us an epic journey - a grand life of chronological motion and ultimate progress - of leadership, survival and triumph. Simultaneously, the notion of 'walk' here also refers to South African history, conceived within a master narrative moving from resistance to reconciliation and the building of a new nation. After an arduous journey, the nation itself has overcome. The connection between Mandela's life and South African history through the notion of a 'walk' has its origins in the

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<sup>265</sup>Desiree Lewis has made the point that with Mandela's own literal family disintegrated, he has nevertheless been accorded a "credible father image without constantly evidencing literal fathering". See Desiree Lewis, 'Winnie Mandela: The Surveillance and Excess of "Black Woman" as Signifier', *Southern African Feminist Review*, Vol 2, No 1, 1996, p 10.

<sup>266</sup>Desiree Lewis, 'Winnie Mandela', pp 8-10.

<sup>267</sup>Obviously, this image was tempered slightly by Mandela's relationship with Graça Machel, widow of Samora, proven 'first lady', and a credible 'woman of substance'.

biographic work of collection, arrangement and editing by Ruth First in the 1965 book.<sup>268</sup> While freedom was an aspiration under conditions of adversity and repression in the 1950s and particularly 1960s, the notion of a 'walk' granted hope through perseverance and commitment. By 1994 and Mandela's election as President, the meaning of Mandela's (and the nation's) walk, as in *Long Walk to Freedom*, had shifted to one signifying the ultimate triumph of destiny. In this long walk, Nelson Mandela's biography became a trope for the nation's history, Mandela was narrated as the embodiment of the nation itself, and his life became the measure of South African biography.

### *Biographic brands*

As I have argued for the importance of focusing on different genres and institutional forms of mediation in the process of biographic production in the public domain, I have also alluded to the appearance of intellectual property questions, which have attached themselves to biographic imaging and representation. I have drawn attention to the increased awareness of intellectual property rights on the part of documentary photographers in South Africa, such as Jürgen Schadeberg, as the politics of resistance gave way to social reconstruction. Indeed, more generally, resistance biography inserted itself into a world of commerce as the attachment of the names and faces of resistance leaders to places, facilities and public spaces has come to be thought of increasingly as a form of branding. Biographic brand management has come to be seen as an important component of the management of biographic legacies. Alongside the public museum or heritage site, the first few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century saw the rise of the foundation as an institutional medium for the maintenance, management, deployment and negotiation of

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<sup>268</sup>Nelson Mandela, *No Easy Walk To Freedom*. The name of the book was a reference to a statement by Jawaharlal Nehru quoted by Mandela in 1953, while he was banned, in an article about the "uprising of national consciousness" (p 21) in the early 1950s. Mandela wrote "There is 'no easy walk to freedom anywhere and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountain tops of our desires'" (p 31). Nehru's original statement can be found in an article entitled 'From Lucknow to Tripoli', in his *The Unity of India: Collected Writings, 1937-1940*, New York: John Day, 1942, pp 131-2.



biography in public and commercial settings. Chief among these was the Nelson Mandela Foundation.<sup>269</sup>

Ever since the Krok brothers' abortive attempt in the mid-1990s to associate their business ventures with the Mandela lustre through the 'numbing gigantism' of totalitarian art,<sup>270</sup> Mandela's name, face and signature have been in demand for a range of projects, landscapes, institutions and events in search of a transformed image. Informal settlements have claimed Mandela's name as part of their struggles for civic legitimacy. The creation of Mandela Park as the name of Imizamo Yethu Township in Hout Bay, Cape Town, was of a different order of civic politics than the municipal reordering of Port Elizabeth and urban surrounds into the Nelson Mandela Metropole. A local township tourism entrepreneur in Hout Bay could invite tourists to partake of "Dinner at Mandela's", in an "evening cultural experience" in "the atmosphere of a true South African shebeen", while in P.E, the creation of the new municipal metro enabled a host of tourist and cultural initiatives in Mandela's name. The tourism magazine for P.E. and Eastern Cape surrounds was named *Madiba Action*, while a coastal inlet being developed as a tourist destination and holiday resort was named 'Madiba Bay'. It also ensured that the Port Elizabeth Art Museum was fully within its rights to rename itself the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum.<sup>271</sup>

These Mandela initiatives in P.E. culminated in the approval by the provincial government at the end of 2002 of plans developed by a group of businessmen to build "a

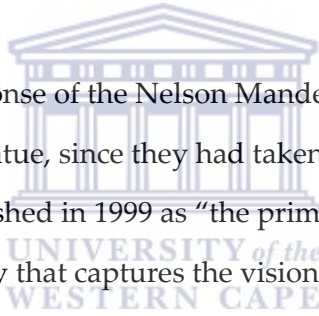
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<sup>269</sup> Another key foundation was the Steve Biko Foundation. An additional institutional form created for the propagation of biographic legacies was the Peace Centre, as in the case of the Desmond Tutu Peace Centre, which sought to develop a museum and leadership academy for the presentation of leadership courses to potential leaders (Nazma Dreyer, 'Tutu Peace Centre to be situated in Cape Town', *Cape Times*, 16 December 2003).

<sup>270</sup> The idea that this proposal ended in failure needs to be tempered with the admission that the Krok brothers did eventually get their Apartheid Museum in 2001, a "rogue museum", created as part of their securing of the Casino licence for Gold Reef City. Ironically, this museum made use of social history research to create a challenging environment of historical representation.

<sup>271</sup> 'Dinner @ Mandela's: Evening Cultural Experience, Imizamo Yethu Township (Mandela Park), Hout Bay' (Flyer, n.d.); *Madiba Action*, Summer 2002/03; *Art Talk*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, 2003. It is not clear whether the planned 'Madiba Bay' was the same as the 'Nelson Mandela Bay', the "exciting holiday destination" in P.E. with "a signature of freedom" (*Equinox*, Issue 4, 2003, p 27).

metal colossus” in Mandela’s image at the harbour entrance. The statue was planned to be 65 metres high, one-and-a-half times the size of the Statue of Liberty, and in its original design, proposed the enlarged Mandela with a clenched-fist salute, holding a copy of his book, *Long Walk to Freedom*. With “discomfort in some quarters”, this plan was shelved in favour of one with an open hand, with a figure of a young girl bearing a bowl added. Called the “Statue of Freedom”, the giant statue was intended as “a symbol of humanity’s struggle for freedom”. It would be fronted by a 600 metre “long walk to freedom”, and its 45-metre plinth would house “a museum of freedom” celebrating national liberation struggles around the world. Because he had worried about “being built up into a tremendous cult figure”, and about being depicted as “the lone leader”, Mandela had indicated his discomfort with the idea of this statue, but at the same time admitted his awareness of the “commercial interest behind it” and of its potential as “tourist attraction”.<sup>272</sup>



It is not certain what the response of the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF) was to the idea of an outsize Mandela statue, since they had taken on responsibility for management of the Mandela brand. Established in 1999 as “the primary vehicle” to “lead and direct the development of a living legacy that captures the vision and values” of Mandela’s life and work, the NMF became the administrative infrastructure mediating his ongoing involvement in public life. The NMF also sought to regulate the reproduction and sale of Mandela’s image and the use of his name in commercial or public settings. It invoked the old 1941 Merchandise Marks Act that protects national symbols to prevent artists from the unauthorised “quoting” of Mandela’s image. Yiul Damaso, an artist who had depicted and sold paintings of Mandela as Rastafarian and boxer, among other guises, and who had sold his works from a Sandton Square restaurant during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, was ordered by the NMF to stop painting Mandela images. NMF lawyer, Ishmael Ayob, also instructed an “unemployed, self-taught” KwaZulu-Natal

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<sup>272</sup> ‘Freedom Statue to rival Statue of Liberty – Survey: Nelson Mandela Metropole’, *Sunday Times* Surveys, 19 August 2001 (author’s possession); Rowan Philp, ‘Giant Mandela statue planned’, *Sunday Times*, 20 October 2002; ‘Mandela – the tourist industry’, *Mail and Guardian Online* ([www.mg.co.za](http://www.mg.co.za)), 8 December 2002, accessed on 10 December 2002; Rory Carroll, ‘The colossus of King’s Beach’, *Mail and Guardian*, 25-31 October, 2002.

artist, Jacob Khumalo, who had exhibited his Mandela paintings at the Ubuntu craft village at the World Summit, to remove the images. Both artists insisted that their work had been motivated by their “admiration for Madiba”.<sup>273</sup>

The NMF had become aware of Mandela’s brand value after US research had shown that Mandela’s face was “the most recognisable in the world”, and that his brand was surpassed only by Coca-Cola. Permission was required for the reproduction or sale of an image of a head of state. Anything that resembled Mandela required the NMF’s authorisation. The NMF claimed that they would give permission for images that “will enhance his image and not something that will break down his image”. It was very important that Mandela’s “image and stature ... be respected”. The NSF’s action sent ripples through the gallery circuit in South Africa resulting in some removing all paintings containing any reference to Mandela.<sup>274</sup> After the NMF had given the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) permission to use an image of Mandela in a TAC T-shirt for its advertising campaign, it was forced to step in to prevent potential embarrassment, when it found the image used on posters advertising a march to parliament.<sup>275</sup>



While the NMF attempted to curtail some acts of Mandela reproduction, they encouraged others including the incorporation of an image of Mandela’s face on to an elaborate national costume made of ostrich skin and feathers, which Miss South Africa would wear at the 2004 Ecuador Miss Universe pageant. The NMF spearheaded a campaign named after Mandela’s Robben Island prison number, 46664 to raise substantial funds for HIV/Aids anti-retroviral treatment projects, for the care and support of infected people, for social and scientific research, and generally “to arouse the conscience of the world”. An internationally televised benefit concert in Cape Town in December 2003 saw international artists perform in front of a giant bust of Mandela’s smiling face, ensuring

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<sup>273</sup> Lesley Mofokeng, ‘Madiba artist gets brush-off’, *Sunday Times*, 1 September 2002; Hazel Friedman, ‘What’s in a name? Evidently everything’, *Mail and Guardian*, 13-19 September 2002.

<sup>274</sup> Lesley Mofokeng, ‘Madiba artist gets brush-off’; Hazel Friedman, ‘What’s in a name?’.

<sup>275</sup> Jo-Anne Smetherham, ‘Mandela backs cause, but not march’, *Cape Times*, 13 February 2003.

that the event and campaign carried the stamp of Mandela's "moral stature".<sup>276</sup> The NMF gave its support for the naming of a new Johannesburg bridge after Mandela, as a means of honouring him and identifying it as a "bridge of unity".<sup>277</sup> It also gave permission for Sandton Square at the wealthy, suburban Sandton City shopping mall to be renamed Nelson Mandela Square. This renaming and the unveiling of a "specially donated 6-metre tall bronze statue" of a jiving Madiba enabled a "meaningful focus" to be added to a "meeting place" of shops, theatres, restaurants and cafés, so that the mall could "celebrate the future" while "saluting the past". In exchange for Mandela's aura, the NMF acquired a shopfront facility on the square for the sale of 46664 concert CDs and other Mandela-related products.<sup>278</sup>

While the work of the NMF seemed to involve the brand management and deployment of Mandela's name and image and the regulation of the reproduction and sale of Mandela images, there is no doubt that it also took on the responsibilities of biographic maintenance and narrative custodianship as part of "living the legacy". This ensured that philanthropy and biography were brought together into a single cultural economy. The NMF engaged a prominent news photographer, Bennie Gool, to document Mandela's ongoing public activities as a means of ensuring the creation of a vivid, official, documentary record. It took responsibility to ensure that Mandela's interests were represented on the Councils of the Nelson Mandela Museum (where the Mandela family had four council seats out of thirteen) and the Robben Island Museum. In this regard, Mandela's fellow Rivonia trialist and Robben Islander, Ahmed Kathrada, who was the chair of the Robben Island Museum council, was also deployed as one of the four Mandela

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<sup>276</sup> Jo-Anne Smetherham, 'Aids: world goes to war – Mandela leads the charge', *Cape Times*, 1 December 2003. Mandela's real Robben Island prison number was 466/64, but a source in the Robben Island Museum management intimated that the dropping of the slash served not only to turn the number into a chantable concert sound byte; this avoided any intellectual property concerns.

<sup>277</sup> Pat Hopkins, 'Bridge of Unity', *Sawubona*, August 2003.

<sup>278</sup> *Cape Argus*, 6 May 2004; 'Nelson Mandela Square at Sandton City: Celebrating the Future' (Advertisement), *Mail and Guardian*, 30 April – 6 May 2004.

representatives on the Nelson Mandela Museum council.<sup>279</sup> Kathrada was seemingly given the portfolio of managing Mandela's biography in national museums.

As part of the management of Mandela's biography, the NMF made a decision to enjoin Mandela's legacy with that of Cecil John Rhodes to create the Mandela Rhodes Foundation, "an historic amalgamation of resources to boost initiatives in education and other fields". This almost unlikely initiative to bring together "the names of two immense figures of Africa" in a biographic pact signalled (in Mandela's words) "the closing of the circle and the coming together of two strands in our history".<sup>280</sup> The NMF Chair, Jakes Gerwel, who was also the Chair of the HSRC's council, enlisted the HSRC's assistance in the compilation of Mandela's speeches in an 85<sup>th</sup> birthday, celebratory publication, "as an enduring legacy for South Africans and the world". Produced with attention to biography, Mandela's speeches were accompanied by a series of tributes by "leading national and international figures" in many fields.<sup>281</sup>

Finally, the NMF also ensured the redeployment of HSRC researcher, Thembeke Mufamadi, who specialised in biographical research, to assist Mandela on a full-time basis with writing a book on his presidential memoirs as a sequel to *Long Walk to Freedom*.<sup>282</sup> At the end of 2003, rumours began to circulate in museum circles that the NMF had expressed a desire to have Mandela's gifts taken from the Nelson Mandela Museum's Bhunga Building in Umtata and brought to Gauteng, where they could display these in a more prominent, visible location, perhaps one such as Nelson Mandela Square. Some expressed objections to the NMF's claims to be a collecting and display institution in respect of Mandela's legacy, and worried that it may be claiming a responsibility best suited to an official museum. However, this seemed to be an indication that the NMF had begun to position itself more deliberately as a memory custodian in the cultural economy

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<sup>279</sup> Nelson Mandela Museum Publicity Folder (Umtata, c.2002). The other council members representing the Mandela family were Jakes Gerwel, the NMF Chair, Fink Haysom, one of Mandela's lawyers and Mandela's wife, Graça Machel.

<sup>280</sup> Michael Morris, 'Rhodes Scholars to hold meeting of minds in city', *Cape Argus*, 24 January 2003.

<sup>281</sup> Kader Asmal, David Chidester and Wilmot James (eds), *Nelson Mandela: From Freedom to the Future – Tributes and Speeches* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2003).

<sup>282</sup> Thembeke Mufamadi, personal communication.

of Mandela memory, one that was not averse to negotiating and deploying Mandela's image as a business asset, albeit for the benefit of social causes.

Over and above these tensions, all the Mandela memory contenders had their work cut out for them. The cultivation of the biographical project of Thabo Mbeki had already begun virtually to omit Mandela from its narrative, as Mbeki came to be narrated as the inheritor of Oliver Tambo's legacy. It was as if the presidency of Nelson Mandela had been a mere interlude. Mbeki, it was suggested further, had in any case already become *de facto* president during Mandela's term of office.<sup>283</sup> In addition, the creation of the colossal, all-embracing, multidisciplinary legacy project of Freedom Park as the main heritage site of the nation was poised to dislodge Nelson Mandela from his central position in national memory. Freedom Park was being conceived and funded in a way that would supersede Robben Island and the far-flung Nelson Mandela Museum in the domain of national heritage. Freedom Park's quest was to accommodate "all of the emerging experiences and symbols ...to tell one coherent story of the struggle of humanity in South Africa".<sup>284</sup> In spite of all the museum and brand attention it received, the central place of Mandela's image in national heritage was not as assured as it once seemed. Imposing Mandela's image through grand public landmarks provided little guarantee of preserving his memory. This required ongoing critical biographic work, not merely image management and brand awareness.

It is very interesting to think of the work of the NMF in the light of the work of another prominent foundation which guarded and projected the memory and legacy of a resistance hero, that of the Steve Biko Foundation (SBF). The public work and interventions of the SBF through a programme of memorial lectures have sought to construct a public intellectual culture of debate and critical reflection in Steve Biko's name. This emphasis on critical debate occurred in the spirit of values promoted by Biko of "self-

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<sup>283</sup> This was the biographic narrative put forward in a documentary about Mbeki screened on the day of his presidential inauguration on Freedom Day, 27 April 2004. See *Mahlambandlopfu: New Dawn* (Directed and Produced by Beverley Mitchell for Ancestral Vision; Executive Producer, Sylvia Vollenhoven, 2004).

<sup>284</sup> *Freedom Park: Conceptual Framework* (Pretoria: Freedom Park Trust, n.d.), p 3.



reliance, self-respect and self-esteem". It was the embracing of self-reliance that enabled you to "rewrite the script of your life", and that enabled the autonomy of community in its creative assets and choices of action. In this vein, the SBF also initiated a 'Culture, Values and Community' programme, which sought to organise social history writing programmes and youth arts festivals as a means of developing a youth intellectual culture. This would ensure that "Biko's children" would be able to realise their objectives.<sup>285</sup>

In Biko's name, the SBF conducted an overt public programme in biographic narration as a means of fostering social development. As a public scholar in his own right, SBF's executive director, Xolela Mangcu, ensured that the argument for greater public biographical attention on Biko was taken to other public culture platforms such as a weekly newspaper column he wrote from 2001-2003. More than being merely a "Biko publicist", Mangcu and the SBF also took up the cause of Robert Sobukwe's legacy, seeking to retrieve this "political and intellectual ancestor" from "the basements of ... university libraries" to "place him at the centre of our public life". More generally, in his work as a public intellectual, Mangcu propounded an entire project of political biography, of dedicated heroes' days, of public memorials, and of heroic biography as a catalyst for leadership development.<sup>286</sup> As engaged as Mangcu's biographic ideas were, this was political biography in a conventional form, framed as historical recovery and leadership lesson.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Zakes Mda, Second Steve Biko Memorial Lecture, UCT, 13 September 2001; Xolela Mangcu, introductory remarks at Second Steve Biko Memorial Lecture, UCT, 13 September 2001. Jointly managed by Xolela Mangcu and Biko's son, Nkosinathi, the SBF seemed to originate in a research grant given to Mangcu and Nkosinathi Biko to write a biography of Steve Biko. What started as a quest for a biography turned into a multi-pronged biographical foundation. See Xolela Mangcu, 'In search of Steve Biko, an activist for all times', *Sunday Times*, 23 April 2000.

<sup>286</sup> See a range of combative, engaging articles by Xolela Mangcu in his series, 'Second Take' published in *The Sunday Independent* between 2001 and 2003. The quotes are from two of his pieces, 'Proud Biko Publicist gears up for Sobukwe anniversary year' (29 December 2002), and 'At this time we need to learn from the giant that is Sobukwe' (16 March 2003).

<sup>287</sup> Celebration was a little more difficult since the narrative of trauma associated with Biko's memory had not culminated in any sense of reconciliation. But it was not surprising that Mangcu and the SBF attracted criticism after one of the memorial lecture events for "speak[ing] of Biko for a whole night without referring to the organisations he led, organisations that fought to make his name what it is today" (Mathatha Tsedu, 'A reminder to rekindle a true memory of Africa's heritage', *Sunday Times*, 21 September 2003).

To this end, the SBF was not unsupportive of the “Afro-chic” design outfit Stoned Cherrie, when it placed a colourful image of Biko’s face on to a fashion T-shirt as a means of introducing “the image of Biko to the otherwise uninformed youth”. This may have served to take the cause of “Biko preservation” from the domain of the party ideologue and to “liberate [him] from the mausoleum”, but it did not stop Black Consciousness activists from objecting to “the *pop idolisation* of our legends”. As one public intellectual wondered how the proceeds of Biko’s face (at R 310, 00 a T-shirt) might be directed to the poor, another expressed his support for the “refreshing mobilisation effort” of the design move, but added his hope for a transition “from the imagery of Biko to the content of his writings”. Perhaps Stoned Cherrie might have considered selling its T-shirts “with an accompanying paperback copy of Biko’s *I Write what I Like*”.<sup>288</sup>

In the first 10 years of South Africa’s democracy, institutions in the public domain became sites for the production of history in the form of heritage projects, museum displays, new memorials, and the performance of identity. A central element of these heritage productions has been biographic, with the construction of heroic memory in many sites. Many of these constructions occurred ‘from above’ as part of the engineering of a new nation in accord with new identifiable discursive frameworks and also involved processes of heritage commercialisation and image branding. While some projects and initiatives have sought to contest these hegemonic constructions, this chapter argues that the most significant biographic challenges have come from the work of critical biography in such museum domains as the District Six Museum and the Hector Pieterse Museum, which have shown how it is possible to pay attention to issues of knowledge production and mediation in the work of biographic representation. Biography needs to transcend the frames of documentary realism and triumphant celebration in order to be effectively marshalled in the work of developing a critical citizenship.

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<sup>288</sup> ‘Finding Biko’, in *SL*, November 2003; Bongani Madondo, ‘Not just a pretty face’, *Sunday Times Lifestyle*, 24 August 2003; Nadia Davids, ‘Public art out of our present’, *Cape Argus*, 26 August 2003. The public intellectuals cited are playwright, Davids and former AZAPO executive member, Gomolemo Mokoae.

## PART TWO

### BEYOND MODERNIST HISTORY: THE PRODUCTION AND CONTESTATION OF ISAAC BANGANI TABATA'S BIOGRAPHY



UNIVERSITY *of the*  
WESTERN CAPE

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ISAAC BANGANI TABATA'S BIOGRAPHY AND THE LIMITS OF DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

#### *Tabata memories, commemorations and memorials*

Across the memory landscape of South Africa at the beginning of 2002, at least five sites could be identified where Isaac Bangani Tabata's life was commemorated, and where biographic images and narrations of his life were recovered, projected and contested. Three of these sites were in Cape Town, where Tabata lived as a full-time political activist from the early 1930s until his departure from the country in 1963 for Swaziland, Tanzania and later Zambia and Zimbabwe. The other two were in the Eastern Cape, where Tabata was born and educated, and where he visited almost on an annual basis for political work between the early 1940s and 1956, when he was banned for five years by the apartheid state. These sites consisted of an office of a small political organisation, a community museum, two university-based archives, and a roadside cemetery, where Tabata was buried after his death in Harare in 1990.

An old, converted, bioscope complex in Salt River, Cape Town was where the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA) had an office in 2002. The office in Palace House was in a small room in what had once been part of the cafeteria of the Palace Bioscope, and was surrounded by hairdressers, shoe shops, fruit and vegetable stores, spice shops and trade union offices at a busy intersection on Albert Road, close to the Salt River Railway Station. This was a modest office, located under a staircase, with little more than a desk, filing cabinet, old photocopying machine and telephone. It seemed to be shut for much of the time, with little sign of political activity. Yet the office conveyed a contradictory sense of steadfastness and purpose amid scarcity of resources and overwhelming political

marginality. Among the materials in the office were pamphlets, newsletters and books, the distribution of which seemed to be one of the main activities.

Amid the reading materials were piles of publications written by Tabata. On the walls were photocopied poster advertisements: “*Education for Barbarism On Sale, R5.00 only*”. Prominent on the posters was a copy of the black and white portrait of Tabata, which graced the backcover of the edition of the book, which had been republished by the Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA) in 1980.<sup>1</sup> Photographed from the chest up, in a pose that had him gazing into the distance, and dressed up in a grey suit, with horn-rimmed spectacles and a pen prominent in his pocket, this was an image of Tabata as political leader, possibly from the early 1970s, turned into a realm of memory.<sup>2</sup> On the back covers of the piles of Tabata books, the late UMSA and APDUSA president was described as an “indefatigable organiser, orator and writer”, who had been “very active in the national struggle of the oppressed blacks for over forty years”.<sup>3</sup> Amid the scattered evidence of intermittent political work, the name of I.B. Tabata, as late political leader and chief author of the movement, and narrations of his life history, had a prominent position, albeit on the margins of post-apartheid South African political life.

Not far away, in downtown Cape Town, on the edge of District Six, another image of I.B. Tabata was put on display. A large portrait of Tabata was installed as part of a Portrait Gallery, one of the display features of an exhibition, *Digging Deeper*, which

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<sup>1</sup> I.B. Tabata, *Education for Barbarism: Bantu (Apartheid) Education in South Africa* (London and Lusaka: Unity Movement of South Africa, 1980; first published by Prometheus, South Africa, 1959 and by Pall Mall, UK, 1960). Other publications by Tabata available for sale included *The Awakening of a People; Imperialist Conspiracy in Africa; 'The Rehabilitation Scheme: A New Fraud'; The Boycott as Weapon of Struggle; 'Freedom Struggle in South Africa'* and *Apartheid: Cosmetics Exposed*. UMSA became the convenient name of the NEUM after the name 'Unity Movement' or 'UM' was decided upon in 1964 by exiled members. It was felt that the category 'Non-European' had become outmoded and it was necessary to identify the South African specificity of the organisation as part of their agitation (I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 11 August 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; Interview with Alie and Ursula Fataar, Harare, 19 July 1992). See also I.B. Tabata, *The Awakening of a People*, Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> See the discussion of the concept 'realm of memory' in Chapter Two.

<sup>3</sup> I.B. Tabata, *Education for Barbarism*, back cover.

opened in the District Six Museum in 2000.<sup>4</sup> Tabata's image, large, light and transparent, of a young bespectacled man with a neat open-necked collar over a jacket, hung between portraits of Cissie Gool and James La Guma, in the same row as images of Ben Kies and Clements Kadalie, and opposite enlargements of Goolam Gool, Alex La Guma and Abdullah Abdurahman.

The same Tabata photographic image was also on display downstairs in an exhibition panel, which reflected upon resistance politics and cultural expression in District Six. This time, it was printed in the form that the Museum had acquired it, an Anne Fischer portrait from 1941, sellotaped inside a makeshift soft brown frame. In the panel, it was deliberately displayed alongside an image of playwright and author, Dora Taylor in a narrative juxtaposition to indicate a special relationship, including one of biographic production. This was an image positioning that became a source of controversy in the Museum. In different ways, then, the idea of Tabata as a leader to be commemorated was placed in a display environment which transcended the frameworks of triumphal pantheon and illustration.<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere in Cape Town, I.B. Tabata's life history had also entered the halls of the academy, when a collection of documents pertaining to his political activities in a range of political formations was deposited over a few years in the Manuscripts and Archives Division of the University of Cape Town. A letter written to UCT economist, Francis Wilson by Tabata in 1987 was deemed to be the I.B. Tabata Collection's founding document. In this letter, Tabata had enquired to whom he may send "a few documents" in order to address concerns over the "shortage of sources" on anti-apartheid struggles, which had resulted in "a distorted view of the facts of the situation". Between 1988 and 1992, 37 bundles of photocopied documents were gathered together in Hemel Hempstead in England, for posting to South Africa.

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Four for a discussion of *Digging Deeper* and of the history of the District Six Museum more generally.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Four. See also Tina Smith and Ciraj Rassool, 'History in photographs at the District Six Museum', in Ciraj Rassool and Sandra Prosalendis (eds), *Recalling Community in Cape Town*.



Gradually, in drips and drabs, the parcels of photocopies arrived at UCT, leading the principal librarian of African Studies to express how “highly delighted” they were that “this important material” would at last be available to researchers in South Africa.<sup>6</sup>

The documents fell into different categories of writing: drafts of manifestos, reports of political activities, memoranda, letters to the press, to fellow activists, notes for lectures and speeches, and articles intended for publication. Some were typed, and some handwritten, mostly in a recognisable script, and often both versions (as well as early drafts) appeared. Also included were copies of the *Anti-CAD Bulletins* for the 1940s, the *AAC Voice* for the period 1946-48, the *Proceedings of Unity Conferences, 1944-1951*, and political pamphlets. In addition, key texts, such as published writings by Tabata, and copies of the journal *Apdusa* were also forwarded. Included also were Tabata’s diaries and three of Dora Taylor’s. This collection, referred to variously as the ‘UMSA Collection’ and the ‘Tabata Collection’, stood as the foremost narration of Tabata’s life, housed in the archive of a university, where it signified the final arrival of the Unity Movement’s past and Tabata’s biography into the official institutions of history and heritage.<sup>7</sup> There it came to be consulted by scholars working on a variety of projects to document or recover the history of national resistance and socialist politics in South Africa, as well as the particular story of the Unity Movement.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I.B. Tabata to Francis Wilson, 29/4/87; M.P. Richards to B Johns (Pseudonym for Ronnie Britten), 11 May 1988; 15 June 1988, UMSA/I.B. Tabata Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town (BC 925), hereafter called the I.B. Tabata Collection.

<sup>7</sup> When the collection entered UCT, it was known as The Unity Movement Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town (BC 925); in October 1995, the name of the collection was formally changed after claims were made on its possession by Temba Sirayi, then Director of the Centre for Cultural Studies at Fort Hare University. See below.

<sup>8</sup> Gail Gerhart, who had begun the project to update *From Protest to Challenge*, and Allison Drew, who had begun working on the documentary history of radical politics in South Africa, made enquiries to consult the collection. See M.P. Richards to B Johns, 31/7/89; A Drew to University Archivist, Manuscripts and Archives Department, University of Cape Town, 15/4/91; Leonie Twentyman Jones to A Drew, 26 April 1991 (I.B. Tabata Collection, UCT BC 925). Perhaps the most significant recovery history research conducted on the collection was that by erstwhile APDUSA youth activist, Robin Kayser, who researched the papers for a Master’s degree in History at UCT. See the discussion of Kayser’s work below.

In 1995, Temba Sirayi, then Director of the Centre for Cultural Studies at Fort Hare, challenged the University of Cape Town's right to be the custodian of the Tabata Collection. Thereafter Fort Hare University was given a microfilm copy of the collection. Today the microfilm copy forms part of the records of the "liberation archives" in a newly reconstituted National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre (NAHECS), where it is held together with documents of the PAC (110 linear metres), AZAPO/BCM (3.5 linear metres) and the New Unity Movement. In a temporary move, the ANC Collection, all 260 linear metres representing the activities of 33 missions of the organisation, had been moved from NAHECS to the basement of the library.<sup>9</sup>

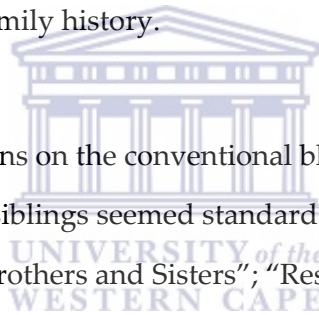
Established in 1981 as a Centre for Xhosa Literature, the Centre changed its name and focus in 1991 and under Sirayi's directorship, the Centre attempted to position itself as one that promoted "knowledge and understanding of material and human resources pertinent to heritage and culture in South Africa". It was during this phase that a deliberate decision was taken to position itself as the foremost repository for the official documents of all sections of the liberation movement. Agreements were signed with leaders of liberation movements including the ANC, PAC and the New Unity Movement. In 1998, the Centre was renamed NAHECS, with an Archives and Museum Division, and committed itself to becoming "a significant player in the transformation of the ... heritage and cultural landscape".<sup>10</sup> In this reconfigured heritage institution in the academy, through which Fort Hare sought to make its mark in the domain of national heritage, I.B. Tabata's papers on microfilm, framed as part of a "liberation archives", had been grafted on to older ethnographic collections (the Hamilton Welsh and F.S. Malan Collections) as well as a collection of artworks by black artists (previously collected as 'bantu art').

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<sup>9</sup> University of Fort Hare, 'Background document on the National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre (NAHECS): Prepared for the NAHECS Workshop', University of Fort Hare National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre Strategic Workshop, Stutterheim, 8-9 May 2003.

<sup>10</sup> University of Fort Hare, 'Background document on the National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre (NAHECS): Prepared for the NAHECS Workshop'.

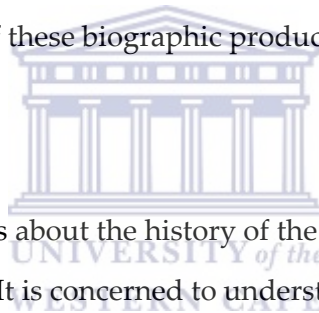
While Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape may be a repository of mere copies of the Tabata Collection, with the originals in Cape Town, the Eastern Cape was the setting of perhaps the most significant memorial site that commemorated I.B. Tabata's life. This was the site of Tabata's grave in a cemetery alongside the national road, north of Queenstown, just past the entrance to Lesseyton, an impoverished village-township, which had resisted incorporation into Transkei under apartheid, and just before the turnoff to Bailey station, where Tabata grew up. This was the modest Tabata family cemetery, where Tabata had been buried on 27 October 1990 after his death in Harare two weeks before. Tabata had been buried between the graves of his brother George (1893-1977) and his sister Bridget (1909-1986) and in sight of the resting place of his brother Puller Mjikelo (1902-1903). Nearby lay his father Steven (1860-1929) and his mother Amy (1862-1957). Lesseyton, Bailey and the cemetery were part of a district known as KwaTabata, close to the Tabata River, where the whole landscape had been marked by the Tabata family history.



In the cemetery, the inscriptions on the conventional black and grey granite headstones of Tabata's older siblings seemed standard: "Safe in the Arms of Jesus"; "Remembered by Children, Brothers and Sisters"; "Rest in Peace". In this cemetery landscape, the headstones of the older parental graves were more striking, and notably inscribed in Xhosa: his mother's brown marble headstone modestly inscribed – "Lala Ngoxolo"; his father's cement headstone with sheep motif much more elaborate: "Waye Ngumfuyi we Gusha. Sodibana Ngalo Ntsasa Yovuko". Surrounded by older family graves covered with stones, with deteriorating wooden crosses, these well-marked burial sites memorialised settled Christian, churched, close-knit family and sheep farming identities. I.B. Tabata's mortal remains were interred into this family landscape, with his headstone marked in deliberate, yet contradictory ways. The conventions of the standard black and grey granite had seemingly been reworked. Framed by a floral image and an illustration of a flame, a large image of a book - whose aesthetic origins may have been biblical – had been inscribed with a secular political biography: "Here Lies a Great Politician, President of the Unity

Movement of SA and a Great Man". The setting of the modest family cemetery made the claims on leadership and greatness seem incongruous.

These varied sites and institutions at which I.B. Tabata's life history was projected, recovered and contested as political lesson, archival collection, museum display and memorial resting place reflect differences in biographic impulse, narrative intent and cultural economy. Indeed, at the turn of the 21st century, as Tabata was turned into a deceased political teacher, elder statesman, and family ancestor, the narratives and meanings of his life history were contested in a variety of ways between institutions and sites. This suggests that there was a longer genealogy of biographical work and biographical relations, through which Tabata was 'produced' in narrative terms under different conditions. It also indicates a deeper layering of controversy and contestation through which these productions were challenged. Here, we argue that it is the order and sequence of these biographic productions, relations and contests that need to be understood.



Part Two of this dissertation is about the history of the idea of Isaac Bangani Tabata as a leader with a biography. It is concerned to understand a fuller range of narrations of the life of this activist, intellectual and writer associated with the Workers' Party of South Africa (WPSA), the All African Convention (AAC), the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) and the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA). It is interested to analyse the social and political lives of Isaac Bangani Tabata's biographies and examine how these have been produced and reproduced through and across quite varied mediums of history: through writing and visualisation; in the political movement and in the academy; through the politics of exile and in the domain of commemoration; through the creation and institutionalisation of an archival collection, and in the museum setting of heritage creation. My interest also lies in trying to comprehend the relations and conditions of production of these biographies, the circumstances of their reproduction and continued life, how they were put to work at different times, and the ways in which they were contested and contradicted. This study tries to explore new possibilities

for the field of political biography in South Africa through opening up questions about political lives as productions and about the place of narrative in the formation of identity. These questions create the possibility of extending the field of South African resistance history beyond the realist methodological boundaries of chronological narrative and the recovery limits of documentary political history.

### *Tabata biographies and documentary history*

Biographical narrations of I.B. Tabata's political life have featured in the recovery projects of documentary history in the collections of political documents and political lives compiled by Gwendolen Carter and Tom Karis in the 1960s and 1970s. Tabata's political career was also a subject of some focus in the archival investigations and political syntheses of American political scientist Allison Drew and socialist intellectual Baruch Hirson, both of whom set out to recover and document the political record of South African Marxist - especially Trotskyist - political formations, thinkers and activists. As argued above, Carter and Karis's documentary history of the national movements, as a project of archiving and resistance historical narration, served to set the terms, chronologies and codes through which black South African resistance politics was understood for a long time. In its published form and in its existence as an archive, the Karis and Carter project constructed an orthodox narrative history of modern, rational and purposeful political formations, led by equally modern, rational and purposeful leaders. Political history was constituted out of the words and actions of political leaders of national political organisations, and their political statements and biographic profiles stood as the authoritative – almost monumental – sources of a significant political history.<sup>11</sup>

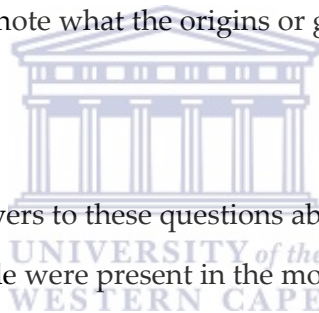
While Volumes 2 and 3 of the Karis and Carter series published a range of political materials authored by Tabata,<sup>12</sup> Tabata was also accorded two paragraphs

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>12</sup> For example, 'Address by I.B. Tabata, AAC Conference, December 16, 1941' (Document 62), 'Letter ["On the Organisations of the African People"], from I.B. Tabata to Nelson Mandela', June 16, 1948' (Document 67) and "'Opening Address" at First Conference of the society of Young

constituting three-quarters of a page for his political profile published in Volume 4.<sup>13</sup> This profile provided a conventional biographic narration of Tabata's political career as "a founder and leading theoretician of the Non-European Unity Movement". It focused on his birth and early education in the Eastern Cape, followed by his political education and early political activity in Cape Town. It concentrated on organisations that he helped establish or build (AAC, Anti-CAD, NEUM, APDUSA), and policies that he pursued, such as his preference for a "peasant-based liberation movement and a long-range strategy of political education rather than short-range action campaigns". It also provided a brief discussion of key political writings by Tabata and ended with a discussion of his activities and continued writings after he went into exile in 1963. It is this biographical document that went on to form the main source on Tabata's political career for subsequent researchers, who mined the volume for facts on leaders' lives.<sup>14</sup> It was not clear from the face of this published volume or its bibliographical note what the origins or genealogy were of Tabata's profile.



Some of the clues for the answers to these questions about the origins and genealogy of Tabata's biographical profile were present in the more extensive - but far less consulted - Carter-Karis microfilm collection. In addition to a number of addresses, speeches and writings authored under Tabata's name between 1945 and 1965,<sup>15</sup> the

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Africa, by I.B. Tabata, December 20, 1951' (Document 98), in Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge*, Volume 2, pp 340, 362, 506.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge*, Volume 4, p 150.

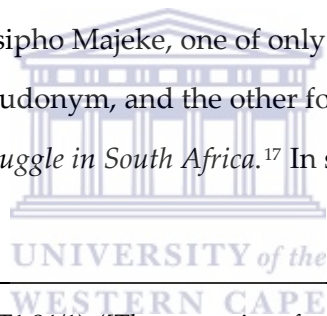
<sup>14</sup> It is interesting that Carter and Karis's brief mention of Tabata having been employed as a truck driver in Cape Town and having become a leading member of the Lorry Drivers' Union were among the innocuous facts retrieved and repeated by subsequent scholars such as Catherine Higgs, Allison Drew and Linda Chisholm, who made uncritical use of Carter and Karis' profile of Tabata. See Catherine Higgs, *the Ghost of Equality*, Ch 5, fn 13, p 231; Allison Drew (ed), *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*, Volume 1, p 193, fn 34; Volume 2, p 156, fn 12; Linda Chisholm, 'Education, Politics and Organisation: The Educational Traditions and Legacies of the Non-European Unity Movement, 1943-1986', *Transformation*, 15, 1991, p 22. See also Colin Bundy, 'Resistance in the Reserves: the AAC and the Transkei', *Africa Perspective*, No 22, 1983, p 52, which drew partly on Carter and Karis's profile of Tabata.

<sup>15</sup> For example, "'The rehabilitation scheme: a new fraud." Non-European Unity Movement' (Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 2:DA13: 84/5); "'The problem of organisational unity in South Africa" By I.B. Tabata. Lusaka: All African Convention Unity Movement, 1948' (sic) (2:DA13:84/6); "'Education for barbarism: Bantu education in South Africa." By I.B. Tabata. Durban: Prometheus



microfilm collection contained a substantial body of biographical notes and essays about Tabata dated mainly in the early and mid-1960s. These must have been the tracts that Gail Gerhart and Tom Karis drew upon for the construction of the Tabata profile published in Volume 4. Some of the essays had been written either as prefaces for publications by Tabata, or had been compiled for solidarity political organising and fundraising in the United States, conducted by the Alexander Defense Committee or by the Committee for a Free South Africa.<sup>16</sup>

At least five of the documents involved the intercession of Dora Taylor, in the form of her correspondence with Gwendolen Carter about I.B. Tabata and APDUSA, a text of an interview conducted by Taylor with Tabata about his political life, a transcript of a conversation with Taylor at Northwestern about the AAC and the Unity Movement and two biographical essays. One of the biographical essays was authored under the name Nosipho Majeke, one of only three occasions other than 1952 that Taylor used this pseudonym, and the other formed the preface to the publication of *The Freedom Struggle in South Africa*.<sup>17</sup> In spite of the evidence of



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Printers and Publishers, 1959' (2:XT1:84/1); '[The transcript of a speech delivered by I.B. Tabata to the Program of African Studies, Northwestern University, in 1965.]' (2:XT1:81/2).

<sup>16</sup> '[A biographical essay which was taken from the preface to *The Freedom Struggle in South Africa* by I.B. Tabata.]' (Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 2:XT1:91/1); 'A biographical essay published by the Alexander Defense Committee, New York, 1967.]' (2:XT1:91/2); '[Biographical data compiled by the Committee for a Free South Africa, New York.]' (2:XT1:91/3).

<sup>17</sup> '[A letter dated Mar. 16, 1963, from Dora Taylor to Gwendolen M. Carter which discusses the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa and I.B. Tabata.]' (2:XT1:92/1); '[Text of an interview by Dora Taylor with I.B. Tabata on Nov. 20, 1965.]' (2:XT1:94); '[The transcript of a conversation with Dora Taylor at Northwestern University on Nov. 20, 1965, regarding the role of the All African Convention and the Non-European Unity Movement in the South African nationalist movement.]' (2:XT1:92/2); "'I.B. Tabata, President of the Unity Movement of South Africa for Full Democratic Rights." By Nosipho Majeke' (1965), (2:XT1:92/3); '[A biographical essay which was taken from the preface to *The Freedom Struggle in South Africa* by I.B. Tabata.]' (2:XT1:91/1) (This was most certainly also authored by Taylor). The second occasion that Taylor used the pen name 'Nosipho Majeke' was for a background article accompanying the Unity Movement's memorandum submitted to the OAU asking for assistance. The third was for an unpublished pamphlet that was originally intended as the introduction to a reassembly and re-edition of Tabata's writings, which was never published. See Nosipho Majeke, 'The Background: Racism in South Africa', in *Unity: The Road to Freedom in South Africa – A memorandum submitted to the Committee of Nine of the Organisation of African Unity by the All-African Convention and the Unity Movement of South Africa* (c. November 1963, Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University); Nosipho Majeke, *The Dynamic of Revolution in South Africa* (Unpublished pamphlet, c.1971,

deliberate biographical work on Tabata's life, especially by Taylor, the most important way in which the significance of the documentary collection was understood was as evidence of black political statements and decisions, and of black leadership. The documents were merely collected, placed into a sequence, and mined to construct a story of the life of a leader. The preoccupation was with documentation as source of ideas and politics, with chronological narration of lives, which seemed unmediated, natural and objective, and not with cultural questions about the production of lives, genealogies of narration, biographical relations and biographical contestation.

Indeed it would be interesting to ask questions about the very process of 'collecting' itself here, especially since it seems as if the documents associated with the 'Unity Movement' and I.B. Tabata had deliberately been lodged with Gwendolen Carter and Tom Karis as part of a strategy of organisation-building in exile and to influence the historical record on the history of resistance.<sup>18</sup> The lodging of these documents had also sought to counter any criticisms contained in printed materials that Carter



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in author's possession); Dora Taylor (ed), *The Dynamic of Revolution in South Africa: Speeches and Writings by I.B. Tabata* (Unpublished manuscript, c.1969, in author's possession).

<sup>18</sup> Correspondence and communication with Gwendolen Carter and Tom Karis were deliberately preserved and archived by Dora Taylor as part of the work of building the Unity Movement in exile. These notes and letters of introduction and explanation (mainly by Taylor), with compilations of biographical information of Tabata began before Tabata left South Africa (with Jane Gool and Nathaniel Honono, President of the AAC) in June 1963 (and when Carter was still based in the Asian and African Studies Program of Smith, Amherst and Mount Holyoke Colleges and the University of Massachusetts). It seemed to have been spurred on by the need to respond to Carter's book, *The Politics of Inequality: South Africa since 1948* (New York: Praeger, 1958). This communication also included notes from the first meeting that Carter had with Tabata, Honono and Gool in Swaziland in July 1963. See Dora Taylor to Gwendolen Carter, 16/3/63, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925, also reproduced in Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection (2:XT1:92/1); see also 'Tabata, Honono, and Miss Gool, near Mbabane, Swaziland, July 25, 1963 [notes of Gwendolen Carter's discussion with Tabata, Honono and Gool]', I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. But see, especially, Dora Taylor to I.B. Tabata, 17 August 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925, in which Taylor expressed fear that information that Carter requested Tabata "write up" (which related to the period that Carter had "distorted through ignorance and liberal informers") would be "very much for her benefit", thus subsidising "her requirements in writing up proper stuff". While expressing the view that it would be unwise "to put gifts into her hands", Taylor nevertheless felt that it was "worthwhile to get the record straight".

and Karis may have received from Tabata's Anti-CAD opponents with whom he had cut ties in Cape Town in the late 1950s.<sup>19</sup>

This methodological preoccupation with documents as seemingly transparent windows upon political policies and with uncovering real lives of political leadership were also central characteristics of Allison Drew's collections and research on South African socialism, in which I.B. Tabata was accorded some attention. In the mid-to-late 1980s, Drew travelled to a number of archives, libraries and private collections in the United States, Britain and South Africa, and travelled to Zimbabwe and Namibia to conduct interviews with socialists about the history of socialist politics in South Africa. This research to collect and establish the evidence of South African socialism led to a doctoral dissertation and a few published articles. These sought to comprehend the political policies, theoretical positions and social analyses that divided and united different socialist formations in South Africa as they faced a number of challenges and dilemmas, sometimes framed as 'questions', such as the 'national question' or the 'land question'. As we have seen, another significant set of publications which emerged from Drew's work was the two-volumed 'Karis and Carter' of South African socialism, a collection of contemporary records of socialist thought and politics in South Africa.<sup>20</sup> For these volumes, Drew had gone beyond her dissertation research collection to incorporate documents from the UMSA/Tabata Collection held at UCT and the Workers' Party of South Africa Papers at UWC.

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<sup>19</sup> After receiving a 1964 list of documents pertaining to the Unity Movement held by Gwendolen Carter indicating that she had a copy of the document 'What has happened in the Non-European Unity Movement' (Issued by Joint Secretaries, NEUM, 1958), which attacked the AAC leadership for "desertion", Taylor seemed to have gone out of her way to ensure that Karis and Carter had a copy of the reply to this document penned by Tabata, 'The Wreckers of Unity at Work'. Tabata himself had urged her to ensure that the material that Ben Kies "had surreptitiously sent her" be countered. See 'Materials on Unity Movement Presently Held by Dr Carter' (1964); Thomas Karis to Dora Taylor, 11 September 1964; Gwendolen Carter to Dora Taylor 23 September 1964; I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 3 January 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>20</sup> For details on Drew's dissertation and publications, as well as a critical examination of Drew's documentary history project, see Chapter Three.

This milieu of socialist politics, resistance strategies and national liberation constructed by Drew included a focus on I.B. Tabata, whom she described as one of the socialist movement's "principal figures".<sup>21</sup> Apart from her research in the Karis and Carter volumes and microfilms, and in other collections, Drew had also gone to Harare to interview Tabata and his companion, Jane Gool, in December 1987. Drawing on Dora Taylor's biographical writings about Tabata, as found in these collections, and on this interview, Drew reconstructed Tabata's biography. He had been the "most prominent African member and leading organiser" of the Trotskyist Workers' Party of South Africa, who had been "born near the farming community of Queenstown" and who "made yearly trips to the Transkei in the late 1940s and early '50s".<sup>22</sup> In the 1940s, as a member of the WPSA, Tabata had been one of the "group of radicals" who "[had taken] over the leadership of the AAC", and had argued for "a boycott of all racial structures proposed by the government". Tabata was also "a founder of the NEUM". After having been banned in 1956, Tabata "established and became president of APDUSA".<sup>23</sup>

Tabata and the Workers' Party focused on the "land question", which for them "was the heart of South Africa's social struggle". Tabata believed that "Africans were predominantly a landless peasantry which could be mobilised for social revolution on the issue of land hunger". Drew drew upon her interview with Tabata (with Gool), to make the argument that the Workers' Party had long ago realised that migrant labour could easily be used against urban worker strikes if the reserves remained unorganised. Therefore for them, migrant labour formed "the mediating link between urban and reserve-based struggles".<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere, Drew entered into debate with Tabata over his analysis of the "dual consciousness" of migrant workers

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<sup>21</sup> Allison Drew, 'Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism, 1928-1960', p 8.

<sup>22</sup> Allison Drew, 'Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism, 1928-1960', p 463. Here, the biographical tract produced by Dora Taylor under the name Nosipho Majeke in 1965, 'I.B. Tabata, President of the Unity Movement of South Africa for full democratic rights', which Drew consulted at Manuscripts and Archives at Yale University Library, was treated as an unmediated source, and simply mined for facts on Tabata's life.

<sup>23</sup> Allison Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition*, Volume Two, p 156.

<sup>24</sup> Allison Drew, 'Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism, 1928-1960', pp 463-465.

and reserve dwellers, arguing that this seeming “dual consciousness” was “actually a refection of a highly differentiated reserve population with diverse aspirations”.<sup>25</sup>

Drawing again on Taylor’s manuscript and her own interview with Tabata, Drew referred to the importance of AAC activists in the first campaigns against the Rehabilitation Scheme from 1946, to the impact of the distribution of Tabata’s 1945 pamphlet criticising the scheme, and to the strategic decision to advocate forms of non-collaboration to protest against Rehabilitation. Having been arrested in 1948 in the Mount Ayliff region for incitement after having addressed a large crowd, Tabata, she suggested, had argued for importance of mobilising people “on the basis of their immediate needs and demands” and not in pursuance of “abstract goals like nationalisation”, as other Trotskyists in Cape Town had been advocating. Tabata had argued that the government already owned the reserves, and it had “merely entrusted” these to Africans. This, Drew suggested led Tabata to query whether activists should “allow the government to take the people’s cattle”.<sup>26</sup> By the late 1950s, according to Drew, the AAC found itself caught between rural pressures for “more militant assistance” against Rehabilitation and pressures inside the WPSA and NEUM for a more restrained, propagandistic approach to agitation.<sup>27</sup>

In the face of this “rural pressure for militancy”, internal turmoil in the WPSA led to the split in the NEUM, which, Tabata suggested was “mediated by personality conflicts”. In Drew’s rendition of Tabata’s position, this internal conflict was “between theoreticians who were not involved in the actual organisation of people

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<sup>25</sup> Allison Drew, ‘Theory and Practice of the Agrarian Question in South African Socialism, 1928-60’. Notwithstanding its presence in the bibliography of her dissertation and this article, it is indeed remarkable that Drew failed to refer to Colin Bundy’s research on the AAC and the Agrarian Question in her chapter on ‘The Unity Movement and the Land Question’. See Colin Bundy, ‘Resistance in the Reserves: the AAC and the Transkei’, *Africa Perspective*, No 22, 1983, and ‘Land and Liberation: Popular Rural Protest and the National Liberation Movements in South Africa, 1920-1960’, in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London and New York: Longman, 1987). The latter article was first delivered in 1982 in New York at the conference on which the book was based.

<sup>26</sup> Allison Drew, ‘Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism, 1928-1960’, pp 468-9.

<sup>27</sup> Allison Drew, ‘Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism, 1928-1960’, p 474.

and those engaged in practical grassroots activity". Cape Town Trotskyists, on the other hand, understood this split as brought on by the "growing tendency" in the AAC to "interpret the land question in the narrow bourgeois sense of the right to buy and sell". In the cities, growing pressure for "greater involvement in urban struggles" led to the formation of SOYA, the Society of Young Africa, in 1951, whose affiliation to the AAC was, Drew suggests, an attempt on Tabata's part "to increase his social base through organisational leverage" in the WPSA and the NEUM. The formation of APDUSA in 1961 by the Tabata faction was "an organisational response to internal pressures for a militant working class approach", and "address[ed] the question of African leadership" that had been raised in the WPSA. In comparing APDUSA to "yeast which makes the dough of the mass movement rise", Tabata's view of the relation of APDUSA to the national movement "reflected Trotsky's influence".<sup>28</sup>

In reconstructing this internal history of the NEUM and Tabata's political career, Drew placed emphasis upon the agency of the WPSA and on Tabata's membership of and participation in this party as motivation for his interventions. This archival recovery of a primary, but submerged, Trotskyist agency as the basis of understanding the history of the NEUM, its component sections and the analyses of its activists was not new. Drew's work, which was first published in 1991, followed in the footsteps of a longer genealogy of documentary research that had tried to uncover Trotskyist initiative in shaping political formations and organisational strategies of national liberation, and in directing political ideas and historical analyses of the NEUM.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Allison Drew, 'Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism, 1928-1960', pp 477-505. Drew's argument that the formation of APDUSA as a unitary structure as well as its "non-racial definition of the African nation" had showed a "recognition of the criticisms of NEUM's federal structure" (p 502) reflected a conflation of the federal structure with the NEUM's three-pillar structure and a misunderstanding of the NEUM's federalism. The federal organisational form of the NEUM did not refer to the three racialised streams of political mobilisation and campaigning, as assumed by Drew, but to the relationship between the NEUM, the AAC, and the Anti-CAD and the myriad of organisations of diverse kinds which were members of these structures.

<sup>29</sup>See Tony Southall, 'Marxist Theory in South Africa until 1940', M.A. Thesis, University of York, 1978; Roy Gentle, 'The NEUM in Historical Perspective', B.Soc.Sci. Hons Thesis, University of



Indeed, in this genealogy, the most indefatigable documenter and biographer of the political and intellectual labours of South African Trotskyism was undoubtedly Baruch Hirson, who devoted a substantial amount of his time in exile in London to researching a myriad of questions relating to this history. He also gave support and encouragement to many younger scholars, who spent time researching his personal papers.<sup>30</sup> Hirson, himself, had been an activist in the Trotskyist movement in South Africa at different times in the 1940s and 1950s, and some of his research was addressed to analysing political events, movements, strategies and assessments in which he himself had been a participant. While in exile, Hirson completed a doctoral dissertation on the black working class in the 1930s and 1940s,<sup>31</sup> was a regular participant in the academic activities of the Institute for Commonwealth Studies at the University of London, and for a while, even taught at Bradford University. Partly because of having been a participant in certain events and movements he wrote about and wanting to rise above his “rancour of yesteryear”, as well as wanting his writings to stand as more than merely the personal testimony of an activist wanting to set records straight, Hirson advocated a reliance on “basic documents” as evidence in order to tell stories “dispassionately” and achieve the accuracy needed to avoid a mere “potted history”.<sup>32</sup> According to Hirson:

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Cape Town, 1978; Ciraj Rassool, ‘Going Back to Our Roots: Aspects of Marxist and Radical Thought and Politics in South Africa, 1930-1960’, M.A. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1987; Baruch Hirson, *Yours for the Union: Class and Community Struggles in South Africa 1930-1947*, London: Zed, 1989. In the early 1990s, my own research on Tabata continued to be firmly premised on the need to identify the lineages and ruptures in the history of Trotskyist political formations; see Ciraj Rassool, ‘Non-Stalinist Marxism and National Liberation in South Africa before 1960’, in *Proceedings of Conference on Marxism in South Africa: Past, Present and Future*, UWC, 1991.

<sup>30</sup> See Tom Lodge’s description of Hirson’s “generosity of spirit” in his Foreword to Hirson’s posthumously published book, *The Cape Town Intellectuals: Ruth Schechter and her Circle, 1907-1934* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2001). I spent a period doing research on Hirson’s papers in 1992, and benefited from extensive discussions with him. Allison Drew had spent time in 1987 doing research in Baruch Hirson’s ‘private archive’ (Tom Karis, personal communication, 1987; Drew had just been in touch with Karis about the progress of her research). However, in her research, Drew referred to Hirson’s former activism, and not to his scholarly research.

<sup>31</sup> This was published as *Yours for the Union*.

<sup>32</sup> Ciraj Rassool, ‘Introduction of Keynote Speaker, Baruch Hirson’, Marxist Theory Seminar Conference, *Marxism in South Africa – Past, Present and Future*, UWC, September 1991; Baruch Hirson, Additional Comments to Al Richardson’s Review of Robert J Alexander, *International Trotskyism 1929-*

The reading of documents is not proof against false conclusions – but the historian must at least have these available before a coherent account can be written. More than this, there must be some insight into the period in the country's history, the members and their actions. In the absence of such evidence and insights, what is written can only misinform.<sup>33</sup>

While some of Hirson's work took place on the edge of and partly in relation to the academy, the main corpus of his intellectual endeavours occurred outside, as part of his work as a socialist intellectual, connected with the socialist movement, who wanted to place certain understandings of the history of socialism in the public domain. The journal, *Searchlight South Africa*, which he edited between 1988 and 1995, sought to offer "analyses from a critical Marxist standpoint" and to provide a platform for critical debates on South African history and politics.<sup>34</sup> In addition, Hirson produced his own historical research on South African labour history and political history, which gave rise to a few monographs.<sup>35</sup> A substantial amount of this research and writing took a biographical form,<sup>36</sup> and, while Hirson was critical of any "beatification" of individuals,<sup>37</sup> this was biography as chronological narrative, geared towards the discovery of origins and causation, and based upon the extensive, international search for written sources - however scant - of evidence of political thought and policy. And the purpose of these studies of socialist lives was evaluative,

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1985: *A Documented Analysis of the Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), in *Revolutionary History*, Vol 4, No 4, Spring, 1993, pp 173-174.

<sup>33</sup> Baruch Hirson, Review of Robert J Alexander, *International Trotskyism 1929-1985*, p 174.

<sup>34</sup> Preamble to *Searchlight South Africa*, No 1, September 1988, p i.

<sup>35</sup> Apart from *Yours for the Union*, Hirson had published a Marxist analysis of the 1976 uprisings in 1979 (*Year of Fire, Year of Ash: Soweto, Roots of a Revolution?* London: Zed, 1979) and an account of the 1925 Seaman's Strike (with Lorraine Vivian, *Strike Across the Empire: The Seamen's Strike of 1925* (London: Clio Publications, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> Baruch Hirson and Gwyn A Williams, *The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones 1883-1924* (London: Core Publications, 1995); Baruch Hirson, *The Cape Town Intellectuals: Ruth Schechter and Her Circle, 1907-1934*. Here, we can also include Hirson's autobiography, a testimony of an unconventional socialist life, which also sought to reinterpret aspects of political and labour history. See Baruch Hirson, *Revolutions in my Life* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Baruch Hirson, 'South Africa – The State of a Nation', *Searchlight South Africa*, No 12, June 1995, p 27.

and was conducted as part of a wider circle of socialist evaluation that took the form of documentary history and radical antiquarianism.<sup>38</sup>

Hirson's penchant for biography as a means of recovery of radical history had a pedigree that stretched back at least to the early 1980s. Among his earliest historical publications after his arrival in Britain was a biographical study of Johannesburg trade unionist, Dan Koza, which was published under a pseudonym.<sup>39</sup> Here the reconstruction of Koza's career as a trade unionist and political activist was also a means to record the influence of the Trotskyist Workers International League (WIL) - of which Hirson had been a member - on trade unions in Johannesburg, and to set the record straight in relation to Koza's life and its impact and influence. This had been "barely known even to the most serious student of contemporary events".<sup>40</sup> Although this study was connected to Hirson's doctoral research, it can also be seen as one of Hirson's earliest acts of documentation, an early foray into creating a public record of aspects of South African socialism. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, as Hirson became more committed to the project of researching and recording the history of socialism in South Africa through documentation and biography, he also imbibed from a growing, but theoretically limited field of Trotskyist biographic work.<sup>41</sup> Hirson's main concern

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<sup>38</sup> Hirson served on the editorial board of *Revolutionary History*, a platform constructed by different Trotskyist groups in Britain to "right ... historic wrong[s]", especially those perpetuated by "generations of liberal and Communist historians", (Introduction, *Revolutionary History*, Vol 4, No.s 1&2, 1991-2, p 1) and to create a public record of Trotskyist political activity in different parts of the world in the form of historical and analytical articles, eye-witness accounts, and original documents. Part of the motivation for this research and documentation was a belief that "Trotskyism's complex history can only be understood from inside" (Al Richardson, Review of Robert J Alexander, *International Trotskyism 1929-1985*, p 169). The publication of the evidence of this history was necessary as a body of lessons because "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it" (Cover, *Revolutionary History*, Vol 4, No 4, Spring 1993. Among the special issues of *Revolutionary History* produced were *The Spanish Civil War: The View from the Left* (*Revolutionary History*, Vol 4, No.s 1&2, Winter, 1991-92) and *Victor Serge – The Century of the Unexpected: Essays on Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (*Revolutionary History*, Vol 5, No 3, Autumn 1994). Some of Hirson's colleagues on the *Revolutionary History* editorial board also documented Trotskyism's history in other societies through the publication of monographs. See Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *The War and the International: A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain 1937-1949* (London: Socialist Platform, 1986).

<sup>39</sup> David Harries (Pseudonym for Baruch Hirson), 'Daniel Koza: A Working Class Leader', *Africa Perspective*, No 19, 1981.

<sup>40</sup> David Harries, 'Daniel Koza: A Working Class Leader', p 2.

<sup>41</sup> For example, Wang Fan-hsi, *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary*. Translated and with an Introduction by Gregor Benton; New York: Columbia University Press, 1991; Alan M Wald, *The New York*

was to record the truth of socialism's history, to "get the record straight",<sup>42</sup> with little more than archival and empirical intent.

From the late 1980s, *Searchlight South Africa* became Hirson's most important platform for this project of documenting the facts of South African socialism's intellectual and political history, and evaluating the life histories of socialists and those connected with them.<sup>43</sup> Importantly, for our purposes, it was here that Hirson reflected much more purposefully on the history of South African Trotskyism,<sup>44</sup> and on the history of the Unity Movement,<sup>45</sup> with which he had been associated. It was here that Hirson drew upon the evidence of his own and other documentary archives (Carter and Karis, for example) as well as his own recollections to evaluate I.B. Tabata's political ideas and influence in relation to the WPSA, AAC and NEUM. Hirson also wrote a special obituary article to assess Tabata's political career.<sup>46</sup>



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*Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987. The title of the latter book was the influence for Hirson's *The Cape Town Intellectuals*.

<sup>42</sup> Baruch Hirson, 'Socialism – Has it Failed?: Joe Slovo's Apologia for Mr Gorbachev', *Searchlight South Africa*, No 5, July 1990.

<sup>43</sup> From the inception of the journal, space was provided for the publication of archival documents. See for example, 'David Ivon Jones: The Early Writings on Socialism in South Africa', *Searchlight South Africa*, Vol 1, No 1 September 1988 (this was clearly an annotated presentation of documents as part of the biography of Jones); 'Selections from *Spark*', *Searchlight South Africa*, No 2, February 1989; Leon Trotsky, 'Remarks on the Draft Thesis of the Workers Party', *Searchlight South Africa*, No 4, February 1990; Frank Glass, 'The Commune of Bulhoek', *Searchlight South Africa*, No 6, January 1991. This was also where Hirson published shorter biographical articles, often in preliminary form, as work in progress, based upon his archival searches. See for example, '*Spark* and the "Red Nun"', *Searchlight South Africa*, No 2, February 1989; 'Ruth Schechter: Friend to Olive Schreiner', *Searchlight South Africa*, No 9, August 1992.

<sup>44</sup> Baruch Hirson, Supplement to *Searchlight South Africa*, No 10, April 1993: *The Trotskyists of South Africa, 1932-48*. The articles in this Supplement were also published along with a piece by Ian Hunter ('Raff Lee and the Pioneer Trotskyists of Johannesburg'), in a special issue of *Revolutionary History* (Vol 4, No 4, Spring 1993) called *Colour and Class: The Origins of South African Trotskyism*. This issue of *Revolutionary History* also contained 65 pages of archival documents on historical and policy issues of South African Trotskyist formations, including correspondence, and statements on 'the land question', trade unions, the party and the war.

<sup>45</sup> Baruch Hirson, 'A Short History of the Non-European Unity Movement: An Insider's View', *Searchlight South Africa*, No 12, June 1995.

<sup>46</sup> Baruch Hirson, 'The Dualism of I.B. Tabata', *Searchlight South Africa*, Vol 2, No 2, January 1991.

In making these assessments, Hirson was careful to spell out that his relationship with Tabata had gone back to the periods 1944-45 and 1950-57, when he worked in the NEUM. It was Hirson who had set up the People's Press in Johannesburg in 1950, and used his old printing skills gained in the WIL (and the same typesetter and printer) to enable Tabata's book, *The All African Convention: The Awakening of a People*, to be printed in a cheap and rudimentary format.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Hirson had written a critical review of *The Awakening* in 1957, which had conveyed his deep disagreement with Tabata's arguments for not providing an economic analysis of South African society and for failing to analyse class divisions among blacks. Hirson had also criticised the principle of non-collaboration and the organisational methods of the AAC and the NEUM.<sup>48</sup>

In the 1990s, with the hindsight of memory and an assembled archive, Hirson sought to establish a narrative of Tabata's political life and to establish lines of biographic causation in an evaluation of Tabata's political positions. In this search for origins as a means of explanation, Hirson proposed that it was undoubtedly the events at Bulhoek, near Queenstown, in May 1921, when hundreds of Israelites, a church group, had been killed or wounded by troops, which influenced Tabata "profoundly" and "helped shape his perception of the nature of the struggle in South Africa". But the overwhelming explanation for Tabata's political trajectory, for Hirson, was his membership of the WPSA. After an almost obligatory mention of Tabata's Lorry Driver Union membership (no doubt following Karis and Carter), Hirson contended that Tabata had joined the WPSA in about 1934 and "throughout his life endorsed the

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<sup>47</sup> Baruch Hirson, 'The Dualism of I.B. Tabata', p 63; *Revolutions in My Life*, p 231; Ciraj Rassool interview with Baruch Hirson, Cape Town, 11/9/91. Hirson also suggested that Tabata seemed dissatisfied with the less than elegant format of publication. Indeed when Tabata received the first copies of the book in December 1950, a number of them were defective, and were summarily disposed of. See I.B. Tabata Pocket Diary, entry for 9 December 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>48</sup> R Mettler (Pseudonym for Baruch Hirson), 'It is Time to Awake!' (mimeo), November 1957, Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 2: DA13:84/9. The other critical review had been written by Arthur Davids, who had been a member of the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa in the 1940s and the Forum Club in the 1950s; see Arthur Davids, 'A Critical Analysis of I.B. Tabata' Book "The All African Convention or The Awakening of a People"', *Discussion*, Vol 1, No 2, 1951 (Irwin Combrinck Papers). For a personal account of these issues see Baruch Hirson, 'A short History of the Non-European Unity Movement', pp 84-86.



principles of that organisation".<sup>49</sup> It was as a member of the WPSA that Tabata, along with Goolam and Jane Gool, attended the All-African Convention convened in 1935 to organise a campaign against the Hertzog Bills. In 1943, the NEUM became "the almost exclusive activity" of WPSA members in an "inverted entryism" in which "populist movements were established so that Trotskyists could enter them, and even be their leader".<sup>50</sup>

For Hiron, it was Tabata, influenced by the "credo" of the WPSA, who had "played a prominent role in defining the attitudes that became the hallmark of the NEUM", including the call for the vote, the use of the boycott as a weapon as well as opposition to the rehabilitation scheme.<sup>51</sup> While the NEUM had included varied organisations and groups in its fold, and drew both from an older, more conservative layer as well as the "young turks" of the WPSA, it was left to Tabata and his associates to give direction. It was they who "had a grasp of programmatic problems that exceeded anything previously formulated". Because the land question had been central to the WPSA as "the alpha and omega", Tabata had recognised that the rehabilitation scheme would be a key focus of rural resistance. And while he (and other NEUM leaders) "continued to speak of the workers as if they were only peasants temporarily in the towns or the mines", he erred in relegating the working class to "second class status in the struggle".<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, in spite of being socialists "with an internationalist outlook", the propagation of democratic demands by Tabata and his colleagues "tied them into a nationalist framework from which they could not break". The logic of this position in the late 1950s was confirmed in Tabata's analysis of "emergent" African nationalism as "genuinely anti-imperialist and anti-colonialism". At this time, in contrast to previous

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<sup>49</sup> Baruch Hiron, 'The Dualism of I.B. Tabata', p 59.

<sup>50</sup> Baruch Hiron, 'The Trotskyist Groups in South Africa, 1932-1948, in *Searchlight South Africa*, No 10, April 1993, pp 81; 90-91.

<sup>51</sup> Baruch Hiron, 'The Dualism of I.B. Tabata', p 61; 'A Short History of the Non-European Unity Movement', p 65.

<sup>52</sup> Baruch Hiron, 'A Short History of the Non-European Unity Movement', p 66; 'The Dualism of I.B. Tabata', p 62.



policy that had envisaged redivided land to be held collectively after liberation, Tabata announced that “land that was to be redivided could be sold as private property”.<sup>53</sup> These contradictions, for Hirson, were expressions of Tabata’s “dualism”, in terms of which “as leaders of a national liberation movement”, a position to which they never adapted, Tabata and his colleagues “were unable to advance socialist demands, while the movement they led was based on a programme of bourgeois demands”. As they tried to “conceal their Marxist background”, and “used nationalist rhetoric”, they “misled countless men and women who believed that they were working for socialist ends”.<sup>54</sup> In spite of these criticisms, Hirson conceded that Tabata had “significant things to say”, and “there were aspects of his life that helped build the tradition [of socialist internationalism]”. It was necessary to “give [him] his due for some of his statements about the problems facing the African people”.<sup>55</sup>

Both inside and on the outskirts of the academy, in the work of Allison Drew and Baruch Hirson, I.B. Tabata’s political biography formed part of projects geared towards the recovery of socialist pasts through documentary history methods of archival sequencing and chronological narration. These recovery projects were connected to political evaluations of the social analyses and political strategies of socialist activists, in order to draw lessons from the storehouse of the past. Tabata’s life history was turned into a comprehensible story of a rational political thinker and activist, whose ‘dualist’ trajectory was explained by the self-subordination by the underground WPSA to bourgeois politics and nationalist demands. Tabata’s biography was comprehended as part of the underground history of Trotskyism in South Africa, whose existence had previously been concealed. As with the empiricist lineage of Karis and Carter, Tabata’s biography, here, formed part of an approach to the history of resistance politics, which sought to place hidden pasts of institutional decisions and trajectories on record, utilising the statements and views of leaders. This

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<sup>53</sup> Baruch Hirson, ‘A Short History of the Non-European Unity Movement’, p 85.

<sup>54</sup> Baruch Hirson, ‘The Dualism of I.B. Tabata’, pp 59, 62; ‘A Short History of the Non-European Unity Movement’, p 64.

<sup>55</sup> Baruch Hirson, ‘The Dualism of I.B. Tabata’, pp 59, 62.

included a focus on underground political formations and their agency in shaping political direction.

These efforts to understand the trajectory of Tabata's political life also sought to assess his analyses of South African conditions as well as the political strategies he advocated and embarked upon. While Drew has suggested that Tabata failed to understand rural conditions and the extent of proletarianisation, Hirson focused on Tabata's failure to break from the rhetorics and organising strategies of nationalism. Tabata and the leadership of the NEUM, Hirson argued further, created a hallmark out of "never enter[ing] a political struggle, except verbally". They "spoke, condemned, insulted and threatened", Hirson suggested, "but did not engage in political action, neither in the rural areas nor in the towns".<sup>56</sup> This not infrequent assessment was turned on its head in the more directly partisan research of APDUSA member, Robin Kayser, on the NEUM and the Land Question. And as with Hirson's research, the methodological basis of Kayser's work was archival and documentary, in an attempt to place on record - in the form of an academic thesis - the hidden history of the Unity Movement's past. Whereas for Hirson, any political practice on the part of the NEUM was almost entirely absent, for Kayser, it was to be found beyond mere radical political statements, in the evidence of rural organising and mobilisation.<sup>57</sup>

Kayser (with Adhikari) drew on evidence from the Tabata Collection at UCT, from official APDUSA papers, as well as from personal testimony of APDUSA "operatives" - "material hitherto not available to researchers" - to recover a history of APDUSA's role in organising and mobilisation, especially in rural areas in the early 1960s.<sup>58</sup> The

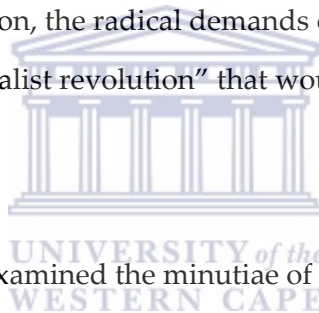
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<sup>56</sup> Baruch Hirson, 'The Dualism of I.B. Tabata', p 62.

<sup>57</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, "'Land and Liberty!': The African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa during the 1960s' (Typescript of article prepared for the 'Road to Democracy' Research Project of the South African Democracy Education Trust - SADET). This was drawn partly from Kayser's graduate research. See Robin Kayser, 'Land and Liberty!: The Non-European Unity Movement and the Land Question, 1933-1976', M.A. Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2002. Here (p 3) Kayser describes his research objective as "the recovery and accurate recording of the NEUM's political activity in the countryside".

<sup>58</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, "'Land and Liberty!'", p 2. In drawing upon the Tabata Collection in his research for his thesis as well as for his collaborative research paper for SADET's

formation of APDUSA in January 1961 after a secret Head Unity Committee meeting on the Chapman's Peak mountains followed on the identification by the NEUM leadership that "a qualitative change" had occurred in the mood of urban and rural people, one aspect of which was that NEUM ideas, it seemed, "had taken root amongst a significant section of the population", resulting in "a new level of political consciousness". Deemed to be necessary in order to "[harness] revolutionary potential" - which the NEUM itself could not accomplish, as a federal body with no direct membership - APDUSA's task as a non-racial, unitary organisation, was to serve as a "conduit for channelling together the struggles of both the rural oppressed and the urban working class within its organisational structures". Through APDUSA, the NEUM would "win mass support amongst rural dwellers", and as a "broad-based mass movement", APDUSA would be able "to direct their struggle towards the achievement of national liberation". Once the masses had been mobilised for the attainment of national liberation, the radical demands of the proletariat "would provide the impetus for a socialist revolution" that would extend beyond the borders of South Africa.<sup>59</sup>



Kayser (with Adhikari) also examined the minutiae of rural organising by APDUSA in the 1960s. In spite of the state of emergency, APDUSA "gained footholds" in Lady Frere and Centani, and drew support from Makhuluspan, the rural movement which protected rural dwellers of Tsolo, Qumbu and Matatiele from stock theft. With its influence spreading, APDUSA developed a "significant following" in Sekhukhuneland, Lehurutse and eastern Pondoland, where its growth was strongest. With "concerted efforts", APDUSA activists won the "trust" of the peasants of Pondoland and "at the very least several hundred" joined APDUSA in the early 1960s. Moreover, in the 1960s, APDUSA was "the only liberation movement to operate in Pondoland". From this base, members were recruited in other districts of Transkei and on the Natal south coast. In 1964, APDUSA also extended its influence into rural

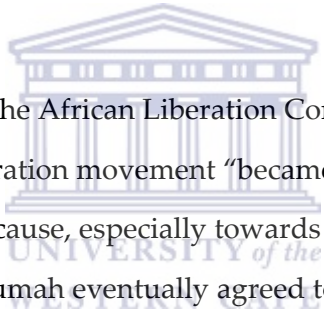
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book on resistance in the 1960s, Kayser has perhaps enabled the major purpose of the Collection's deposit in an academic archive to be realised as an archival legacy to the youth.

<sup>59</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, "Land and Liberty!", pp 2-6.

northern Transvaal and drew support from Fitakgomo and Likwepepe, two migrant worker organisations which had come into existence in Sekhukhuneland and in rural areas between the Vaal and Limpopo.<sup>60</sup>

Kayser and Adhikari also looked at the impact of repression and political circumstances of exile on these efforts at mobilisation. In late 1964 and early 1965, the arrest and detention of APDUSA members in Pondoland as well as the jailing and banning of the NEUM leadership contributed to the collapse of APDUSA organisational structures in this area, especially after information had been divulged under interrogation. While this resulted in the loss of contact by the NEUM's exiled leadership with their Pondoland constituency, nevertheless it did not prevent "grassroot support" from remaining intact and even spreading to the Libode and Tabankulu districts.<sup>61</sup>



In exile, the unwillingness of the African Liberation Committee (ALC) of the OAU to recognise the NEUM as a liberation movement "became a major obstacle to the advancement of the NEUM's cause, especially towards implementing the armed struggle". While Kwame Nkrumah eventually agreed to provide military and financial assistance, this came too late, as Nkrumah was overthrown shortly after the initial group of UMSA cadres arrived for training in Ghana. With Fourth International member Ernest Mandel's assistance, five UMSA executive members did receive some military training in Guinea from Cubans in the late 1960s. At least two abortive attempts at more widespread recruitment of members and supporters from South Africa for military training in the late 1960s and early 1970s resulted in arrests, terrorism charges and imprisonment. The effect was that UMSA and APDUSA were

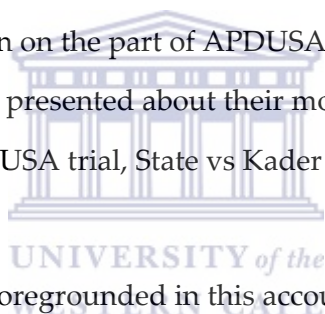
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<sup>60</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, "Land and Liberty!", pp 6-13; see also Robin Kayser, 'Land and Liberty!: The Non-European Unity Movement and the Land Question, 1933-1976', pp 90-141.

<sup>61</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, "Land and Liberty!", pp 15-16.

“effectively ... smashed within the country”. All that was left of the organisation by 1972 “was a small contingent of leaders in exile”.<sup>62</sup>

In attempting to set the documentary record of resistance history straight, Kayser’s account (with Adhikari) of APDUSA’s rural organising in the 1960s was, for the most part, a conventional account, which also contained a basic biographical element. The basic elements of the historical narrative were identifying political organisations, institutions and structures, tracing political policies, decisions and acts of mobilisation, and tracking political leadership and office bearers at the national level. Here the lives of I.B. Tabata, Leo Sihlali, Wycliffe Tsotsi, Karrim Essack, and others were woven into an account of rural mobilisation and subsequent political repression. What set this resistance narrative apart from others, however, was that it drew on evidence of resistance lives in rural areas - based on interviews with rural activists - to understand the extent of rural mobilisation on the part of APDUSA, and APDUSA’s impact. Kayser also drew on evidence presented about their mobilising activities by local APDUSA activists in the APDUSA trial, *State vs Kader Hassim and 12 others*.



The key life history that was foregrounded in this account was that of I.B. Tabata, whose political trajectory was narrated as a “key ideologue” and “key theoretician”, who “entered radical politics” as a “founder member” of the WPSA,<sup>63</sup> and who had “placed great emphasis on practical political activity and [who] undertook annual tours of the Transkei and Ciskei during the 1940s and 1950s to propagate the ideas of the NEUM”.<sup>64</sup> In his thesis, Kayser devoted substantial attention to Tabata’s life history and his “unique contribution” in “initiating and familiarising the rural dwellers with the political ideas of the AAC, and in “establishing the basis” through which the AAC approached the peasantry. This was a biography of rural activism and political organising “at both ends of the migratory labour system”, in which Tabata

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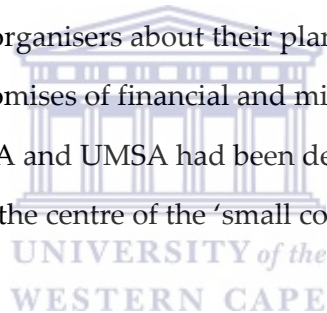
<sup>62</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, “Land and Liberty!”, pp 16-19; see also Robin Kayser, ‘Land and Liberty!: The Non-European Unity Movement and the Land Question, 1933-1976’, Ch 7.

<sup>63</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, “Land and Liberty!”, p 3.

<sup>64</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, “Land and Liberty!”, p 3.

took ideas to the rural areas and “acted as an important link between town and country”.<sup>65</sup>

It was the archival collection constituted as the I.B. Tabata Collection that determined much of the narrative of Kayser’s account of APDUSA in the 1960s. Indeed, Tabata’s opinions, observations and political explanations as well as the sequence of his activities, as gathered from the Collection, drove the account. It was Tabata’s “optimistic report” on his secret journey to Southern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Tanzania and Kenya in 1962, undertaken after his ban had expired, and his securing of a promise of Algerian assistance, that led to the decision by the NEUM executive in January 1963 to “embark on armed struggle”. A few months after leaving South Africa (along with Jane Gool and Nathaniel Honono), following a decision of the executive committee in March 1963, Tabata had the opportunity to be briefed by and to engage with Pondoland leaders and organisers about their plans for armed struggle. It was Tabata’s efforts that led to promises of financial and military assistance. Once the internal structures of APDUSA and UMSA had been decimated by repression and imprisonment, Tabata was at the centre of the ‘small contingent’ of leaders that remained in exile.<sup>66</sup>



The importance of Kayser’s research (and the article written with Adhikari) lay in the documentary truths that he sought to place on record as evidence of significant rural mobilisation in the Eastern Cape and Transvaal during the 1960s, for which APDUSA had not been accorded any historiographical credit.<sup>67</sup> In documentary terms, it also challenged a number of stereotypes associated with the Unity Movement, of its character and spread being largely coloured and Western Cape.<sup>68</sup> However, the

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<sup>65</sup> Robin Kayser, ‘Land and Liberty!: The Non-European Unity Movement and the Land Question, 1933-1976’, pp 25-28.

<sup>66</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, “‘Land and Liberty!’”, pp 8-18.

<sup>67</sup> Kayser’s research has enabled the political commitment made by APDUSA in 1995 “to write the true history of the Pondoland rebellion” to be realised. See *The APDUSAN*, Vol 1, No 1, July 1995.

<sup>68</sup> See inter alia Ian Goldin, *Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa* (London and New York: Longman, 1987), which located the NEUM in a narrative of the radicalisation of coloured politics. See also Gavin Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of*



opportunities that presented themselves for a methodological overhaul of political history were largely ignored in favour of more limited documentary objectives. An argument inspired by Clifton Crais' approach to Eastern Cape political history would suggest that Kayser's focus should have been on rural social movements on their own indigenous terms – of healing, social health and a confrontation with evil, and with attention to their own political rituals of appropriation – and not merely as passive recipients of the influence of a modernist 'elite national(ist)', political formation.<sup>69</sup> However, for us, the question that Kayser and Adhikari's work leaves unanswered, is how it might be possible to approach the study of modernist political formations in ways that transcend the equally modernist historical methods of institutional and social history.

The potential for this methodologically fresh line of enquiry was present in some of Kayser's research. He did, for example, identify rather interesting ritualised elements of rural political mobilisation and gathering in Lusikisiki-Flagstaff and Bizana, where branch meetings of APDUSA in the 1960s had been held at night in secrecy, with members carrying bibles as if going to church. Meetings could instantly be converted into church gatherings if the police arrived. The Lusikisiki-Flagstaff APDUSA branch was referred to as '*Incwadi e Phantsikwellitye*' ('the book under the stone') as a reference to the secrecy with which it was forced to operate. Such interesting issues for a study of the culture of politics were subordinated to evidence (of committees, office-bearers, annual fees, membership cards and minute-keeping) that was marshalled merely to assert the *fact* that these APDUSA branches' existed.<sup>70</sup> Kayser and Adhikari's limited

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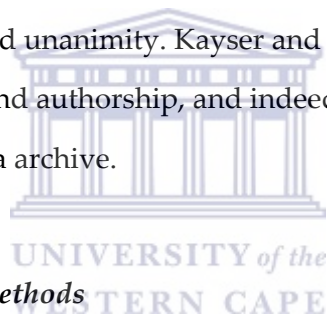
*South African 'Coloured' Politics* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1987); Maurice Hommel, *Capricorn Blues: The Struggle for Human Rights in South Africa* (Toronto: Culturama, 1981) and Mary Simons, 'Organised Coloured Political Movements', in H.W. van der Merwe and C.J. Groenewald (eds), *Occupational and Social Change among Coloured People in South Africa* (Cape Town: Juta, 1976). Ironically, the latest work which sees the NEUM as an expression of coloured radicalism is the analytically modest doctoral dissertation by Kayser's co-author, Mohamed Adhikari. See Mohamed Adhikari, 'Hope, fear, shame, frustration: Continuity and change in the expression of Coloured identity in white supremacist South Africa, 1910-1994', unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, University of Cape Town, July 2002.

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter Three for a discussion of Clifton Crais' approach to South African political history in his book, *The Politics of Evil*.

<sup>70</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, "'Land and Liberty!'", p 12.

documentary purposes were also demonstrated in their deployment of statements presented during proceedings in apartheid criminal courts as enabling a transparent window on ideas, acts and events in the past, without their order of evidence and knowledge interrogated.

Likewise, the Tabata Collection has been mined as a repository of facts of resistance, to enable records to be set straight. In this framework, Dora Taylor has been turned into a mere comrade and WPSA member, a “left-wing activist and intellectual” who “played an important role within the NEUM as a political educator”, and who was later elected to the executive.<sup>71</sup> Exile has been understood as merely an empirical stage of the chronological course of a political movement. Apart from a brief reference indicating some historical disagreement among members or former members of NEUM affiliates,<sup>72</sup> the conception of formations such as the NEUM, UMSA and APDUSA was one of internal consistency and unanimity. Kayser and Adhikari have missed out on prior processes of narration and authorship, and indeed on the mediated nature and storied character of the Tabata archive.



### ***Transcending documentary methods***

It is possible to transcend documentary methods by becoming more attuned to questions about the ‘culture of politics’. Political history and intellectual history can become open to cultural questions about the repertoires of resistance, the rituals of spoken words and speech genres in public gatherings, and the written transcripts and rhetorical strategies of the printed word.<sup>73</sup> With their focus on texts mainly as sources of evidence for narrativised histories of politics or social life, documentary and social historians have missed out on some of the more intriguing questions about language

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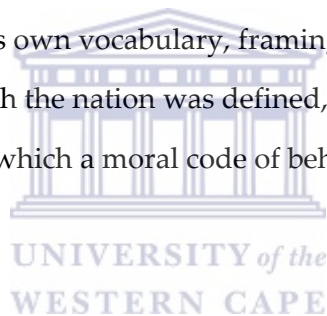
<sup>71</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, “‘Land and Liberty!’”, pp 8-9.

<sup>72</sup> Kayser cites an article by APDUSA member, Norman Traub, ‘From the NEUM to UMSA: A reply to Yousuf Rassool’, *Marxist Discussion Journal*, No 21, 2002.

<sup>73</sup>See Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988, Tr. by Lydia G Cochrane) for a discussion of these matters. See also Robert Darnton, ‘Intellectual and Cultural History’, in Michael Kammen (ed), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

and verbal performances, which have their own narrative structures and strategies.<sup>74</sup> The Unity Movement and its structures were settings for the production of historical knowledge, through different mediums of expression, and such knowledge was put to work in the service of the movement's objectives as they shifted over time under shifting conditions.

As an indigenous emancipatory project with modernist overtones, what is conventionally named as the 'Unity Movement' can be seen as an assemblage of forums, publications, relationships and organisational rituals.<sup>75</sup> Together, these constituted a long range, almost state-like project in public education,<sup>76</sup> whose objective was the constitution of a new public domain as a rational form of social order, peopled by suitably conscious proto-citizens. Through an analysis of power in society and the conditions of resistance and collaboration, a system of representation was created, complete with its own vocabulary, framing categories, concepts, activities and procedures through which the nation was defined, the 'enemy' named and conceptualised, and through which a moral code of behaviour was counter-posed to that of the 'enemy'.



These institutional settings also saw the evolution of a repertoire of rituals of assembly, research, and knowledge-creation and dissemination, through speeches at public gatherings in meeting halls, which were like lessons in classrooms, and political tours that were akin to research fieldtrips. A domain of publishing was constituted, of leaflets, newspapers, pamphlets and books which were intended for the circulation of ideas, analyses and concepts for the edification of people, for the development of their consciousness and the construction of an entire social and political imaginary. This

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<sup>74</sup>For a useful example, in another context, of a political history that does take language and culture seriously, see Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>75</sup> See David I Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, & Power* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988) for an examination of modern political structures and processes through an analysis of the power of ritual and symbol; see also Susan Herbst, *Politics at the Margin: Historical Studies of Public Expression Outside the Mainstream* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>76</sup>See James C Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), especially Ch 5.

was an arena of education that extended beyond the framework of formal schooling, where teacher activists might have looked to other teachers and pupils as an entry point to political work, and where teacher organisations were the mainstay of political advancement. Indeed, beyond formal education, this was an entire programme in public education, with its own pedagogy, through which the nation was 'taken to school'.<sup>77</sup>

The NEUM and its component political organisations can be seen as a discursive formation with its own vocabulary, body of representations and symbolic practices.<sup>78</sup> It constituted a new public sphere in which the subjectivity and identity of the non-racial subject was produced.<sup>79</sup> This was a space for the "non-citizen" to exercise the politics of citizenship in a republic of letters,<sup>80</sup> which saw the creation of a set of institutions and structures, with their own codes and categories. At the same time, this was a field of identity formation, within which black people, figured through the unifying categories of 'African' and 'non-European', were invited to become citizens in a supra-organisation, structured self-consciously on 'federal' lines, as a microcosm of a new nation in formation, understood as the product of historical progress. The discursive construction of the subject in these spaces of knowledge production had implications for the constitution of persons and the narration of personhood. It also raised questions about the collective and the individual, and history and biography, as

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<sup>77</sup> I first encountered this concept in a discussion with former Cape Town teacher and TLSA member, Joe Rassool in 1987.

<sup>78</sup> For a highly suggestive study of a political movement as a discursive formation, see David E Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> The use of the notion of a 'public sphere' follows that developed by Jurgen Habermas. See Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, MS: MIT Press, 1991, as well as Craig Calhoun (ed), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MS: MIT Press, 1992. See especially the critique developed by Nancy Fraser in 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: a Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in Craig Calhoun (ed), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, where she presented a position which identified "subaltern counterpublics", which were "parallel discursive arenas". Here oppressed and marginalized groups "invent[ed] and circulat[ed] counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs (p 123). See also Susan Herbst, *Politics at the Margin*.

<sup>80</sup> This notion is drawn from David Morley and Ken Worpole (eds), *The Republic of Letters: Working class writing and local publishing* (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1982).

political leadership was exercised through a politics of collective identification and mobilisation.

Political expression occurred in formal, institutionalised settings, in which knowledge production was influenced and determined by the disciplining effects of the conventions of spoken and written language and expression, by the orderly rules and conventions of meetings, and by hierarchies of membership and relations of loyalty and respect for leaders. A simultaneously enabling and ordered political environment of knowledge production was constituted, which also saw the concurrent formation and regulation of citizens. The setting up of relations between speakers and listeners, and writers and readers formed the basis of a hierarchical knowledge system that had implications for notions of collective leadership. At the same time, the unfolding of a progressivist, evolutionary framework for comprehending the politics of history and the history of politics set up relations between social and political forms deemed to be advanced and those deemed to be backward or regressive. In terms of this framework, the federal structure and loyalty to political ideas (and not individual leaders) were understood as a more developed stage in the evolution of organised national resistance. These were the contradictions inherent in a modernist political movement seeking to comprehend and bring a secular order to society through institution building, policy formation and processes of narration.

These arenas of knowledge creation and instruction were spaces of identity performance in which selves were constituted discursively. I.B. Tabata was both producer and product of this discourse community. As people were inscribed as 'African' and as 'non-European', and 'non-European' figured as the basis of political unity, Tabata was himself being constituted in political terms. Tabata was made both in his relationships with layers of comrades in public and clandestine formations as well as in the borderland spaces between the public and the private.

Political biography emerged as a key aspect of this knowledge system, and narrations of I.B. Tabata's political life, produced and projected within particular biographic relations and under changing conditions, were at the centre of attempts to provide a historical basis for political claims. It was the written word and claims to authorship that provided the conditions of individuation, and served as the threshold of biography. The emergence of a politics of presidentialism out of a prior emphasis on collective leadership is also discernable in photographic depictions. As we shall see, Tabata's long-standing association with Dora Taylor was the key relation through which biographic representations of his life were produced. This occurred in a *borderland*, a transitional space between the public and the private, and the political and the personal that mirrored the cleavage between public and clandestine political activity.

These narrations were not without significant political contests and challenges, which coincided with increasing fragility and tenuousness of the political movement. These challenges were the consequence of relations of paternalism and patronage which Tabata had cultivated. This political arena was not the only setting in which Tabata's biography was constructed and contested. His funeral in 1990 in Lesseyton, outside Queenstown in the Eastern Cape, unleashed a submerged Christian narration alongside a secular political one, as a weakened political movement was unable to assert a triumphant political narrative. These issues of production and contestation in the history of Tabata's biography are the subject of exploration in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.



## CHAPTER SIX

### FROM COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP TO PRESIDENTIALISM: PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES, AUTHORSHIP AND I.B. TABATA'S BIOGRAPHY

If one's objective is to historicise the idea of I.B. Tabata as a leader with a biography, then it is possible to show that narrations of I.B. Tabata's life emerged for the first time, in tentative ways, at the time of his arrest at Mount Ayliff in the Transkei in September 1948. These biographic intonations were taken further in 1956 when Tabata was banned for five years under the Suppression of Communism Act. While repression served as a threshold for biography, the process of individuation that accompanied Tabata's writing and claims on authorship ultimately could not be contained within the principled code of collective leadership and adherence to principle that characterised the movement's politics during the 1940s. This transition from collectivity to individuation is also the hallmark of the domain of visual representation, and a shift can be discerned in which photographic reluctance and reticence gave way to an opening up to the camera and the embracing of the codes of portraiture. By the 1960s, a shift had occurred from biographic ambivalence to a politics of presidentialism in which Tabata's biography became a key aspect of projecting the movement in exile.

#### *Historicising Tabata's biography*

In 1948, Tabata was arrested on charges under the Transkei Penal Code and the Riotous Assemblies Act of "unlawfully incit[ing]" people to disobey legal measures seeking to enforce stock culling.<sup>1</sup> A.C. Jordan, Tabata's colleague in the AAC, produced a circular letter in his private capacity informing people of the political circumstances of Tabata's arrest, asking for "the support of each and every African and African organisation", and

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<sup>1</sup> 'Rex vs Isaac Tabata, N/M., Age 38, Mount Ayliff Criminal Case No. \_\_\_/1948' (Indictment), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

appealing for financial support for his legal defence. Amid political explanations of the AAC's federal methods of mobilisation, and the importance of Africans needing to turn their backs on all structures of segregation (including Advisory Bodies, Bungas, Native Representative Councils and Native parliamentary representatives), Jordan foregrounded Tabata as an AAC foundation member who deserved support because of his "unselfish devotion to the cause of his people".<sup>2</sup>

Referring to Tabata, Jordan argued that from the time of the AAC's birth in 1935,

no-one has carried out the spirit and ideals that gave  
birth to that federal political organisation more faithfully  
and loyally and conscientiously than himself.<sup>3</sup>

Tabata had "written more than one treatise" on the land question, Jordan went on, and had "brought out clearly its relationship to the cheap labour policy". "No-one was better qualified to address a gathering of Africans, whatever their intellectual level, on the 'Native Policy'". Jordan ended his appeal by inviting people to read Tabata's pamphlet, 'The Rehabilitation Scheme: A New Fraud', which could be acquired from him. This letter contained the earliest intonations of a narrative of Tabata's life, and seemed to be a fairly isolated case of biographic narration of a Unity Movement leader in the 1940s.<sup>4</sup>

Eight years later, at the time of the imposition of a five year banning order on Tabata in 1956,<sup>5</sup> the idea of Tabata as a man with a biography that could be reflected on made another tentative reappearance in biographical tributes sketched out in speeches at

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<sup>2</sup> Circular Letter from A.C. Jordan, 27 September 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>3</sup> Circular Letter from A.C. Jordan, 27 September 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>4</sup> Circular Letter from A.C. Jordan, 27 September 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; this early biographical treatment by Jordan, may have been an expression of a more definite 'nationalist', and even 'liberal' (as opposed to socialist) tendency, which some (at the time, and subsequently) have associated him with (Interview with Benita Parry and Irwin Combrinck, Cape Town, 19 October 1995).

<sup>5</sup> I.B. Tabata was banned for five years on 10 March 1956, after being served by the Minister of Justice with a notice under the Suppression of Communism Act and another in terms of the Riotous Assemblies and Criminal Law Amendment Act. In terms of these restrictions, Tabata was banned from attending gatherings, and from leaving the magisterial districts of Cape Town, Wynberg, Simonstown and Bellville. See *Cape Times*, 13 March 1956; I.B. Tabata Pocket Diary, entry for 10 March 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

special protest meetings in convened Cape Town to condemn his banning.<sup>6</sup> These were reproduced in cautious form in print in organisational publications.<sup>7</sup> These developments culminated in more definite biographic assertions at the national conference of the AAC held in Queenstown in December 1956, from which Tabata had been restricted. In condemning the “fascistic ban by the Herrenvolk” on Tabata, the conference placed on record its “lasting debt of gratitude” and that of “the whole oppressed peoples”, which was owed to Tabata for his “unremitting loyalty and devotion” to the cause of the national liberatory movement since the inception of the AAC.<sup>8</sup> Reiterating the conception of the AAC’s position as the “Parliament of the oppressed”, the conference statement went further to declare its duty

to place on record that his name shall occupy one of the highest places of honour in the list of fighters known and unknown who are being silenced for their services in the cause of liberation.<sup>9</sup>

These increasingly assured biographic statements were put forward significantly at the same time as Tabata’s banning and the attempt by the state to render him silent and invisible. Tabata’s banning was an occasion for him to think about his political and personal relationships, the social significance of his suffering, and how much his “incapacity” had weighed on him. He expressed his anguish at being “kept out of the battle-field”, which was like “consigning a man to a morgue”. This loss of freedom was however “softened by the knowledge that millions before [had] suffered worse”. It united him “with the vast pain suffered daily by the Great Humiliated”. While Tabata understood that “each person is in the final analysis alone”, the anguish and suffering occasioned by his ban were mitigated by the political significance it gave him. “It helps to know”, Tabata wrote to his comrade and brother-in-law, Wycliffe Tsotsi “that now one has qualified to belong to that great fraternity on whose ideas and sufferings has

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<sup>6</sup> Jane Gool and Minnie Gool as well as then SOYA members, Gwen Wilcox and Benita Parry (then Teper) recalled these protest meetings (personal communication).

<sup>7</sup> See *The Soyana*, April 1956, on “The Banning of Mr. I.B. Tabata, Dismissals and Banishments”, Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 2:ES1:85/1.

<sup>8</sup> Copy of Telegram From Conference, All African Convention, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1956, Queenstown, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>9</sup> Copy of Telegram From Conference, All African Convention, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1956, Queenstown, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

depended the progress of mankind".<sup>10</sup> In the face of a politics of collective leadership and commitment to political ideas, repression was meted out on the individual, and these instances of repression were the triggers for biographic production.

It is also ironic that the emergence of an autobiographic self-conception by Tabata coincided with the production of a 'repressive biography' of Tabata by the state, based on its processes of surveillance by informers and policemen. The Acting Secretary of Justice responded to an enquiry by Tabata's lawyer, furnishing reasons for his ban. These consisted of a list of attendances at gatherings and addresses to meetings by Tabata between 1948 and 1955 in which he had been accused of "vilifying" whites as oppressors, and of incitement of "non-Europeans" to resist this suppression. The response also listed a sequence of statements allegedly made by Tabata at protest meetings and organisational forums during this time, as well as formulations contained in his writings. This list of alleged actions and statements by Tabata constituted a perverse kind of intellectual and political biography compiled for purposes of repression.<sup>11</sup>



Tabata's banning coincided with the heightening of internal organisational conflicts and tensions that had been building up in the NEUM and its constituent bodies through the early 1950s. The formation of the Society of Young Africa (SOYA) in 1951 was seen by some as an attempt by Tabata to cultivate an alternative base of young supporters independent of the New Era Fellowship (NEF).<sup>12</sup> Tabata's ban came just as this incipient

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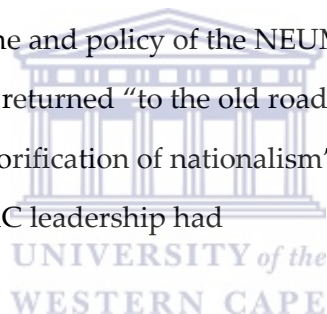
<sup>10</sup> I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 20 March 1956; Diary Statement, 29 March 1956; I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 9 April 1956, I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 19 April 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>11</sup> See Acting Secretary of Justice to Lawyer (name erased), 28 May 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. To this 'repressive biography' one can add the records in the files of the Minister of Justice of controls over Tabata's movements during his ban. He had gotten permission to attend the funeral of his mother in Lesseyton during March/April 1957, and that of his nephew, Fezo, in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth in February 1958. See Adjunk-kommissaris, S.A. Polisie, Kaapstad na Kommissarisse van Polisie, Kaapstad en Pretoria, 27 Maart 1957; Vergunning: I.B. Tabata, 27 Maart 1957; Vergunning: I.B. Tabata, 31 Januarie 1958, Minister of Justice (MJus) 123 J21/22/ (Thanks to Bob Edgar for tracking down these documents for me).

<sup>12</sup> I.B. Tabata, Pocket Diary, entries for 17 January 1952 and 21 January 1952 (I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925) report an NEF meeting to discuss him, and the eruption of "incipient conflict". These tensions of 1951-2 were confirmed in my interviews with Joe Rassool and Irwin Combrinck (Interview with Joe

rupture was coming to a head, when he had decided to do something about it. This only increased his feelings of powerlessness. Tabata had just decided to “clean up within” and act against “petty intriguing”, by “bursting the infected body to allow the pus out”. “I had flung aside all stupid modesty and come forth to take the reins in my own hands”, he declared to Tsotsi.<sup>13</sup>

Instead, six months after he was banned, with his abilities to engage cut down, Tabata found himself accused of having become “regarded and treated as a father-confessor, sage or seer”. This accusation of succumbing to a leadership cult was made amid intensifying conflict over issues such as the value of the identity category of ‘African’ and the future of indigenous languages.<sup>14</sup> In early 1959, following the 1958 AAC conference, the leadership of the AAC (including Tabata) were accused by a group which included Tabata’s old WPSA comrades Saul Jayiya, Cadoc Kobus and Ben Kies of departing from the programme and policy of the NEUM. In terms of this accusation, Tabata and his comrades had returned “to the old road” and “the swamp tracks of 1936-1942”, and reverted to the “glorification of nationalism”.<sup>15</sup> The accusers went further to allege that Tabata and the AAC leadership had



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Rassool, Reading, UK, 1 March 1992; Interview with Irwin Combrinck and Benita Parry, Cape Town, 19 October 1995). See also Joe Rassool, ‘Notes on the History of the Non-European Unity Movement in South Africa, and the role of Hosea Jaffe’, <[www.revolutionary-history.co.uk/supplem/rassool.htm](http://www.revolutionary-history.co.uk/supplem/rassool.htm)>. The NEF was a discussion and debating forum formed in 1937, which often met at the Stakesby Lewis Hostel. On the formation of SOYA, see ‘To the Young People of Africa’, Issued by the Executive Committee of the SOYA, Cape Town, 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1951; I.B. Tabata, ‘Opening Address to the First Conference of the Society of Young Africa, 20/12/51’ (I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925).

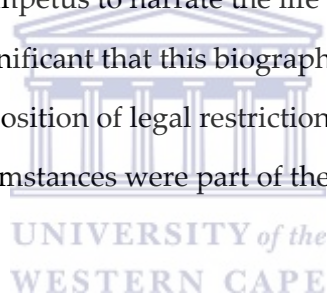
<sup>13</sup> I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 20 March 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>14</sup> Statement by Hosea Jaffe, 2 October 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. This statement was a reply to a letter written by Tabata to the Chairman and members of the National Anti-CAD analysing propositions allegedly put forward by Jaffe at an Anti-CAD meeting criticising the continued use of ‘African’ as a basis of organising as racist, and condemning the promotion of “dying tribal languages” instead of English. See I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Members (Draft in Dora Taylor’s script), September 1956; I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Friends, 26 October 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>15</sup> R.E. Viljoen, S.A. Jayiya, C.M. Kobus and B.M. Kies, ‘What Has Happened in the Non-European Unity Movement?’, February 1959, Baruch Hirson Papers. This was signed by the authors as “foundation members” of the NEUM. This document, Tabata wrote to Tsotsi, had been “secretly distributed among a select few”, and appeared to be “only for coloured people”. During these times of internal turmoil, which came to a head at the 1958 AAC Conference, and which ended in the rupture of 1958-5, the banned Tabata and his colleagues started an independent newspaper, *Ikhwezi Lomso* to counteract the “vilification” and “dirty business” of *The Torch* (I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 16 March 1959; I.B. Tabata to Enver Hassim, 16 March 1959, I.B. Tabata Papers, BC 925).

repudiat[ed] the NEUM concept of leadership and a reversion to the Dube-Ka Seme tribalist cult of the chief or the leader, of adulation and reverence for the elders and contempt for the young.<sup>16</sup>

This accusation was rejected by the AAC leadership with the counter-claim that indeed it was the “self-styled”, “omniscient and omnipotent” group of four “foundationalists” who were “busy creating the cult of the superman”. Viljoen, Jayiya, Kobus and Kies were in turn accused of being “firm protagonists of the leader cult” by implying that they “built the NEUM all on their own” and that members of affiliates “were merely attached ... as fellow-travellers”.<sup>17</sup> These accusations and counter-accusations about leader-cults, cliques and political loyalties constituted public contests over the meaning of leadership and the suitability of relations of political patronage between older political activists and younger members of political formations. It is out of both these sides of this conflict that the impetus to narrate the life of I.B. Tabata, the leader, emerged. And it is indeed significant that this biographic impetus coincided with Tabata’s banning and the imposition of legal restrictions on his individual political will. Indeed, these repressive circumstances were part of the conditions of biographic production.



Until these biographic beginnings, Tabata’s life, like the lives of other political figures such as Ben Kies, had been submerged within public organisational identities of the Anti-CAD, the AAC and the NEUM as part of what was seen as a ‘collective leadership’, a cumulative system of ideas. This conception was seen as an advance upon older political approaches. “There should be no leader or leaders”, Tabata argued at a meeting in Durban in 1949, but only a “common leadership on a given programme under certain

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<sup>16</sup> R.E. Viljoen, S.A. Jayiya, C.M. Kobus and B.M. Kies, ‘What Has Happened in the Non-European Unity Movement?’

<sup>17</sup> ‘The Wreckers of Unity at Work: who is the National Anti-CAD Committee?’, Issued by the Secretary, All-African Convention Committee (WP), n.d (c.1959), Crowe-Rassool Papers. It stands to reason that I.B. Tabata was the author of this reply. The ‘Crowe-Rassool Papers’ is a name I gave to the mixed archive of Communist Party and Unity Movement materials which had been concealed in my parents’ garage, and which had been drawn from the political activism of my maternal grandfather, Daniel Crowe and my paternal uncles, Joe (Yousuf) and Nasim Rassool.



principles".<sup>18</sup> Another aspect of this was undoubtedly the security and protection of individuals, a notion of safety in the collective, and care not to expose or render individual leaders unnecessarily vulnerable to state attention. This was an important factor particularly following the increased state repression after 1950. Another aspect was a desire never to give any impression that the political positions expressed and political acts carried out within or in the name of the Unity Movement and its constituent bodies were the work of a small, conspiratorial group, but were instead an expression of wider political loyalties and commitments.

Collective leadership also entailed a principled rejection of any sense of exaltedness and personal ambition. Indeed this collective principle was understood almost as a code of political organising, and was expressed even as part of the exhortation to build SOYA in 1951. In his written appeal to prospective members, which also circulated the new SOYA constitution, secretary Dan Kunene outlined this understanding:

We want intelligence rather than romantic enthusiasm: we want patience and courage rather than exhibitionism and impetuosity. We want sound co-operation and loyalty rather than personal ambition. We want loyalty to principle rather than loyalty to personalities. We want a sound, reliable leadership rather than a leader.<sup>19</sup>

This collective leadership code manifested itself as considerable reluctance during the 1940s and early 1950s to accede to requests from journalists for biographical information of leaders of the Unity Movement. In an article published in *Drum* in 1954, considered by the magazine to be a 'scoop' (indeed, an 'exposé' in the light of such media reluctance and individual ambivalence), the leaders of the Unity Movement were described as "intellectuals, shy and retiring and opposed to any sort of publicity". The article went on to report that these leaders believed that "the loyalty of members should be towards the movement and not to individuals; and that the 'building up' of leaders should be

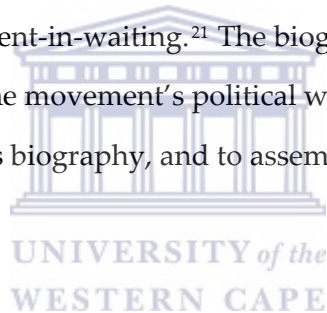
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<sup>18</sup> I.B. Tabata, speech to an "informal get together" in Durban, reported in *Ilanga lase Natal*, 15 January 1949.

<sup>19</sup> 'To the Young People of Africa', Issued by the Executive Committee of the SOYA, Cape Town, 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1951, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

avoided". Nevertheless, Tabata himself was described as the "master mind" of the movement, a "writer, politician and scholar from Cape Town" who "dislikes photographers".<sup>20</sup>

Later on from the 1960s, following the early biographic intonations in the late 1940s and mid-1950s, I.B. Tabata's biography became a key element of organisation-building and the consolidation of political organisation (and a political presence) in exile. In the struggle for recognition by the Unity Movement from post-colonial governments of African countries such as Zambia and from the newly formed Organisation of African Unity, and in the setting of various fund-raising and publicity tours, especially of the United States, the Unity Movement took on a more pervasive biographic character. Tabata's biography was circulated as that of the "outstanding", heroic leader of a liberation movement, who had suffered for his commitments, but who now stood as a potential leader of a government-in-waiting.<sup>21</sup> The biographic imperative gave way to a cult of presidentialism, and the movement's political work in exile was firmly connected to the propagation of Tabata's biography, and to assembling, reassembling and circulating his writings.



Tabata's political life almost became synonymous with the existence of the Unity Movement, and his biography became an integral element of the codes of its political practice. Tabata's biography was deployed to build and support the movement in exile. Biographical essays and appendices usually accompanied the publication and republication of Tabata's writings and conference addresses, or a biographic blurb was

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<sup>20</sup>Tony Seboni, 'Who's Who in the Unity Movement', *Drum*, April 1954.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Defense Committee, Tabata biography on Letterhead (untitled; undated), Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 81:EA1:84/3; Alexander Defense Committee, 'I.B. Tabata' (1 page flyer), Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. The Alexander Defense Committee (ADC) under whose auspices Tabata toured the United States in 1967 as part of an appeal for funds was one of the main forums through which the Unity Movement propagated Tabata's biography. Documents issued by the ADC also found their way into other collections, such as the Carter-Karis Papers, as Tabata moved from city to city in the United States.

included on the back cover of such edited compilations.<sup>22</sup> These texts, usually with a formal portrait photograph of Tabata on their covers, came to acquire canonical status and often constituted the main public evidence of the existence of UMSA and APDUSA in exile. As we shall see, this work of biographic formation and biographic maintenance occurred primarily through Tabata's political and personal relationship with Dora Taylor.

The telling and retelling of Tabata's biography became a central feature of membership of and commitment to UMSA and APDUSA in exile. The learning of a settled narrative of Tabata's life seemed to become a key element of younger members' political lessons in the movement, and its ingestion a demonstration of members' political commitment.<sup>23</sup> Members and supporters looked to Tabata to share "gems from his life and his vast experience", as well as leadership lessons based on stories about heroic dedication, steadfast principle and legendary escapades.<sup>24</sup> Tabata's biography was told as a story of political challenges and obstacles, and what solutions were fashioned to overcome these. In demonstrating what they had learnt, some members even exercised appropriate discretion, knowing when to incorporate overt Marxist elements into their narration, such as Tabata's membership of an underground Trotskyist party.<sup>25</sup>

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Tabata's biography was marshalled as an instrument of sustaining a movement, and as a treasure chest of political lessons of leadership, as part of the education of younger members. It also came to form the basis of a cult of

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<sup>22</sup> See for example I.B. Tabata, *Apartheid: Cosmetics Exposed* (London: Prometheus Publications for Unity Movement of South Africa, 1985).

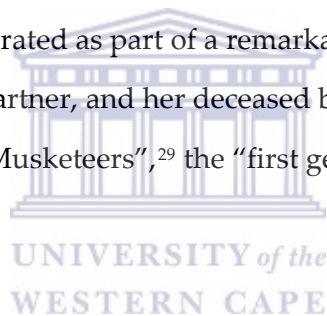
<sup>23</sup> The extent of biographic knowledge of Tabata's political life and formation was shown in official movement obituaries and tributes after Tabata's death. The degree to which people were schooled in basic elements of the established biographic narrative was also apparent from interviews with members (See Norman Traub, 'I.B. Tabata' (Obituary), *The Independent*, 3 November 1990; Interview with Norman Traub, Leigh-on-Sea, 8 March 1992; see also Roger Galant, 'Tribute at I.B. Tabata's Grave' (Text of Oration at Tombstone Unveiling, Lesseyton, 20 September 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Amina Hughes, video interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, 10 September 1989 (I am in possession of an audio copy of this video interview).

<sup>25</sup> See for example the incorporation of information about the Lenin Club and Workers Party in the memorial tribute to Jane Gool by Zina Scholtz after Gool's death in 1996 (Zina Scholtz, 'Jane Gool-Tabata', Obituary presented at the Memorial Meeting for Jane Gool, Athlone Civic Minor Hall (Unity Movement of South Africa, 18 May 1996).

presidentialism. During this time and after, Tabata became habituated to this cult and to the historic importance accorded to the story of his political life.<sup>26</sup> Researchers who sought out Tabata and Jane Gool in the 1980s found an aging revolutionary couple who had long become accustomed to the practice of narrating their life histories - especially Tabata's – as those of resistance veterans, in relation to the evolution of the political principles and practice of the Unity Movement.<sup>27</sup> And, as we shall see, from the 1960s, as much as Tabata's biography was projected and ingested, its narration was also challenged.

The particular narration of Tabata's life, which was promoted, ingested and retold in this shifting order of education, was constituted in the 1960s and 1970s with his active participation. This was a tale of a coherent life of political action and leadership that began in the 1930s in political structures of the Lenin Club, the Spartacus Club and the WPSA.<sup>28</sup> Tabata's life was narrated as part of a remarkable group, which included Jane Gool, who was publicly his partner, and her deceased brother Goolam Gool. Together they constituted "The Three Musketeers",<sup>29</sup> the "first generation of black leaders whose



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<sup>26</sup> The celebration of Tabata's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in Harare in 1989 was indeed a festive biographic occasion in which speeches honouring him connected his political biography to a political legacy. See for example, 'A Speech in honour of Com. Tabata on his birthday on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1989', Harare, 1989, Jane Gool Papers (I am in possession of a copy of this text). Amina Hughes' video interview with Tabata and Jane Gool was conducted to mark his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Alie and Ursula Fataar remembered a celebration of Tabata's birthday in Lusaka in c. 1970, when Wycliffe Tsotsi, in a celebratory speech, suggested that while their membership might have been few then, "one day there would be a public holiday on the President's birthday" (Interview with Alie and Ursula Fataar, Harare, 19 July 1991).

<sup>27</sup> See for example, Allison Drew, interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, December 1987 (author's possession); Shamil Jeppie and Eugene Cairncross, interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, 16-22 January 1989, Western Cape Oral History Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, UCT; Julie Frederickse, interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, 1986 (South African History Archive, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand); see also the article 'Veteran of SA freedom fight tells her story', *The Herald* (Zimbabwe), 14 January 1986.

<sup>28</sup> These Marxist formations were sometimes simply referred to more vaguely as 'left discussion clubs', as a shorthand in certain settings, where more precise details were not required. See for example Amina Hughes, video interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, 10 September 1989.

<sup>29</sup> This was the formulation put to me by Jane Gool, and is also contained in Amina Hughes' interview with Tabata and Gool. After Jane Gool's death, APDUSA member, Zina Scholtz repeated this formulation in her description of the early political relationship between Jane and Goolam Gool and I.B. Tabata. See interview with Jane Gool, Harare, 18-19 July 1991; Amina Hughes, video interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, 10 September 1989; Zina Scholtz, 'Jane Gool-Tabata'.

political training did not take place under the tutelage of white liberals".<sup>30</sup> In the detail of this narrative, it was Claire Goodlatte, the 'Red Nun' who had been Gool and Tabata's WPSA mentor and trainer in political theory, who had granted "the responsibility of leadership" to Tabata and Jane Gool.<sup>31</sup> Jane Gool recalled this moment in Goodlatte's house in York Street, Woodstock in about 1935 in solemn terms:

I got such a shock that the hairs on my skin rose, I got cold....  
[Tabata] stammered [and said] 'I never thought of myself as a leader....' It was like a tidal wave had hit us all. Both of us grew pale with shock. We moved out of the house. I looked at him and he at me, and we stood naked, as it were. We knew then that we were going to be burdened with the responsibility of leadership.... There was nobody else. And although we denied it ... although we pushed it to the back of our minds, nevertheless we knew that that was a task which we could not avoid.<sup>32</sup>

The Unity Movement of South Africa was given a seamless history, which went back to the formation of the Non-European Unity Movement in 1943-44.<sup>33</sup> This represented an attempt to create 'non-European unity' through uniting the Anti-CAD and the AAC, and it was Tabata who had outlined the foundations for the 'Building of Unity' in an address to the Second Unity Conference in 1945.<sup>34</sup> The key methodology of nation-building through the medium of these organisations was the federal structure in which organisations from civic bodies and cultural societies to sports clubs and church bodies could affiliate and be brought into the fold. Another breakthrough in organisational terms had been the formation of APDUSA in 1961, the 'unitary' body

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<sup>30</sup> Norman Traub, 'I.B. Tabata' (Obituary), *The Independent*, 3 November 1990.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Jane Gool, Harare, 25-28 January 1991; younger members would have been taught to be circumspect about the specifically Marxist, underground elements of this narrative. In a speech at Dora Taylor's memorial service after her death in 1976, Tabata himself referred cryptically to Goodlatte (without mentioning her name) as one of the people who had "helped to mould" him. It was she who "showed us how to live" (I.B. Tabata, Oration at Dora Taylor's Memorial Service, 1976, copy in author's possession, courtesy of Doreen and Michael Muskett).

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Jane Gool, Harare, 25-28 January 1991.

<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the name UMSA (chosen to build and propagate the organisation in exile after 'Non-European' had been dropped in 1964 in favour merely of 'Unity Movement' or 'UM') was anachronistically transported back in time and given an existence in the 1940s in some biographic narrations. See Amina Hughes, video interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, 10 September 1989.

<sup>34</sup> "'The Basis of Unity'" (by B.M. Kies) and "'The Building of Unity'" (by I.B. Tabata), Two Addresses delivered at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Unity Conference Held in the Banqueting Hall, Cape Town on 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1945', Issued by the Non-European Unity Committee, 1945, Crowe-Rassool Papers.

formed to draw in 'workers and peasants'. These organisational forms emerged under Tabata's influence, and it was Tabata who was projected as the leading thinker and orator of the movement, a leader forced into exile under threat of repression, after having survived a five-year ban. He was a "brilliant political analyst", as shown by his writings and speeches, and he was also an "outstanding organiser and orator", who was able "to convey to all sections of the population, workers and peasants", the "complex nature" of the struggle in South Africa and "the solution to the political problems facing the people in clear, unambiguous terms".<sup>35</sup>

A key moment in this fairly settled narrative was Tabata's arrest at Mount Ayliff in 1948. His acquittal "galvanised the spirit of resistance among the peasantry", and this "spread throughout the rural areas and continued into the 1960s". It was because of their "revolutionary" politics that Tabata and his comrades were "thwarted" in their efforts to secure recognition and support from the OAU. Nevertheless, in this narrative, Tabata's life did not culminate in failure. Mindful of the "continuity of the struggle", and concerned about "leaving behind a worthy heritage for the young", Tabata was "very interested in the youth and devoted a great deal of energy and to training them".<sup>36</sup> The culmination of this biographic narrative of political consistency was Tabata's life and work turned into a realm of memory, through the continuing sale of his writings, and in the creation of the Tabata archival collection. This was the final stage of biographic work in the ongoing moulding and reproduction of Tabata's life history.

But Tabata did not always have a biography. His refusal to narrate his life and distribute his own image reared its head at an early stage in the history of the Unity Movement. This biographic disavowal was expressed in 1946 in a remarkable set of epistolary exchanges. These communications raised a number of issues that are

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<sup>35</sup> Norman Traub, 'I.B. Tabata' (Obituary), *The Independent*, 3 November 1990. See also Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA), 'I.B. Tabata', Memorial Pamphlet, Issued by the Unity Movement of South Africa, Eikefontein, October 1990.

<sup>36</sup> Norman Traub, 'I.B. Tabata' (Obituary), *The Independent*, 3 November 1990.



pertinent to the themes of this chapter. The youthful editor of a newly formed newspaper, *Inyaniso* ('The Truth'), B. Mnguni wrote to Tabata requesting him to write a review of a pamphlet on influx control, which had been published shortly before.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, the pamphlet, 'Influx of Natives into Towns', was a piece that Tabata himself had authored under a pseudonym.<sup>38</sup> Realising the "predicament" he was in, and clearly not wanting to do a review of his own book, Tabata nevertheless wanted to give the new publication and the group behind it "every encouragement and help" he could. Mnguni and his colleagues at *Inyaniso* saw themselves as "an independent youth league not connected with Mbede's (sic) group".<sup>39</sup>

Within a few days, Tabata wrote off <sup>40</sup> to Wycliffe Tsotsi, who had earlier complained to him of being "snowed under with work". Tabata nevertheless suggested that Tsotsi could help him solve the problem. He proposed to Tsotsi that he help out "by either fathering or writing the review". Tabata explained that he had asked Dora Taylor to write the review, and asked Tsotsi "to do what you like. You have a completely free hand. You can tear the document to pieces. You can alter it, knock it into shape in your own style, use it as a basis, anything you like". Tabata implored Tsotsi to let "the boys" have the review "under your name". "For obvious reasons" it could not go under Taylor's name. Tabata enclosed Taylor's review, saying that it was already about "10 lines too long".<sup>41</sup>

But Mnguni and *Inyaniso* had asked for more than just a review from Tabata. They also asked him to write an autobiographical sketch and submit a photographic portrait for

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<sup>37</sup>I.B. Tabata to B Mnguni, 21 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection (BC 925), The original letter from Mnguni does not survive, but it is referred to in Tabata's reply.

<sup>38</sup>B. Somvinane (I.B. Tabata), 'Influx of Natives into Towns: What it Means', All African Convention (WP), May 1944 (Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University).

<sup>39</sup>I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 12 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection (BC 925). 'Mbede' was obviously a reference to Anton Lembede of the newly formed Congress Youth League.

<sup>40</sup>Note that this is not entirely true. The letter in the collection is in Dora Taylor's handwriting, and may have been narrated by Tabata, as if to a secretary. However, it is more likely that the strategy it proposed was the result of careful discussion, planning and resolution by both Tabata and Taylor. See below.

<sup>41</sup>I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 12 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection (BC 925).

their forthcoming paper. For Tabata, this request was absolutely “out of the question”. While seeming to “appreciate its implications”, Tabata’s response was to “emphatically reject” the request. In his letter to Tsotsi, Tabata tried to find an explanation for Mnguni’s request:

One sees from their request exactly the way they think. They still cling to this “little leader” business. Their little hero must be boosted and have his pictures all over the show. They must [rather] learn to respect and turn their devotion to ideas rather than the individual.<sup>42</sup>

In his response to Mnguni, Tabata was moved to enter the mode of the educator and political mentor. After explaining that he had asked Tsotsi, “a very able and well-known man belonging to the younger school of thought”, to do the review for *Inyaniso*, Tabata commended Mnguni and his colleagues for the task which they had set themselves of “unearthing the *Inyaniso* and carrying it to the people”. The “Bantu Press” (*Umteteli* and *Inkundla*) had refused to refer to the ‘Influx’, much like “the old reactionaries and government agents amongst us”, who “muzzle up the message that such pamphlets carry to the people and cast over them the blanket of silence. However, *Inyaniso* had boldly selected to review pamphlets such as the ‘Influx’, which were “anathema” to the government, and this was “indicative of the role it intends to play in the life of non-Europeans”.<sup>43</sup>

Mindful of his position as educator, Tabata explained his refusal to submit an autobiographical sketch and photograph. Unlike *Umteteli wa Bantu*, whose reports tended to “boost personalities and splash in their pages the faces of such people”, *Inyaniso* had much more important work to do”. *Inyaniso* was concerned “not just with advertising personalities, but with the spread of ideas”. “Too often in the past”, Tabata continued, “have we concentrated on building up individual leaders”. Individuals, he argued could be “bought and sold”. Tabata advocated that it was time “to teach the people to fix their attention on the idea and to give their devotion and energy to the

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<sup>42</sup>I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 12 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection (BC 925).

<sup>43</sup>I.B. Tabata to B Mnguni, 21 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

cause, rather than the leader". The time of "passionate and slavish obedience to a leader" was over.<sup>44</sup> Tabata urged that *Inyaniso* "bring consciousness to the people" so that "they must know the nature of the forces they are up against; they must know what to fight and how to fight". Armed with knowledge, the people would be able to support a leadership which expressed their aspirations, so that "the moment a leader departs from the correct road, they will kick him out".<sup>45</sup>

A number of issues related to Tabata's 'biographic disavowal' emerge out of this exchange between him, Mnguni and Tsotsi. What was the meaning of Tabata's photographic ambivalence in 1946, and how can one historicise his relationship with the camera and the conventions of portraiture? How can one understand the notions of writing, authorship and publication raised by the 1946 correspondence, the contradictory ways in which they featured at different times, and the relations through which writing occurred and authorship was claimed. It was these relations of writing and authorship that generated the materials out of which the Tabata archive was constructed. More generally, how can one understand the constitution of the Tabata archival collection and the processes of its creation? The correspondence also raises issues of paternalism and patronage that characterised Tabata's structured relations with young people and organisations of youth on the one hand, and with fellow-activists who held leadership positions in local affiliates of the movement on the other. These relations were part of the peculiar educational character of political formations in which identities and selves were defined, and leadership was performed. The most significant relationship through which Tabata became a writer and author, and through which he acquired a biography, was that with fellow WPSA member and fellow writer, Dora Taylor. Indeed, it can be argued that it was Dora Taylor who was the primary author of Tabata's biographic narrative.

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<sup>44</sup>I.B. Tabata to B Mnguni, 21 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>45</sup>I.B. Tabata to B Mnguni, 21 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

### *I.B. Tabata and the photographic image*

In 1946, when Mnguni asked Tabata for a photograph of himself along with an autobiographical sketch for publication in *Inyaniso*, it is not clear anyway that Tabata would have had such a portrait readily available. Indeed, he might have struggled to find an appropriate image, even if he had chosen to oblige. For the photographic record of Tabata for the 1940s and 1950s is indeed scant. It is possible to argue that this paucity of photographs needs to be seen in relation to one aspect of the description of Tabata in *Drum* in 1954, that he 'dislikes photographers'. Not only was there a paucity of photographs of Tabata, but it also seems as if, up until 1952, the political spaces of the Unity Movement, its gatherings, and activities and personages had a shallow existence in the domain of visual representation. 1952 seems to have been a turning point, when the Claremont photographer, Ralph Taylor, deliberately photographed podium and crowd scenes from the 30 March 1952 Anti-CAD mass assembly at the Grand Parade held to protest against the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival. This series of photographs was fairly widely circulated after *The Torch* had offered copies for sale as commemorative images of the Parade meeting.<sup>46</sup> This is undoubtedly the reason why these photographs have survived in a number of private collections, why they have subsequently entered into the files of collecting institutions, and why they became the quintessential images of the Anti-CAD as a mass movement (Figure 1).<sup>47</sup>

In spite of the 'shunning of publicity', there were a few fairly informal photographic occasions associated with the Unity Movement before 1952. One rare gathering that was photographed was the Spring School of the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA), which was held in Simonstown in October 1950 (Figure 2). It is not apparent why the participants posed for the photograph at some point in the proceedings, but it is likely that the photograph was intended for private use. The photograph is an outdoor group

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<sup>46</sup> *The Torch*, 15 April 1952. See more generally, Tina Smith and Ciraj Rassool, 'History in Photographs at the District Six Museum'. Tabata was billed as a speaker at the 1952 meeting, but it is doubtful whether he did in fact speak. He does not appear in any of Ralph Taylor's photographs.

<sup>47</sup> See for example Allison Drew, 'Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism in South Africa, 1928-1960', pp 438; 455 and Allison Drew (ed), *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*, Volume Two, between pp 16 and 17.



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portrait with a fairly relaxed, informal character. It is nevertheless quite a rare image in that the group included I.B. Tabata, Jane Gool, Alie Fataar, Ben Kies, Edgar Maurice and Helen Abrahams, who gathered with Dora Taylor who had come to present a lecture on South African literature. In spite of its informal nature, it was an exceptional group image of the participants in one of the official activities of a Unity Movement affiliate. For a brief moment, those who 'shunned publicity' and who 'disliked photographers' posed willingly for a photograph that marked their political participation, albeit in an educational programme of a teachers' organisation.

It is not surprising that this rare image of NEUM leaders was a group photograph, for if the camera could not be avoided, then individual attention could be sidestepped through immersion in a group. And in any event, the photograph had no official status, and the group depicted had a distinct air of informality. Informality was also the hallmark of a group photographed outside Thabisano, the home of A.C. and Phyllis Jordan in Crawford, Cape Town in April 1951 (Figure 3). In one photograph from this series, the seated, smoking Tabata was depicted alongside a car, with his comrades, including Leo Sihlali, Jane Gool, Phyllis Jordan, Wycliffe Tsotsi, Halima Gool and A.C. Jordan standing around him. Tabata was flanked by a group of seated children including those of the Jordans, whose presence added to the 'extended family' character of the group.<sup>48</sup> The only hint of any formality was the attire of the adults, who had probably just returned from the NEUM National Conference held in the Woodstock Town Hall. It is likely that the photographer was Hassen Abrahams, who was with the group on the day, and was someone in Unity Movement circles known for an interest in photography.

Someone else who had a camera for occasional personal use was Goolam Gool, who was the photographer of an extremely rare image of Tabata. This photograph was taken sometime in the late 1940s, on a motoring excursion out of Cape Town. The occasion possibly occurred in December 1947, during a stop en route to Bloemfontein, via

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<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of the family character of politics, see Chapter Eight.





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Bainskloof, Beaufort West, Hanover and Colesburg, to attend the AAC annual conference. Tabata had undertaken the journey by car with Goolam and Jane Gool, and was accompanied for part of the way by 'Edna' (possibly a young Edna Wilcox). The photograph depicted an extremely uneasy-looking Tabata, without his spectacles, without his jacket, squinting against the sun, drying his hands, probably early in the morning or late in the afternoon, at a makeshift roadside camp. With a very faint smile, it is clear that Tabata had been caught off guard, without the attire of his public self, and was uncomfortable about being singled out by the camera. Indeed, he was a rather reluctant photographic subject (Figure 4). Tabata's aversion to photography was mirrored in perhaps one of the few photographs which Tabata himself might ever have taken, of the group at the dishevelled campsite, either packing or unpacking, without a single person being identifiable (Figure 5). All faces were almost symbolically hidden in an act of visual representation by Tabata that concealed far more than it revealed. This was indeed photographic aversion on Tabata's part, both as subject and photographer.

The only photographs of Tabata from the 1940s that entered the public domain were those taken in 1941 and 1942 by professional art photographer, Anne Fischer. In 1946, when faced with Mnguni's request, it is possible that Tabata may have had prints of these in his possession. It is not clear why they were created, but Fischer had connections with left-wing circles in Cape Town, and in the early 1940s, also spent time taking photographs in rural Transkei, as a field art photographer. It may have been that Tabata needed a portrait for personal reasons or for some purpose of official identification. But it might also have been the case that in posing in Fischer's studio in 1942, Tabata also met her needs for a suitable photographic model, possibly inadvertently satisfying her interest in 'native photographic subjects'.<sup>49</sup>

Fischer's 1942 image was used in 1965 by the Alexander Defense Committee for two cryptic biographic pamphlets, which accompanied publicity material for Tabata's

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<sup>49</sup> Tina Smith and Ciraj Rassool, 'History in Photographs at the District Six Museum', pp 142-43.



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speaking tour of the United States.<sup>50</sup> In that setting, it acquired the incongruous meaning of a portrait of a political leader with a significant political biography in spite of hailing from a time of distinct photographic aversion and biographic ambivalence on Tabata's part. I have no doubt that this image had been cared for privately by Dora Taylor for a long time before she chose to release it for the public purposes of the ADC US tour because of a shortage of suitable Tabata portraits.<sup>51</sup> This is also perhaps the reason why the image took on new life in the private world of Tabata and Jane Gool in Lusaka and Harare, where the original signed print later acquired a makeshift copper-coloured cardboard frame, held together by sellotape (Figure 6). In spite of its fleeting entry into the public domain in the mid-1960s, the Fischer image had not been created as a portrait of a political leader. And it was not intended for use in the public to project an image of a leader.

Fischer's photographic image of Tabata had a distinct performative quality. Dressed in a jacket and open-neck shirt, but with horn-rimmed spectacles prominent, almost as a prop, Tabata was photographed in full lighting, gazing into the distance, and cutting a stylised image of the young, modern, male, urban intellectual. Tabata showed rare comfort at being photographed, undoubtedly because the photographic occasion occurred in the setting of the art photography studio, and the photographer was an artist and professional photographer. The studio was a space of identity performance, and in this image, Tabata can be read as celebrating and affirming his urban modernity, perhaps marking his difference from rural lives.

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<sup>50</sup> 'I.B. Tabata'; 'I.B Tabata' (slightly abbreviated, and marked 'labor donated', pamphlets issued by the Alexander Defense Committee, n.d. (1965), Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. It was also used as a portrait for the republication in the ISR (*International Socialist Review*?) of Tabata's Presidential Address to the first conference of APDUSA in April 1962. This was facilitated by Dora Taylor who had liaised with Tom Kerry (referred to cryptically as 'Tom K' by Dora Taylor in her diary entries). See Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary, entries for 24, 28 and 29 April 1965, and 19 June 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>51</sup> With her temporary relocation to Toronto, where J.G. Taylor had an academic appointment, Dora was forced to write back to her daughter, Doreen Muskett, for photographs of Tabata (which must have been left behind in England). The 1942 Taylor photograph was what Doreen sent. See Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary, entries for 12 & 30 April 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.



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Equally performative, if not more so, was the second Fischer image of Tabata that has survived, one dated to 1941, the year before Tabata entered Fischer's studio. It was incorporated into the I.B. Tabata Collection, as part of the body of evidence of the political life of a political leader. This Fischer photograph had a different aesthetic and was far more personal. Seemingly created outside the studio in the intimate space of the home, Tabata was photographed without a jacket, with his shirt open to reveal his chest. His spectacles were removed and his gaze lowered, making him seem introspective and vulnerable. Unlike Fischer's studio image, the lighting here was natural, revealing facial blemishes and marks where spectacles had been. The effect was a nakedness of self, and a sense of intimacy, sensuality and complexity. As a consequence, Tabata's masculinity was subdued, creating simultaneously a sense of feminisation (Figure 7). As the work of a professional artist, the photograph had an aesthetic element that was simultaneously modern and intensely private. This image would certainly have been absolutely inappropriate for the needs of Mnguni and *Inyaniso*, and their desire for a ready-made leader. It was also hardly the image of leadership wanted for the ADC campaign. Indeed, its almost incongruous incorporation into the Tabata Collection owed much to Dora Taylor, for whom this photograph must have had significant personal meaning.



While the visual record of I.B. Tabata during the 1940s and early 1950s had been framed within collective leadership, or marked by photographic aversion or aestheticised modernism, the visual register of Tabata from the mid-1960s was of one who had embraced the conventions of portraiture and the visual construction and projection of leadership wholeheartedly. This marked a significant shift from the previous, almost principled biographic disavowal and dislike of photographers. Instead, Tabata became habituated to the camera. In 1965, when the ADC in New York needed portraits of Tabata as part of its preparation of publicity materials for his tour of the United States, one of the photographs that Taylor sent from Toronto was the 23-year-old Anne Fischer studio portrait of the youthful Tabata.<sup>52</sup> However, the projection of a southern African liberation movement required the credible visual depiction and projection of a leader. A

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<sup>52</sup> There are two pamphlets with this Fischer image in the ADC Collection. See footnote 129 above.



basic passport-type pen picture satisfied this need. This was the image of Tabata chosen by local ADC committees around the United States, and was widely circulated in advertisements of his speaking engagements. This they chose from the “Pictures of Tabata for publicity use”, which had been included in information packs sent out by the ADC Executive Secretary along with Tabata’s itinerary (Figure 8).<sup>53</sup>

It is not certain when in the 1960s the conscious programme of constructing Tabata as a ‘presidential’ political leader through visual representation began as an element of projecting the Unity Movement as a liberation movement. On his first visit to England in May 1962, where he went after his secret “trek through Africa”, Tabata was certainly photographed, perhaps more to mark a personal reunion.<sup>54</sup> A portrait photograph taken of Tabata in 1963 in England was later used on a book cover.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Tabata began to be photographed in conscious and definitive ways to convey a sense of confidence, certainty and authority that belied any previous visualising reticence. The programme of imaging Tabata was stepped up from about 1965, especially when the need for publicity and visual projection began to make itself felt through the ADC. From at least 1966, publications of the Unity Movement and APDUSA in Lusaka began to include posed portraits of Tabata, accompanied by the description, “President of Unity Movement of South Africa and President of APDUSA”.<sup>56</sup> These portraits were often full-page, and

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<sup>53</sup> Robert H Langston to Friends (Circular Letter), 23 September 1965, Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. This was the photograph used to advertise Tabata’s speaking engagements in Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Seattle between October and December 1965. The tour began with receptions and meetings in New York, and Tabata also spoke in Philadelphia, Milwaukee and Washington, DC. A visit to New York at the end was also advertised, but Tabata had to rush back to Lusaka in January 1966.

<sup>54</sup> There is a photograph in the Tabata Collection (BC 925) with this wording as part of its official caption. Tabata arrived in England on 25 May 1962, 2¾ months after Dora Taylor had left Cape Town for England via Johannesburg and Ndola, where she spent five weeks with her daughter Sheila Belshaw. Tabata spent more than five months in England attempting to solicit support for the NEUM’s struggle from socialist and African countries before making his way back to South Africa via Algeria, Italy, Yugoslavia and other African countries, where he spent time assessing possibilities of support.

<sup>55</sup> There are at least six portrait photographs in the Tabata Collection (BC 925), one of which is marked ‘1963 – England (used on a cover)’.

<sup>56</sup> See full-page portrait before page one of *Apdusa* (Special Edition), Vol II, No 5, Sept-Oct 1966, Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.



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their prominent placement in publications suggests the adoption of a presidential paradigm as a means of foregrounding and defining the movement.

The provenance of each photograph that was circulated and projected is not entirely clear. But one factor in the production of presidential images was the photography of Michael Muskett, Dora Taylor's son-in-law. Perhaps beginning as early as Tabata's secret England visit in 1962, Muskett began to photograph Tabata during his regular visits to England in the 1960s and 1970s, and in this time, his photographs of Tabata became more formal and stylised. This photography may have begun as assistance for the organisational work of Dora Taylor. By the time Dora Taylor died in the mid-1970s, Muskett had assembled a full album of Tabata portraits, and at some point he even contemplated publishing a book on Tabata based on these.<sup>57</sup> It is likely that some of the Tabata images that found their way on to back covers of Tabata's republished writings, and which were circulated as one of the elements of the Unity Movement's newfound presidentialism, may have been those taken by Michael Muskett (Figure 9).

And in Lusaka at the beginning of 1965, coinciding with the presence in Lusaka of a number of APDUSA members, the leadership of the Unity Movement went into the photographic studio to record their movement's existence in visual terms. They may have failed to obtain recognition as a legitimate liberation movement from the Committee of Nine of the OAU.<sup>58</sup> But they were intent on declaring their existence to the world. In the studio, as the APDUSA members stood around their leaders, Nathaniel

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<sup>57</sup> I was fortunate enough to be able to look at this album when I visited Doreen and Michael Muskett in Duntish, England, in 1992 to interview them. Michael Muskett also showed me his notes from his interviews with Tabata, which he once conducted possibly in preparation for such a book. See Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Doreen and Michael Muskett, 22 March 1992. One of his preoccupations seemed to be with Tabata's supposed royal Thembu lineage and notions of a birthright of leadership. See M. Muskett, Untitled notes on I.B. Tabata's family history and early life (n.d; author's possession).

<sup>58</sup> 'See the failed submission by the Unity Movement: 'South Africa: A Memorandum submitted to Committee of Nine by the All-African Convention and Non-European Unity Movement', Lusaka, December 1963, Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University; see also 'Statement by the AAC and NEUM justifying their rights to the funds voted by the Liberation Committee of Nine', December 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925) and the critique of the OAU ('The Crisis of the Organisation of African Unity and the Liberation Movements') in *Apdusa* (Special Edition), Vol II, No 5, Sept-Oct 1966.



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Honono, Jane Gool and I.B. Tabata, the image of the political movement became marked by greater assertiveness and openness to the camera. Also apparent was a newfound sense of formality, and a distinct sense of hierarchy and presidentialism, which were in keeping with the character of exile politics (Figure 10). It was as if Tabata was acting out the 'cult of the chief or leader', which had been the basis of accusations against him in 1959. The posing and image-making carried over into the movement's Head Office in Lusaka which had "a huge, big portrait of the president".<sup>59</sup> It also extended beyond the photographic image, as the order of presidentialism was enacted in the everyday life of the movement.

### *Authorship, individuation and the biographic threshold*

The transition from "selflessness"<sup>60</sup> to 'presidentialism' was also a feature of Tabata's history as a writer and author. Indeed, the subsuming of the self by the political activist into the political formations and ideas of the collective was not always as clear-cut as Tabata made it seem in 1946 in his correspondence with Mnguni and Wycliffe Tsotsi. In the first place, in exhorting Tsotsi to author a text that had already been written by Dora Taylor as a review of a written intervention circulated under the name 'B Somvinane', Tabata was exercising the authority of his leadership in the All African Convention, in spite of the fact that he held no formal office at the national level in that body.<sup>61</sup>

Leadership may have been conceptualised and projected as collective and the rejection

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<sup>59</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Livingstone Mqotsi, London, 3 March 1992.

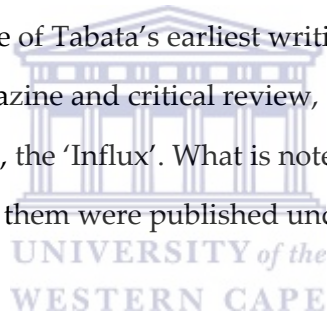
<sup>60</sup> In a speech to the 1955 Cape African Teachers' Association (CATA) conference, Tabata contrasted 'selflessness' and "complete devotion to the cause", conceptualised as "greater than the individual", with the "reckless actions" and "stunts and pranks" of the 1950s campaigns by Congress, which were predicated on "individual sacrifice". See Notes for Speech, CATA Conference, 1955, Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>61</sup> It is clear that Tabata drew a distinction between leadership and the holding of political office in the "straitjacket of officialdom". In December 1948, Wycliffe Tsotsi was elected to the Presidency of the AAC, as part of a strategy to "get rid of Jabavu". Someone had to be found to replace D.D.T. Jabavu who was "young, well-known, acceptable to the country and above all trustworthy and in full accord with the policy of Convention". In taking responsibility for Tsotsi's election, Tabata expressed his guilt to him as follows: "I felt I had sacrificed you in a way to the exigencies of the time". This "sacrifice" he argued, had been "forced upon us" and he saw it as temporary, to "tide us over a difficult period". "Your job and my job are in the field", he suggested to Tsotsi, "[and] on the floor of the house, hammering out a new policy or fighting for the implementation of one that has been decided upon" (I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 22 February 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925). In the 1940s and 1950s, Tabata was at most a provincial representative on the AAC executive. It was only in 1961 that he was elected President of APDUSA.



of individualised leadership may have enabled the public performance of collective leadership as a means of rejecting older political approaches. However, Tabata became increasingly committed to writing and authorship, and these provided ambiguously for individualising modes of communication which seemed to contradict notions of 'selflessness' and the collective.

Having immersed himself in the intellectual worlds of the clubs and fellowships connected to the WPSA from the 1930s, it seems that I.B. Tabata's writing began to take off in the early 1940s. It seemingly began as notes made for lectures to the New Era Fellowship in which ideas were carefully set out, surveying the historical development of African political organisation through a sequence of stages.<sup>62</sup> Soon this gave way to official written submissions on behalf of the AAC (WP) to the Native Affairs Commission on major questions that affected the daily lives of African people.<sup>63</sup> These presentations resulted in some of Tabata's earliest writings, which were published in the independent intellectual magazine and critical review, *Trek*,<sup>64</sup> and also generated his first substantial political pamphlet, the 'Influx'. What is noteworthy about these early pieces of writing is that almost all of them were published under pseudonyms.<sup>65</sup> During the



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<sup>62</sup> Lecture to the NEF on the AAC, 14 June 1941, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. In the organisation of the Collection, Dora Taylor tried to establish Tabata's "first attempt" at writing, and this resulted in an incomplete document, 'Manifesto of the AAC', marked as 1939 in spite of its clear references to events of 1943-44.

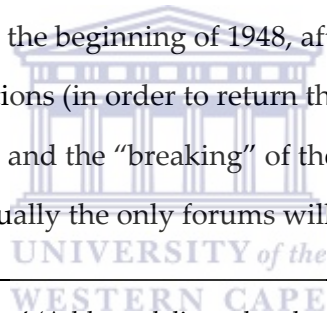
<sup>63</sup> All African Convention Committee (WP), 'Memo on the Proclamation restricting the entry of Africans into the Cape Town Municipal Area' (June 1941); 'Memo of the AAC Committee (WP) for submission to the Native Affairs Commission on the Beer Question', n.d, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. The latter was in response to a Notice from the Department of Native Affairs, in which the AAC (WP) was asked to submit a memorandum as part of the Native Affairs Commission's enquiry into the production, supply and sale of 'kaffir beer'. It is interesting that this brief co-operation with the procedures of the Native Affairs Department occurred at an early stage in the evolution of the policy and meaning of non-collaboration. Considered together, these pieces of writing constituted a veritable social survey of Langa.

<sup>64</sup> B Ywaye (I.B. Tabata), 'We don't want Beer Halls', *Trek*, 24 October 1941; 'Commissioning Native Affairs', *Trek*, 8 May 1942; 'From him that hath not', *Trek*, 23 October 1942; 'The Native elections: a post-mortem', *Trek*, 20 November 1942.

<sup>65</sup> Tabata used the pseudonyms B Ywaye and B Somvinane. The exceptions were the address on the history of the AAC which Tabata delivered to the 1941 AAC conference, and the address on 'The Building of Unity' which Tabata presented to the Third Unity Conference of the NEUM in 1945. These addresses were published and circulated under his own name, probably because they had been presented as part of the official quasi-parliamentary proceedings of the AAC and NEUM conferences. In addition, the latter address was published alongside B.M Kies' address on 'the Basis of Unity'. See

1940s, Tabata continued to submit written interventions for publication under pseudonyms to *Trek*<sup>66</sup> as well as to the mining capital-owned *Umteteli wa Bantu* and the African-owned (but anti-Communist) *Inkundla ya Bantu*.<sup>67</sup> However, the latter two were often hostile to the emerging positions on non-collaboration and the building of unity taken by Tabata, and often his submissions went unpublished.<sup>68</sup>

This rejection might have been expected from *Umteteli*, which was in the Bantu Press stable, but for Tabata, it was especially galling that the supposedly independent and African-owned *Inkundla*, which had claimed to be “a forum for African opinion”, acted “in the exact manner as the Chamber of Mines press”.<sup>69</sup> After complaining to its owner about the failure of its editor, Jordan Ngubane, to ensure open discussion, Tabata was moved to ask whether *Inkundla ya Bantu* had not in practice become *Inkundla ka Rulumente*, as a result of its declaration that “our community has wisely decided not to boycott the ... elections”.<sup>70</sup> By the beginning of 1948, after Ngubane had advocated participation in the NRC elections (in order to return the protesting MRCs –so-called ‘boycott candidates’ - en bloc) and the “breaking” of the boycott movement, Tabata went on the offensive. By then, virtually the only forums willing to publicise and promote



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I.B. Tabata, ‘Six Years of Convention’ (Address delivered at the Conference of the All African Convention, December 16, 1941), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; “‘The Basis of Unity” (by B.M. Kies) and “The Building of Unity” (by I.B. Tabata)’. The former published address had its origins in Tabata’s lecture on the AAC delivered to the NEF a few months earlier. See Lecture to the NEF on the AAC, 14 June 1941, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>66</sup> I Funeka (I.B. Tabata), ‘African milestone’, *Trek*, 11 February 1944. One of Tabata’s sisters was known as Funeka.

<sup>67</sup> For contemporary discussions of South African newspapers directed at black readers in the 1940s, see Edward Roux, ‘The Bantu Press’, *Trek*, 24 August 1945 and A.J. Friedgut, ‘The Non-European Press’, in Ellen Hellmann and Leah Abrahams (eds), *Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1949). See also Les Switzer and Ime Ukpanah, ‘Under Seige: *Inkundla ya Bantu* and the African Nationalist Movement, 1938-1951’, in Les Switzer (ed), *South Africa’s Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>68</sup> A list of these submissions can be found in the Tabata Collection, BC 925. Some of these were: B Penza (I.B. Tabata), letter submitted to *Umteteli wa Bantu* August 1941; I Bangani (I.B. Tabata), ‘The Manoeuvres of the Indian leadership’, submitted to *Umteteli*, May 1946. ‘Reply to Rev JJ Skomolo’, submitted to *Umteteli*, December 1946; I Bangani, ‘This Bogus Unity’, submitted to *Inkundla ya Bantu*, c.1947.

<sup>69</sup> I.B. Tabata to C.P. Motsemme (Owner of *Inkundla*), c.1947, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata had submitted an article about Xuma’s policy, which was not published.

<sup>70</sup> I Bangani, ‘*Inkundla ya Bantu? Or Inkundla ka Rulumente? (The People’s Forum? Or The Oppressors’ Forum?)*’, Typescript, c.1947, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

political positions which rejected “trusteeship”, “segregated institutions and dummy councils” and advocated the “New Road” of “Non-Collaboration with the oppressor” and “National Unity” were those created by the AAC and the Unity Movement.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, these institutions became critical instruments deployed in a modernist political project of “building a nation from words”.<sup>72</sup>

In the monthly *Bulletin of the All African Convention* and in *The Torch*, the fortnightly newspaper of the NEUM, I.B. Tabata provided written materials to be published either anonymously, without an authorship by-line or under a pseudonym.<sup>73</sup> Occasionally, this writing gave rise to pamphlets or leaflets, also published without clear reference to Tabata’s authorship. This writing without authorship emerged out of a conscious and deliberate programme of political intervention and textual production. This programme was incorporated into a political code of ‘selflessness’, collective leadership and commitment to ‘the cause’.

The maintenance of collective leadership as a code of political mobilisation was an important element of the critique of the ‘old road’, which had as one of its features the building up of leaders “from obscurity into the political limelight” through the “din and boom” of newspaper reports.<sup>74</sup> The anonymity of the pseudonym was an attempt to shift the focus away from specific activists and producers of written ideas in order to encourage adherence and loyalty to the movement and to the ideas of the ‘New Road’.

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<sup>71</sup> I Bangani, ‘We Accuse’, Typescript, 13 January 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925 (Published as a pamphlet in early 1948); *The Voice of the All African Convention*, No 17, February 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. In 1947, Tabata’s article on Xuma’s policy, which had been rejected by *Inkundla*, was published in *The Torch*. See I Bangani, ‘A Dummy Unity Movement: Whither Xuma?’, *The Torch* 14 April 1947.

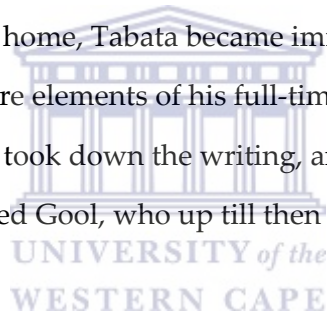
<sup>72</sup> Here I borrow a key phrase from Isabel Hofmeyr’s seminal study of the cultural history of Afrikaner nationalism. See Isabel Hofmeyr, ‘Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and ethnic identity, 1902-1924’, in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*.

<sup>73</sup> After *The Torch* was created in 1946 as the main written forum in the NEUM, it seems that Tabata stopped submitting political analyses to *Trek*. Tabata encouraged activists around the country to support *The Torch* in its “important task” of “enlightening the people politically”. Its “weighty political message” needed “news items from all over the country” alongside it in order to be effective. See I.B. Tabata to Mkele (Durban), 31 January 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>74</sup> I Bangani, ‘A dummy Unity Movement: Whither Xuma?’, *The Torch* 14 April 1947.

This undoubtedly resulted in knowledge being produced behind a veil of collectivity, while the individuated and collaborative processes of production went unacknowledged in the service of collective mobilisation and principled unity. In the process, it is possible that the potential individualising consequences of writing and authorship may have been temporarily offset.

However, Tabata's writing, whether or not under his own name, was not entirely individual. The Tabata Collection provides ample evidence that his writing emerged out of his relationship with fellow-WPSA member Dora Taylor, one that was marked by intense and on-going political and personal interchange. The home of academic psychologist J.G. Taylor and his wife Dora was a studious one, "two people in two different rooms working".<sup>75</sup> According to Jane Gool, it was with Dora Taylor's encouragement that Tabata started to write. Indeed, with Taylor and in the studious atmosphere of her Claremont home, Tabata became immersed in a programme of writing that was one of the core elements of his full-time political work. In Gool's words Taylor "became his secretary, took down the writing, and criticised and so on". And the quality of this writing surprised Gool, who up till then thought that Tabata was more at home "on the platform".<sup>76</sup>



Dora Taylor herself had been immersed in a programme of creative and political writing as well as literary criticism, having herself been encouraged to "fulfil herself" and "do what she was qualified for" by Claire Goodlatte.<sup>77</sup> In the late 1930s, in the WPSA's Spartacus Club, Taylor wrote plays which were performed by members.<sup>78</sup> And from 1939, in *Trek*, she found an outlet for her political analyses, social commentary and literary scholarship.<sup>79</sup> While she became known mainly as a literary scholar, it is

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<sup>75</sup> I.B. Tabata, Oration at Dora Taylor's Memorial Service, c.1976.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Jane Gool, Harare, 25-28 January 1991.

<sup>77</sup> I.B. Tabata, Oration at Dora Taylor's Memorial Service, 1976.

<sup>78</sup> Dora Taylor to 'Comrade Tabata', nd, (1936/7), Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>79</sup> Dora Taylor expressed her delight at the emergence of *Trek* in 1939 as a bilingual, biweekly "family magazine for all South Africans" out of its predecessor, *Independent*. She had found the first issue "stimulating", and found that there was "something for everyone on every page" (Letter from Dora Taylor, *Trek*, 31 August 1939).

interesting that Taylor's first writings were studies of political and social questions including analyses of war and imperialism, the economics of political life, women and fascism, the role of education, the meaning of democracy and ideology and propaganda.<sup>80</sup> At this time, she also wrote a critical discussion of the findings about social poverty identified by the 1938-39 Social Survey, which had been undertaken in Cape Town under the directorship of UCT's Edward Batson.<sup>81</sup>

From late 1941, Taylor's focus switched almost entirely to cultural and literary analyses, with major assessments of international and South African literary production.<sup>82</sup> This was a shift that seemed to coincide with the submissions to *Trek* of political analyses under Tabata's pseudonyms. It was as if Taylor and Tabata came to adopt an intellectual division of labour, with Taylor as cultural critic and Tabata as political analyst. And if political intervention was needed through the written word, little could be gained organisationally by this being done in Taylor's hand, and under her name. Instead, from some time in the second half of 1941, the energies of Taylor's political analyses became directed towards assisting Tabata in the production of political interventions under his pseudonyms. Tabata's writings were thus not those of the lone, self-sufficient writer. They were produced in a relationship with Dora Taylor, at her encouragement, with her active assistance and drawing on her prior experience as a writer. At times, this help was

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<sup>80</sup> Dora Taylor, 'War and Ourselves: The Road to Peace', *Trek*, 31 August 1939; 'When are Politics not Politics', *Trek*, 28 September 1939; 'Women and Fascism', *Trek*, 1 February 1940; 'Is Our Education..?', *Trek*, 19 December 1940; 'What Have We Done for Democracy?', *Trek*, 2 January 1941; 'Education for Democracy', *Trek*, 16 January 1941; 'The Proper Goose for Propaganda', *Trek*, 27 February 1941; 'Facts and Fancies in Education', *Trek*, 18 July 1941.

<sup>81</sup> Dora Taylor, 'Challenge and Warning', *Trek*, 23 May 1941; 'Challenge and Warning II', *Trek*, 6 June 1941.

<sup>82</sup> Taylor's literary writings in *Trek* began with a number of reviews of socially and politically relevant books such as John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (*Trek*, 9 May 1941), André Malraux's *Storm of Shanghai* and *Days of Contempt* (*Trek*, 6 June 1941), Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* (*Trek*, 20 June 1941) and C.L.R James' *The Black Jacobins* (*Trek*, 29 August 1941). Soon these gave way to major, extended essays of cultural and literary analysis. See for example Dora Taylor, 'Our Colonial complex', *Trek*, 21 November 1941; 'Olive Schreiner – A Challenge to Today I - IV', *Trek*, 30 January 1942 - 13 March 1942; 'They Speak of Africa I – VI', *Trek*, 22 May 1942 – 31 July 1942; 'Africans Speak I - II', *Trek*, 28 August 1942 – 11 September 1942; 'Can Afrikaans Survive', *Trek*, 14 January 1944; 'Ivory Towers: New Models I - II', *Trek*, 5 May 1944 – 19 May 1944. *The Rôle of the Missionaries in Conquest* (Alexandra, Johannesburg: Society of Young Africa, November 1952) published under the pseudonym Nosipho Majeke was a significant exception. Its origins, however, lay in research for her unpublished historical play, *Hintsisa*. See Chapter Seven.



merely that of the secretary (as Jane Gool described her), wordsmith and grammarian. Sometimes she was the amanuensis,<sup>83</sup> and at others, the silent, unacknowledged co-author.

As a WPSA member, Taylor was charged with the task of providing administrative assistance to Tabata in his full-time political work in the AAC and other formations from at least August 1941. Sometimes she performed other backstage administrative duties such as the recording of special meetings and conferences.<sup>84</sup> She continued to give lectures, particularly on literary subjects.<sup>85</sup> But for the most part, Taylor became immersed with Tabata in the almost daily work of written composition as politics: letters and telegrams to national and local leaders and activists inside and outside the movement, letters to newspapers, political manifestos, reports of meetings, drafts of written texts for the monthly pamphlet, *The Voice of the All African Convention*, articles for *The Torch* and texts of conference speeches. Often this immersion also entailed assisting Tabata with basic printing and roneoing of materials for distribution.<sup>86</sup>

This joint work seemingly began with contemporary strategic editorial suggestions, rewordings and reformulations made by Taylor to a draft of a letter in Tabata's

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<sup>83</sup> This was the term used by Wycliffe Tsotsi to describe Dora Taylor's position. See Wycliffe Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 3 February 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. After sending his "warmest regards" to Tabata's "amanuensis", Tsotsi bemoaned not having one himself to "bring a little order" into his "chaotic existence".

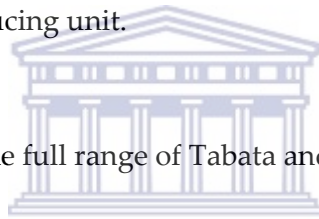
<sup>84</sup> Among these was the special meeting of the NEF convened at the Stakesby Lewis Hostel on 28 February 1943 to strategise a political response to the proposed Coloured Affairs Council (seen as a step en route to a Coloured Affairs Department – CAD – along the lines of the Native Affairs Department). It was here that Tabata proposed the formation of an Anti-CAD committee as a United Front. Other gatherings where she was present and took notes at were the Anti-CAD Conference held in the Mowbray Town Hall on 27 March 1948 and the NEUM Conference held in the Woodstock Town Hall on April 2-3 1951. Notes of these gatherings in Taylor's handwriting are to be found in the I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>85</sup> Taylor gave a lecture at the first Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) Spring School held in Red Hill, Simonstown on 5 & 6 October 1950. As a white WPSA member, Dora Taylor participated in public formations only as an invited lecturer with special expertise in the literary field.

<sup>86</sup> See I.B. Tabata, Pocket Diary, entries for 21 February 1945; 27 March 1945, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.



handwriting, which had been prepared for submission to *Umteteli wa Bantu*.<sup>87</sup> By 1943, she was intervening significantly, making suggestions for wording and paragraphs, in the preparation of a text for presentation to the AAC Conference of December 1943.<sup>88</sup> Drafts of letters were often prepared in both Tabata and Taylor's script, but mostly solely in Taylor's script, indicating the possibility of dictation or the work of an amanuensis. Many strategic letters often saw substantial overwriting by Taylor, the adding of words into sentences and the incorporation of new sentences in ways that contributed substantially to their meaning.<sup>89</sup> Sometimes, critical written interventions under Tabata's pseudonym seem to have had their origins in texts in Taylor's handwriting, which may have resulted from dictation, but more likely may have been the product of joint thinking, discussion and formulation.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, it can be argued unequivocally that at crucial moments, Dora Taylor participated directly in the setting out of political policy and in the production of meaning in what was a single, productive, knowledge-producing unit.



Michael Muskett expressed the full range of Tabata and Taylor's collaborative efforts in the following way:

They worked together in absolute collaboration, teasing out precise meaning and dressing it to give it colour. And they would ... think nothing of spending fifteen minutes on a sentence ... until they got the formulation and the sensitivities to it just right and the balance right. [If they] didn't quite like the way that document [came out] they would re-write it. [Later] he would come over and stay for a few weeks and again the writing would continue, whether it was letters or analyses or [work on] the international situation.

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<sup>87</sup> B Penza (I.B. Tabata), Draft of Letter to Editor, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, c.August 1941, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. This letter demanded that Jabavu and the rest of the older leadership of the AAC commit themselves to the AAC conference at Bloemfontein in December 1941, or else "give way to younger and more energetic men". Many other documents in the collection, which date to the early 1940s, bear Taylor's annotated markings, which had been added *subsequently* as part of editorial work that she did in the planning of publications.

<sup>88</sup> See for example, 'Full Text of Political Review presented to the Conference of the AAC, December 1943', Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>89</sup> See for example Circular Letter from I.B. Tabata, n.d. (c.1943), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>90</sup> See for example the various handwritten and typed (and annotated) versions of 'We Accuse', published eventually as a pamphlet in early 1948, but which bore a draft title, 'Mountains, Labour and Produce: A Rat'.

Whatever it might have been, they worked on it together. [Their's] was a most unusual collaboration.<sup>91</sup>

Quite anomalously, at the end of 1945, a few months before his correspondence with Mnguni and Tsotsi over the *Inyaniso* request, the AAC Committee published a 16-page pamphlet written by Tabata (undoubtedly with Taylor's assistance) under his own name.<sup>92</sup> It is not clear why this authorial decision was made in strategic terms. Perhaps the prior publication of the 'Building of Unity' address under Tabata's name was an influencing factor. The purpose of the pamphlet was "to enlighten the people" about the government's 'rehabilitation scheme' for the reserves, and to provide an analysis of the scheme in relation to the political economy of labour supply and rural relations.<sup>93</sup> The publication of the pamphlet was also meant to enhance "the prestige of the organisation in the eyes of the people", and to raise funds for the AAC.<sup>94</sup>

The rural areas of the Eastern Cape and Transkei were seen as important areas for the distribution of the pamphlet, especially in areas like Butterworth, Mount Ayliff and Pondoland, which had been earmarked for the implementation of betterment. This distribution occurred through the structures of the AAC, with office-bearers and local activists sent batches of 50 or 100 to be sold.<sup>95</sup> The distribution of this pamphlet with Tabata's name on its cover would assist in foregrounding his planned speaking and organising tour of the area in October 1946. By 1947, the pamphlet had gotten into the hands of state officials in Umtata and Pondoland, who were concerned about its possible "subversive results" in "creat[ing] dissent among the native people". The view was expressed that instead of suppressing it, the arguments of the pamphlet needed to be counteracted by "intensified propaganda" by officials about the "true aims" of

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<sup>91</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Doreen and Michael Muskett, 22 March 1992.

<sup>92</sup> I.B. Tabata, 'The Rehabilitation Scheme: "the new fraud"' (All African Convention Committee, Cape Town, December 1945).

<sup>93</sup> For subsequent studies of the history of rehabilitation and betterment schemes, see Fred Hendricks, *The Pillars of Apartheid: Land Tenure, Rural Planning and the Chieftaincy* (Uppsala: Studia Sociologica Upsaliensa, 1990) and Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*.

<sup>94</sup> I.B. Tabata to George Padmore (London), 25 May 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>95</sup> List of names with amounts of 'The Rehabilitation Scheme' sent, n.d., I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

rehabilitation.<sup>96</sup> This did not stop the people of Mount Ayliff from rising up against the police and government officials in 1947 in the face of attempts to implement betterment.<sup>97</sup>

This was how Tabata began to take authorial responsibility for the publication of political analyses of state strategies, for insisting on an understanding of “the inescapable unity of oppression” and for advocating “the gigantic task of bringing together and unifying all the struggles of all sections of the Non-Europeans”.<sup>98</sup> Embracing the unambiguous position of authorship also entailed leaving the less exposed space of ‘collective ideas’ and taking on political risks personally. Indeed, when Tabata was arrested at Mount Ayliff in September 1948, a search of his car by the Kokstad police resulted in 62 copies of the pamphlet being found along with other documents and materials. These were confiscated by the police and handed in as evidence at Tabata’s trial. During the trial, the prosecution relied on extracts from the pamphlet as part of presenting their case against Tabata.<sup>99</sup> And when A.C. Jordan circulated his appeal for funds for Tabata’s case, the struggle biography that he disseminated included an exhortation for people to read Tabata’s pamphlet, which was available from him at “8d Post Free”.<sup>100</sup>

The risk of authorship was also financial. By claiming authorship of ‘The Rehabilitation Scheme’, Tabata nevertheless forewent any rights to royalties and financial proceeds. After all, the pamphlet had been written for the AAC, partly to raise funds for its organisational work. However, as author, it was Tabata who had to address financial difficulties that arose around the republication of ‘The Rehabilitation Scheme’ in the United States by Max Yergan, of the Council on African Affairs. After giving Yergan

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<sup>96</sup> ‘Letter from the Chairman of the Planning Committee, Libode, to the Chief Magistrate, Umtata, 8 February 1947 (Document 63), in Allison Drew, *South Africa’s Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*, Volume Two, p 315.

<sup>97</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, pp 182-3.

<sup>98</sup> I.B. Tabata, ‘The Rehabilitation Scheme: “the new fraud”’ (All African Convention Committee, Cape Town, December 1945).

<sup>99</sup> Record of proceedings of case, Rex vs Tabata (1948), I.B Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>100</sup> Circular Letter from A.C. Jordan, 27 September 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

permission for the pamphlet to be republished in the US, neither Tabata nor the AAC ever received a copy of the republished pamphlet, nor was anything earned for the AAC in spite of Yergan's knowledge of "the perpetual financial difficulties which organisations have to face".<sup>101</sup>

These issues of the responsibilities of authorship and the political and financial risks associated with these came to a head in 1950, when Tabata (and Taylor, of course) had prepared a manuscript on the history of the AAC for publication. In the writing of this history, "what was originally intended to be a pamphlet turned into a book". Tabata, of course, had been writing on the history of Convention, and on the historical evolution of African political formations since at least 1941.<sup>102</sup> He was at the centre of efforts to build the AAC and to theorise its historic significance. He was also concerned to find ways of winning over younger activists within Congress to the federal structure and the politics of non-collaboration. To this end, in 1948 he had spent time meeting with and corresponding (with Dora Taylor's assistance) with members of the Congress Youth League, treading a difficult path of advocating principled unity on a federal basis, while simultaneously trying to present a convincing argument about the historical limits of the ANC.<sup>103</sup>

The upshot of these efforts was a long, considered letter which Tabata wrote to Mandela (no doubt, with Taylor's assistance), where he tried to grasp the nettle of open criticism of Congress, which he couched within an argument about the evolutionary development of political forms. In his argument, Tabata was careful to draw a strategic distinction between the Youth League and Congress itself. "The African National Congress is

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<sup>101</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dr Max Yergan, Council on African Affairs, USA, n.d. (c.1946); I.B. Tabata to George Padmore (London), 25 May 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Max Yergan had been at Fort Hare in the 1930s, and was the AAC's Secretary for External Relations in 1937.

<sup>102</sup> See for example, See I.B. Tabata, 'Six Years of Convention' (Address delivered at the Conference of the All African Convention, December 16, 1941); I. Bangani, 'A dummy Unity Movement: Whither Xuma?', *The Torch* 14 April 1947.

<sup>103</sup> I.B. Tabata to A.P. Mda, 11 March 1948; N.R. Mandela to I.B. Tabata, 22 May 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Mandela had spent time in Cape Town with Tabata discussing the possibilities of cooperation between the AAC and ANC, and his distrust of the Communist Party provided a common basis for discussions with Tabata.

rooted in the past”, he suggested, “whereas the Youth League is the product of modern conditions with a modern outlook”. The creation of the AAC in 1935 had represented “a turning point in the organisational history of the African people”. The AAC’s argument for a federal basis of political unity would “remove competition”, “eliminate all rivalry between organisations” and provide a platform for a “unified leadership”. A “spirit of co-operation” would replace “mutual antagonisms”. Unfortunately, Tabata argued to Mandela, the ANC had accepted “the theory of inferiority and trusteeship, with all its political manifestations”.<sup>104</sup>

Near the end of his letter to Mandela, Tabata was moved to explain the modernity of principled unity in historical terms:

Principles are the backbone of any Movement. To put it another way: any organisation which is not founded on the rock of principles is a prey to every wind that blows. It was the failure to recognise this important fact that was primarily responsible for the fall of so many of our organisations in the past. We have had large organisations which were at first hailed with enthusiasm. But they have vanished away, leaving no trace behind.<sup>105</sup>

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A young man such as Mandela who wanted to enter politics needed to “establish the habit of basing his actions on principles”, Tabata argued. He needed to be ready “to swim against the stream”. Armed with principles, the young man would be “protected against the temptations of seeking popularity and ephemeral success”. Tabata ended his letter by suggesting that they both turn their “combined energies towards stamping out all opportunism and aim at the unity of the people on a principled basis.”<sup>106</sup>

This letter turned out quite a bit longer than intended, and came to be seen as a treatise on the history of political organisation and the question of unity. Indeed, Tabata soon

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<sup>104</sup> I.B. Tabata to N.R. Mandela, 16 June 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>105</sup> I.B. Tabata to N.R. Mandela, 16 June 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>106</sup> I.B. Tabata to N.R. Mandela, 16 June 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata ended by sending his regards to Mandela’s family, and expressed the hope that Mandela would be able to return to Cape Town “when we can exchange our views”.

began to include copies of the letter in his correspondence with his comrades and local cadres in different affiliates of the AAC, deploying it as a document which gave a much needed “historical survey” of political “schools of thought”, and the emergence of “a principled basis of struggle”.<sup>107</sup> In July and August 1948, among the people he sent it to were Nathaniel ‘Tshutsha’ Honono, Wycliffe Tsotsi, Leo Sihlali.<sup>108</sup> Tsotsi, in turn, had half a dozen copies made to be sent, with Tabata’s permission, to Livingstone Mqotsi “and his small group” at Fort Hare, and to others “in our camp” in Queenstown, Grahamstown and elsewhere. In addition, Tsotsi discussed it “with several people” in Port Elizabeth, as he saw it as a document “so full of important matters”.<sup>109</sup>

During the following year, Tabata also sent copies of his letter to Mandela to a number of young people, including members of the Congress Youth League. One such young activist was Robert Sobukwe, to whom he wrote congratulating him on the stand he took at the Cape ANC conference, defending the boycott of NRC elections in the face of the ANC leadership. In circulating the letter to Mandela outside the AAC, Tabata had removed Mandela’s name, and simply called it a letter ‘to a friend’.<sup>110</sup> During 1949, Tabata had been “inundated with correspondence from people eager to know more about Convention and what it stands for”. The copying and circulation of the letter to Mandela was a temporary means of responding to these requests. The letter, written as part of the politics of discussion and persuasion between individual activists, one of whom (Mandela) was almost ten years younger, was raised to the status of an organisational document that was widely circulated as a clarificatory text. But ultimately, it was seen as insufficient for the purposes of historical explanation and Tabata resolved to write “a fuller picture” of the history of Convention.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> I.B. Tabata to N. Honono (Nqabara Secondary School, Idutywa), 21 July 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>108</sup> I.B. Tabata to N. Honono (Nqabara Secondary School, Idutywa), 21 July 1948; W. Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 25 July 1948; L.Sihlali to I.B. Tabata, 6 August 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>109</sup> W. Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 25 July 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>110</sup> I.B. Tabata to R. Sobukwe, 13 August 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>111</sup> I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 25 July 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. In that same month, Tabata had received a letter from a student in Johannesburg, E.J. Vawda, who complained about the “paucity of material about the Convention”. What people knew was “merely a superficial idea”. He



During 1949 and 1950, amid mounting organisational work, Tabata spent some time researching and framing this history. In August 1949, he presented a lecture to the Forum Club on the history of the AAC,<sup>112</sup> and a week later, he wrote to senior African leaders to ask for assistance with information and chronology.<sup>113</sup> At the same time, Tabata and Dora Taylor started to write a narrative of the AAC's history, sometimes writing for almost 15 hours per day.<sup>114</sup> At the AAC Annual Conference held in Bloemfontein in mid-December 1949, it was recommended that the history that Tabata was preparing be taken over by the Convention and published by them.<sup>115</sup> By April 1950, the manuscript was completed, and Tabata made an entry in his pocket diary to mark the significance of this moment. "On this day, at 10.20 pm", he wrote, "*we finished the magnum opus, the history of the AAC*".<sup>116</sup> The manuscript was presented to Wycliffe Tsotsi, the AAC president, who expressed his appreciation. However, the AAC could not be expected to meet the steep costs of publication and printing, and Tabata agreed to take this financial responsibility on his own shoulders. Both Tsotsi and Tabata nevertheless wanted the book's cover to make it clear that it had been published by the AAC. This would serve "to "enhance the prestige of Convention", and create an association between the ideas and positions taken in the book and the politics of the AAC.<sup>117</sup>

In planning the manuscript's publication, Tabata also had to address the issues of political and financial risk. Through Ben Kies, Tabata sent a copy of the manuscript to

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asked Tabata for information so that his study circle could make themselves "perfectly clear" about the AAC's history. See E.J. Vawda to I.B. Tabata, 12 July 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>112</sup> I.B. Tabata, Pocket Diary, entry for 23 August 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>113</sup> See I.B. Tabata, Circular letter to selected African leaders (including D.D.T. Jabavu and Z.R. Mahabane, 1 September 1949; D.D.T. Jabavu to I.B. Tabata, 6 September 1949; Z.R. Mahabane to I.B. Tabata 115 September 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925

<sup>114</sup> I.B. Tabata, Pocket Diary, entry for 7 December 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; Ciraj Rassool, interview with Doreen and Michael Muskett, 22 March 1992.

<sup>115</sup> Minutes of the All-African Convention, 16-17 December 1949, Crowe-Rassool Papers.

<sup>116</sup> I.B. Tabata, Pocket Diary, entry for 21 April 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925 (my emphasis).

What was intended to be a "long article" became a book length study. See I.B. Tabata, Circular letter to selected African leaders, 1 September 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>117</sup> I.B. Tabata to Rev. Z.R. Mahabane, 1 June 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

George Padmore in London, and wrote to him asking his advice on publishing. By providing “a background to and an analysis of the political awakening of the people”, Tabata suggested that a study of this nature had not been written before. There was little hope of finding a publisher in South Africa, and with the AAC named as publisher, there was every chance that it might be affected by repressive legislation and banned. Tabata appealed to Padmore’s political comradeship and asked him to arrange for the book’s publication in Britain or the US, whatever he considered best. While making it clear that “neither the organisation nor myself can meet any expense of publishing”, Tabata asked Padmore to negotiate with any publisher “the business side of publication”.<sup>118</sup>

On financial matters, Tabata also made it clear to the Reverend Mahabane, the President of the NEUM and the AAC’s Vice-President that “if I have to raise the money, then I will have to take the proceeds as well”. He would have to borrow money at “great risk”. If the book were banned, he would be “financially ruined”, but this was a risk he was willing to take because “the publication of the book will benefit the movement in general”.<sup>119</sup> Tabata, of course, was not employed, and had received a small stipend from the WPSA for his full-time political work.<sup>120</sup> It is not surprising that the question of earning some money from his political publishing was raised as an issue. By December 1950, Tabata received the first 66 copies of the printed books, without covers, which had been typeset and printed by Baruch Hirson’s People’s Press, and facilitated by Seymour Papert, Tabata’s protégé in the Progressive Forum in Johannesburg. Tabata was very disappointed with the quality of the print, but he wanted to ensure that there was as little delay as possible. In that same month, he arranged for the covers to be printed by Victory Press in Johannesburg, and at the end of May 1951, Tabata handed 730 books over for covers to be added. He wanted the cover to “catch the eye”, and although

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<sup>118</sup> I.B. Tabata to George Padmore, 25 May 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Padmore had contact with the NEUM through Ben Kies and *The Torch*, which in the previous year, had published an article by him on racial abuse in Britain. See *The Torch*, 18 July 1949.

<sup>119</sup> I.B. Tabata to Rev. Z.R. Mahabane, 1 June 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>120</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Jane Gool, 25-28 January 1991;

“colour and strength” were important, a hard cover was out of the question.<sup>121</sup> Soon, copies of the book went on sale, with all moneys returned directly to Tabata.

The circulation of the book was seen as providing a theoretical and historical explanation of the basis of the AAC’s federal structure and argument for principled unity. CATA expressed its appreciation for “the first book, in the long history of South Africa, to be written by a Non-European, of the Non-Europeans, from a Non-European liberatory point of view”. Tabata went beyond Plaatje’s writings in expressing “not only the sufferings of the people”, but also “the aspirations of a reawakened people”. Whereas Plaatje’s work reflected a time when “Non-European intellectuals were still ideological slaves of the British Empire and of White Liberalism”, Tabata’s work reflected the “new age” of “an entire people ... breaking with the mental slavery of the past in order to throw off their material chains”. The book represented “completely independent thinking”, based “exclusively on the needs and aspirations of the oppressed peoples”, without “the faintest trace of dependence on the reigning ideas of even the most subtle thinkers of the World Herrenvolk”.<sup>122</sup>

Indeed, Tabata saw this book as a manual of principled resistance methods, complete with historical explanations of the significance of the AAC, outlines of political obstacles and forms of disruption, and discussions of “new methods of struggle”.<sup>123</sup> In creating this ‘manual of struggle’, he felt he had “perhaps exaggeratedly emphasised the consciousness and clarity of the AAC”. His generation, he argued, “had started at a disadvantage”, with “no body of literature, no set of principles to guide us in our political struggles”. They had “to start from scratch”. With *The Awakening*, he suggested,

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<sup>121</sup> I.B. Tabata, Diary entry for 9 December 1950; I.B. Tabata to Seymour Papert, 12 May 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; Interview with Baruch Hirson, 11 September 1991.

<sup>122</sup> *Teachers’ Vision*, Vol 18, No 4, December 1951, p 12. A review of Tabata’s book was headed ‘A Historic Book by Mr. I.B. Tabata’.

<sup>123</sup> I.B. Tabata, *The All African Convention: The Awakening of a People*, Cape Town: All African Convention, 1950, pp 89, 101.

it would be possible to fulfil “one of our most important tasks”, namely, to “save the youth the colossal wastage of the trial and error method”.<sup>124</sup>

It would be fair to argue that *The Awakening* became one of the most discussed and debated political texts during the 1950s. It was keenly read and reviewed in reading groups and discussion clubs associated with the liberation movement. For some it was a guide to the principles and strategies of political organising. Enver Hassim described in 1990 how those around him had met in their study group “to discuss it, chapter by chapter”. It “enriched us ... in ways I can never convey”. With Tabata’s writing and speeches, Hassim suggested, there was “a vision of mankind and a comprehension of history that will never be matched”. Tabata was “a colossus of his time” and “the whole world is richer for his being”.<sup>125</sup> The codification of the ideas and political strategies of the movement in the form of a struggle manual now bore the name of a single leader as their author. And this author had demonstrated his mettle in the field two years before, when he survived and overcame arrest and a trial at Mount Ayliff.

The release of *The Awakening* under Tabata’s name, intended to be an educational text for the youth, gave Tabata leadership lustre. The book was “the product of a rich political experience”,<sup>126</sup> the *Teachers’ Vision* declared.

For every conscious non-European knows the role which Mr. Tabata himself has played throughout the long history of the Convention. Only one who has helped to make this history could describe and analyse it thoroughly, with a grasp of all nuances.<sup>127</sup>

The circulation of the book served to consolidate and extend the pool of young activists who entered Tabata’s orbit of influence as disciples, and confirmed Tabata’s position as mentor, teacher and theoretician-in-chief.

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<sup>124</sup> I.B. Tabata to Rev. Z.R. Mahabane, 1 June 1950; I.B. Tabata to George Padmore, 25 May, 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>125</sup> Enver Hassim to Jane Gool, c.October 1990, read by Jane Gool as part of my interview with her, 25-28 January 1991.

<sup>126</sup> *Teachers’ Vision*, Vol 18, No 4, December 1951, p 17.

<sup>127</sup> *Teachers’ Vision*, Vol 18, No 4, December 1951, p 17.

Elsewhere on the left, Tabata's book was subjected to trenchant criticism for its "amazing preoccupation with the Federal Structure". The Forum Club, associated with the remnants of the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA), the other Trotskyist faction that had emerged out of the old Lenin Club, provided a record of its lectures and debates in its journal *Discussion*. It was in this forum that former FIOSA member, Arthur Davids, presented a lengthy critique of *The Awakening* for its propagation of a "federal fetish". Tabata himself was slammed for failing to turn his back on the Three Pillar Structure, a "concession to racialism", of which he had been "the architect", and for failing to understand that the boycott was "a tactic and not a principle".<sup>128</sup>

The Forum Club published Davids' lecture as a "basis for a general discussion" and committed itself to arranging a few meetings to discuss the contents of Davids' review. Tabata's book was "the first book which seriously [undertook] the study of the problems of our movement", and it was "of equal significance" that "a prominent participant in the democratic movement" had written it. Davids' critical review had "shown young people entering the movement how to deal with such an important book by objective criticism [and] separating the cheese from the chalk". Everyone was invited to present his or her views on the book and on the critical review to the open meetings of the Forum Club.<sup>129</sup> Both sympathetic and critical public reviews of the value and merits of the book thus served to confirm Tabata's prominent public profile as author, public intellectual and political leader, whose ideas required serious consideration.

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<sup>128</sup> Arthur Davids, 'A Critical Analysis of I.B. Tabata' Book "The All African Convention or The Awakening of a People"', *Discussion*, Vol 1, No 2, 1951, pp 21-38. Tabata and FIOSA activists had disagreed in public before, at the 6<sup>th</sup> Unity Conference held in Cape Town in 1948, when FIOSA attempted to express its opposition to the federal structure as the organisational basis of unity. While the conference dismissed FIOSA's unitary position, Tabata went further to argue that FIOSA "performed the same tasks as the Communist Party and other enemies of the Unity Movement – they were disrupters of Unity". See Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> Unity Conference, 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> March 1948, Rondebosch Town Hall (Issued by the NEUM), Crowe-Rassool Papers.

<sup>129</sup> *Discussion*, Vol 1, No 2, 1951, editorial comment; pp 50-51 (Chairman's comments).

In the underground WPSA, however, the publication of *The Awakening* and the assertion by Tabata of individual authorship in the public domain were seen as an expression of impertinence and individual ambition, and were deemed to be a deviation from centralised party authority and party discipline. Tabata had dared to write a book without consulting Yudel Burlak, who usually provided party positions on key questions. Tabata had “dared to voice in [the book] his own opinions without consulting the party”.<sup>130</sup> While the WPSA ceased to exist from sometime in 1950 or soon thereafter, it seems that this had been one of the conflicts that precipitated the growing public rift in the Unity Movement through the 1950s.<sup>131</sup> In the meantime, with Dora Taylor’s assistance, Tabata began to assert an independent locus of authority from that formerly provided by the party. He also began to shift away from a strategic immersion in a collective leadership and deliberately put himself forward as author of political histories, principles and strategies without the veil of the pseudonym. This marked a new politics of personhood and leadership in which authorship served as the precursor of biography.



Once the threshold of collective leadership had been crossed and the political practice of named, individuated authorship had been embraced as a deliberate strategy and calculated risk, Tabata could not go back to the era of commitment to policy and collective authority. The 1950s were a time of organisational realignment in the NEUM, with the emergence of SOYA and other formations, such as the Progressive Forum in Johannesburg, and other structures in Durban, which were seen as loyal to Tabata. Between 1952 and 1956, a sequence of formal and informal discussions and meetings

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<sup>130</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Jane Gool, 25-28 January 1991.

<sup>131</sup> Jane Gool’s memory was that the WPSA ceased to exist “around the time of the Group Areas Act”, when a suggestion was made to divide the party into black and white sections, which would meet on separate days. This suggestion resulted in a walkout by some including Tabata and Jane Gool, and seems to have partly been the cause of the party’s dissolution (Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Jane Gool, 25-28 January 1991). By then the party had seen a number of escalating internal conflicts and tensions involving a ‘ganging up’ of Burlak and Ben Kies against Tabata, and attempts within the party to control Tabata’s written expression. From 1945, Burlak and Kies “wanted a hand” in *The Voice*. Tabata, wrote Taylor “yielded to their egoism” (I.B Tabata Diary entries for 20 February 1944; 2 June 1944; 6 June 1944; Annotated Comments by Dora Taylor at the back of handwritten version of *The Voice of the AAC*, No 3, April 1945, I.B Tabata Collection, BC 925). During the 1950s, these conflicts manifested themselves publicly in the NEUM and its affiliates.



occurred in which Tabata was subjected to a political enquiry. Amid the programme of public meetings in 1951-52, which mobilised people to boycott the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival, special meetings of the NEF were convened to discuss Tabata, and in his pocket diary for 1952, Tabata noted that in the NEF, an “incipient conflict” had reared its head.<sup>132</sup>

In the midst of internal strife and in the aftermath of the campaign against the Van Riebeeck Festival, Tabata published - again under his own name - a pamphlet on the boycott, one of the most contentious questions that divided different political tendencies. This was a follow-up to *The Awakening* in presenting an explanation of “the meaning of the Boycott weapon, its effectiveness and ... proper use”, the “positive part” it played in “Building the Nation”.<sup>133</sup> Once again, the pamphlet was published under Tabata’s name, with the AAC named as the publisher. Constituting a second manual of resistance methods, Tabata considered it necessary to outline the proper terms of the boycott, as the opponents of the NEUM had

sneered at it, pretended to adopt it in order ... to debase it and render it ineffectual, and finally they have misrepresented it to the people with the express purpose of making it appear meaningless and ridiculous.<sup>134</sup>

One of the significant elements of Tabata’s 1952 pamphlet was an analysis of the fear of the boycott on the part of intellectuals, who often “stand guard over the population as policemen in the interests of their masters”. As a “specific application of the policy of Non-Collaboration”, the boycott exposed the “voluntary acquiescence on the part of the

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<sup>132</sup> I.B. Tabata Pocket Diary entries, 17 & 21 January 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. The people whom Tabata felt were leading the accusations against him were S.A. Jayiya and Ben Kies. Later, Tabata would also name Hosea Jaffe as one of the protagonists. See I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 6 February 1952; 23 July 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Jaffe, of course, led the political critique against Tabata at the time of his banning (see earlier). See also a copy of a letter from Soyan, G.S. Govindasamy (Fort Hare), complaining of “nonsensical, babyish political backbiting” on the part of Victor Wessels, who had approached him at the TLSA conference in Port Elizabeth in June 1953, and who had tried to “create in [him] an attitude of mind against Soya” (Letter from G.S. Govindasamy, 25 July 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925).

<sup>133</sup> I.B. Tabata, ‘The Boycott as Weapon of Struggle’, published by the All African Convention Committee (W.P.), Cape Town, June 1952.

<sup>134</sup> I.B. Tabata, ‘The Boycott as Weapon of Struggle’, p 2.

quisling intellectuals”, Tabata argued.<sup>135</sup> Three months after the publication of ‘The Boycott’, Tabata wrote to Seymour Papert about its effects:

In one district, the delegates from the CATA Conference were selling the ‘Boycott’, for which, by the way, there was a great demand. Some headmen came running to the Commissioner asking if anything could be done to ban such literature that was ‘influxing’ the district. That gave me to feel that it hits where it is sore.<sup>136</sup>

By using the word ‘influx’ to describe the headmen’s complaints about ‘The Boycott’, Tabata was, of course, referencing state policies of control over the movement of African people between rural and urban areas. At the same time, this was a reference to his own pamphlet from 1944 which had critiqued these policies. This also represented a suggestion that Tabata had begun to think about his own writings as constituting a corpus, a written body of coherent political thinking.

When Tabata was banned in 1956, among the alleged statements gathered by the agencies of the state and relied on by the Minister of Justice for the decision, were extracts from his writings. As part of the surveillance of his political activities, the state had deemed at least 29 lines from ‘The Rehabilitation Scheme’ and 22 lines from ‘The Boycott’ as evidence of furthering “the achievement of the objects of Communism”, of “vilifying the majority of the European inhabitants of the Union as oppressors” or of “inciting the non-Europeans to resist”.<sup>137</sup> Read together with a compilation of statements allegedly made by Tabata at meetings across the country between 1948 and 1955, this compilation of extracts from Tabata’s resistance writing and speeches by the apartheid state represented a malicious, unauthorised anthology of Tabata’s political and intellectual labour. As part of a perverse, repressive biography, the state had turned Tabata’s words, uttered and written in his own name, on himself by banning him from gatherings, restricting his movements and attempting to isolate him. This had the effect of contributing to the process of Tabata’s individuation, and added to the idea that

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<sup>135</sup> I.B. Tabata, ‘The Boycott as Weapon of Struggle’, pp 18-19.

<sup>136</sup> I.B. Tabata to Seymour Papert, 19 September 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>137</sup> Acting Secretary of Justice to Lawyer (name erased), 28 May 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

Tabata, as an individual, bore a political authority that the state feared. As we saw earlier, his banning marked a threshold for a biographical imperative when Tabata's political life began to be narrated in protest meetings and conferences.

But Tabata was not entirely isolated. He had moved into a newly rented house with Jane Gool in Milan Street, on the edge of District Six, in 1953 after the closure in the previous year of the African section of the Stakesby Lewis Hostels, where Tabata had lived for many years.<sup>138</sup> Representing the first time that Tabata lived together with a partner, Tabata and Jane Gool created a home together, where Tabata lived out his partial isolation between 1956 and 1961, tending to his garden in the shadow of Devil's Peak. It is also there where Tabata (and Gool), who had begun to adopt the position of elders, received visits from young members of the movement - who often came in pairs - such as Zulei Christopher and Enver Hassim, Elma Carrollisen and Karrim Essack, Neville Alexander and Gwen Wilcox.<sup>139</sup> He also kept in touch with his comrades and protégés, such as Wycliffe Tsotsi, R.S. Canca, Leo Sihlali and Seymour Papert by correspondence.<sup>140</sup> From about October 1957, with fears of surveillance, Tabata's political correspondents were asked to keep in touch with him through Dora Taylor.<sup>141</sup> These letters which she received on Tabata's behalf marked a phase when Taylor became his proxy, marking another level of intellectual and political partnership, and a moment of deeper co-mingling of their political labours.

Tabata's communication with his comrades was especially pressing for him when "a section of the leadership", especially those associated with the NEF and other Fellowships, sought "to take advantage of [his] disablement", by directing "a web of

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<sup>138</sup> I.B. Tabata Pocket Diary, entries for 10 July 1952 (departure from the Stakesby Lewis Hostel) and 18 May 1953 (move into 8 Milan Street, Cape Town); I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. During the 10 months in between, Tabata travelled extensively, especially in the Eastern Cape and lived with Amina ('Minnie') Gool, Jane Gool's sister, in Balmoral Street in District Six.

<sup>139</sup> I.B. Tabata Pocket Diary, entries for 3, 12 & 14 January 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>140</sup> See for example, I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 18 March 1957; 30 May 1957; to Leo Sihlali, 14 February 1957, to R.S. Canca ('Mlamleli'), 20 March 1957; to Seymour Papert, 29 November 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. These letters were often drafted in Dora Taylor's script and then typed.

<sup>141</sup> See for example, Leo Sihlali to Dora Taylor, 4 October 1957; 22 December 1957; 24 August 1958; A.K. Tom to Dora Taylor, 20 January 1958; 4 June 1958

fabrications, gossip and slander” against him, and these had begun to filter into other bodies, such as the TLSA. They were also “most zealous in enforcing the ban, and had also “instituted an absolute boycott of the banned individual”. Tabata identified Hosea Jaffe as having led this campaign against the AAC committee for having allegedly been “infiltrated with liberal influences, tribalism, racialism and nationalism”. Jaffe had accused the AAC leadership of being “the Nkrumahs and Nehrus of South Africa, and champions of speculators”. Amid these charges, Tabata was accused of becoming, for some, a “sage, seer or father-confessor”.<sup>142</sup> It was necessary, the “Jaffeites” contended, “to ‘save’ the youth” from Tabata’s “‘evil’ influences and to rescue them from becoming his ‘stooges’”.<sup>143</sup>

1957 saw the formation of Prometheus Printers and Publishers (P.P.P) by Tabata’s supporters in Durban, a move necessitated by a realisation that the Torch Publishing Company could not be relied upon as a medium of public expression.<sup>144</sup> In addition, in the midst of crumbling NEUM structures, in July 1958 those activists in the AAC grouped around Tabata launched a new newspaper, *Ikhwezi Lomso* (*Morning or Rising Star*), in the absence of a press that they could trust. The newspaper was understood as an essential “umbrella” and an “urgent” conduit for organising and mobilisation, and was “addressed especially to the peasants”.<sup>145</sup> It would also be an organ independent of Ben Kies and the ‘Jaffeites’, “capable of publicising and criticising their actions” and

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<sup>142</sup> I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Members (Draft in Dora Taylor’s script), September 1956; I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Friends, 26 October 1956; AAC Committee to The President, The Teachers’ League of South Africa (written by Tabata), 15 November 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Among the issues that needed Tabata’s attention were the perceived attack by Jaffe and his supporters on SOYA (which unlike the NEF, was a “political body organised on a Union-wide scale”), different interpretations of the “Land Question” (in which Jaffe attacked the AAC’s demand for “the right of people to acquire or buy land anywhere outside ... the Reserves”), Jaffe’s “propagation of the English language” and his reference to African languages as “dying tribal languages”.

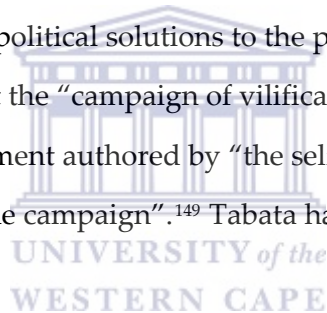
<sup>143</sup> Extract from letter from I.B. Tabata to A.C. (Joe) Jordan, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>144</sup> I.B. Tabata to Wyckliffe Tsotsi, 30 May 1957; Leo Sihlali to A.C. Jordan (?), 3 June 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>145</sup> I.B. Tabata to Wyckliffe Tsotsi, 5 March 1958; I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 18 March 1958; Annotation made by Dora Taylor on face of untitled article prepared by I.B. Tabata for *Ikhwezi Lomso*, July 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. From its establishment, *Ikhwezi* was owned and published by a private company, *Ikhwezi Lomso* (Pty) Ltd, whose directors and proprietors were Nathaniel Honono, Wyckliffe Tsotsi and Sihlali. Sihlali was the editor. A substantial amount of reportage on national events was in Xhosa.

making them “more careful about what they do”.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, some of the details and organisational consequences of these fratricidal accusations and counter-accusations openly entered the pages of *Ikhwezi*, with reports about plots against the AAC by *The Torch* and expulsions from SOYA and the AAC.<sup>147</sup> From October 1959, the printing of the sixth issue of *Ikhwezi* shifted from the Victory Press in Johannesburg to P.P.P in Durban. From September 1961, P.P.P was designated as the proprietors of a new newspaper, *Ilizwi LeSizwe (The Voice of the Nation)*, which replaced *Ikhwezi* under escalating conditions of repression, and in the era immediately after the birth of APDUSA.

Under these circumstances - of being banned, and of being attacked politically from within the NEUM - Tabata continued to write political analyses and position papers. Although he could not participate in meetings, some of these analytical interventions took the form of organisational letters analysing the internal conflicts that had burst forth, and attempting to find political solutions to the problems of “Jaffeism”.<sup>148</sup> By 1959, Tabata was forced to confront the “campaign of vilification” directly, especially in response to the lengthy document authored by “the self-styled ‘foundation members’”, which marked “the peak of the campaign”.<sup>149</sup> Tabata had expressed the view that it was



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<sup>146</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 27 May 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata asked about the due date of delivery of the Sihlalis’ baby. His reference to the “new baby” may also have been a means of secretly asking about the new newspaper venture, and what its publication due date was.

<sup>147</sup> *Ikhwezi Lomso*, Vol 2, No 4, February 1959, p 4; Vol 2, No 5, May 1959, pp 3, 4,6; Vol 3 No 1, February 1960, pp 1-4. It seems that the December 1958 AAC Conference at Edendale was a watershed, with the withdrawal of the “fraternal delegation” of the National Anti-CAD, after it accused the AAC leadership of “retreating” from the 10-Point Programme. The Anti-CAD, in turn, largely absented itself from the December 1959 NEUM Conference, also held at Edendale, and was accused inter alia of being deserters and has having defected. These tensions also resulted in operational difficulties in other structures such as the Head Unity Committee and the Working Committee. Part of the problem, it seemed, was the refusal of the Anti-CAD leadership to call any conferences for a number of years. In the meantime, an AAC Vigilance Committee was formed in January 1961 around Cadoc Kobus, who had sided with Ben Kies against Tabata in these disputes. See *The Torch*, 1 February 1961.

<sup>148</sup> I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Members (Draft in Dora Taylor’s script), September 1956; I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Friends, 26 October 1956; AAC Committee to The President, The Teachers’ League of South Africa (written by Tabata), 15 November 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>149</sup> ‘The Wreckers of Unity at Work: who is the National Anti-CAD Committee?’, Issued by the Secretary, All-African Convention Committee (WP), n.d (c.1959). Tabata wrote this in reply to ‘What Has Happened in the Non-European Unity Movement?’ (1959), which was authored by R.E. Viljoen, S.A. Jayiya, C.M. Kobus and B.M. Kies, who had styled themselves as ‘foundation members’. ‘The Wreckers of Unity’ was also published in shortened form in *Ikhwezi Lomso*, Vol 3, No 1, February 1960.

no less than the life of the Unity Movement itself that [was] being discussed and undermined”, and indeed that “its fate” hinged “on the outcome of present disputes”.<sup>150</sup>

*Ikhwezi* also became a vehicle for Tabata’s continued written analyses, and he wrote a series of articles in the first six issues under the broad title, ‘The national situation: the real problems in the liberatory movement’. The intention was to give readers “a general picture of the struggles of the peasants against oppressive measures”, and “to show the manner in which the national crisis affects the different groups of political parties”.<sup>151</sup>

*Ikhwezi* tended to come out irregularly, and Tabata spent the entire duration of its existence pestering the editor, Leo Sihlali, with letters about the value of its timely publication in building political capital. Tabata concerned himself with the health of the newspaper as the medium of a reconstituted collective will, and with his own polemical writing once again published anonymously.

Tabata’s banning was also an opportunity for more extended analytical writing about the pressing issues of South African society, and in the late 1950s, he began to do some reflection about the system of Bantu education that had emerged as policy in the 1950s.<sup>152</sup> In 1957, Tabata prepared a text on university education that was premised upon an analysis of Bantu education policy of “regimentation and indoctrination” and “the debasement of education”. In 1958, Tabata replied under a pseudonym to a letter from UCT’s Professor A.H. Murray published in *The Observer* in Britain and reprinted in the *Cape Argus* in 1958, which had suggested that Bantu education was acceptable to Africans and “indeed that they had begged for it”. In his letter, Tabata challenged Murray by asserting that “not a single well-known African organisation of the African people [had] asked for this thing”. He reminded Murray that CATA had submitted a memorandum to the Commission, which had been “drawn up by a body of African

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<sup>150</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 7 May 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

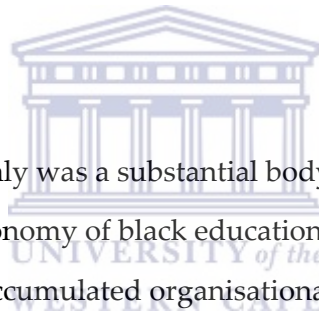
<sup>151</sup> *Ikhwezi Lomso*, Vol 1, No 1, July 1958, p 4; Vol 1 No 2, September 1958, p 5.

<sup>152</sup> See I.B. Tabata, ‘University Education in South Africa’, text prepared for publication overseas, 23 April 1957; A Jericho (I.B. Tabata) to The Editor, *The Observer*, 23 April 1958, copy in I.B. Tabata Collection, BC. 925. Tabata also informed readers of *The Observer* that Murray achieved notoriety for having given evidence for the Crown at the Treason Trial.



teachers qualified to speak on matters of education” had received “pubic acclaim among the African people”.<sup>153</sup>

In CATA in the 1950s, there had been a concerted effort to analyse the political intentions of the emerging education system. In addition to submitting a memorandum to the Eiselen Commission, its 1952 CATA conference devoted a significant amount of time to discussing its implications.<sup>154</sup> Livingstone Mqotsi had devoted substantial attention to researching and analysing the emerging system, and had presented a couple of formal addresses, first at the 1953 CATA Conference and at the 1954 AAC Conference, both held in Queenstown.<sup>155</sup> Tabata had participated in these discussions, particularly about how teachers should respond to the new system, and how problematic it may be to advocate a boycott of schooling under the emerging system of Bantu education. In addition, AAC affiliates produced pamphlets and arranged study circles and lectures on the Bantu Education Act.<sup>156</sup>



By the late 1950s, there certainly was a substantial body of research based inside the movement on the political economy of black education policy. Drawing undoubtedly upon these discussions and accumulated organisational knowledge, Tabata completed a manuscript on the system of Bantu education in September 1958, no doubt having been assisted by Dora Taylor once again. In April 1959, he received advanced copies of his booklet, *Education for Barbarism*, by airfreight from the publishers, and the first consignment was delivered in May. In spite of being banned, the booklet was published

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<sup>153</sup> The Eiselen Commission Report was published in 1951, its recommendations made into law in 1953, and it was put into full effect from 1955. See Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940-1990*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999, p 42.

<sup>154</sup> Programme of the CATA Conference, Cape Town, June 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. The TLSA also submitted a memorandum on African education to the Commission.

<sup>155</sup> Livingstone Mqotsi, ‘Coloured Education Commission’ (An Address Delivered at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference of the Cape African Teachers’ Association, Queenstown, 24-27 June 1953, I.B. Tabata Collecton, BC 925; ‘Politics of Eiselen/De Vos Malan Schooling’, in Minutes of All African Convention Conference, Queenstown, December 1954, Crowe-Rassool Papers.

<sup>156</sup> See for example reports from affiliates in Minutes of All African Convention Conference, Queenstown, December 1954. Among the activities reported on were a Progressive Forum pamphlet and lectures by Jane Gool. See also Leo Sihlali, AAC Secretarial Report, 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

under his own name. The terms of his banning did not proscribe open written expression. There was no need to conceal or refrain from a claim on authorship. He was already personally the subject of repressive attention. And Tabata did indeed think of himself as an author of works, and referred to *Education for Barbarism* as his “Magnum Opus Minimum”.<sup>157</sup>

This time, there was clear evidence of a commercial element in the publication, and a few weeks before its release, Tabata received a cheque for £100.<sup>158</sup> A formal publisher, Prometheus Printers and Publishers, which was a commercial operation in spite of its close connections with the movement, published the booklet.<sup>159</sup> The inclusion of the phrase “All Rights Reserved” opposite the title page made it clear that private intellectual property rights and copyright were being claimed. Tabata and Dora Taylor kept in touch with Neville Alexander, who was studying in Germany, about a German translation and edition, and Alexander was also interested to ensure the booklet’s distribution in Britain.<sup>160</sup> There were also indications that the American publishing company, Knopf, may have been interested in an overseas edition. Tabata and Prometheus entered into a formal contract over rights, obligations and mechanisms in the event of any further releases of *Education for Barbarism*. In the meantime, the book was sold through bookshops and mainly through an order form system.<sup>161</sup>

In spite of – and, in some ways, because of – the isolation of his ban, and following on from the processes of individuation set in motion by his other publications in the 1950s,

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<sup>157</sup> I.B. Tabata, *Pocket Diary*, entry for 5 September 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata’s 1957 text on university apartheid was also incorporated.

<sup>158</sup> I.B. Tabata, *Pocket Diary*, entries for 26 March, 13 April and 2 May 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata was certainly concerned about how he would earn a living during his ban (I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 20 March 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925).

<sup>159</sup> I.B. Tabata, *Education for Barbarism: Bantu Education in South Africa*, Durban: Prometheus Printers and Publishers, 1959. One of the proprietors of PPP was AAC Assistant Treasurer, Enver Hassim, whose partner, Zulei Christopher, was Jane Gool’s niece. In his correspondence, Tabata addressed them jointly as ‘Zulenver’.

<sup>160</sup> I.B. Tabata to Neville Alexander, 4 December 1958; Neville Alexander to Dora Taylor, 11, 24 & 25 May 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Taylor spent the period April-August 1959 in England.

<sup>161</sup> I.B. Tabata to Enver Hassim, 16 March 1959; Zulei Christopher to Dora Taylor (in England), 27 May 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

*Education for Barbarism* marked Tabata's unambiguous, commercial entry into the world of authorship and publishing. This time the publication was not *directly* in the service of a collective cause or geared towards building a national movement, as had been the case before. Not only was no political organisation mentioned as having some interest in the publication, but also at no stage in the contents of the book did Tabata advocate a particular programme of political mobilisation, as was the case with other publications. This was Tabata the author engaged in social analysis and public scholarship at a level removed from direct party political objectives. No doubt this was partly because of deepening repressive circumstances, and because his ban prevented him from advocating political action. But this was also because Tabata was now free from the controls of collective leadership, and felt able to stake a claim to an authority as a writer and intellectual in his own right.

Indeed, John H MacCallum Scott, a member of the editorial and production office at the Pall Mall Press in Essex in England, which was preparing an edition of *Education for Barbarism* for release in Britain, wrote to Tabata in 1960 that through his writing, it was now possible "to give the 'feel' of South Africa ... from the point of view of an educated and cultured African".<sup>162</sup> No sooner had Tabata, the author, emerged in his own individuated name, than his authorship niche was being fashioned in the domain of professional publishing. And as much as he was opening up to individually authored analytical writing, the publishing industry was defining, determining and limiting the potential of his written expression as presenting a 'cultured' African view. Scott reported that the Americans were reluctant to bring out a version of *Education for Barbarism* because of its modest length. Instead they had enquired about whether Tabata would be willing to write "a real book", in "the same vein and style" about "the life of a colored man in South Africa in all its aspects, not just about education". Scott put this proposal to Tabata, saying that such a book "should not be too polemical". Instead it should be "an objective, straightforward account of conditions, embracing education, opportunity, social life, politics, etc., etc." For this, Tabata was offered £100, 10% royalty

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<sup>162</sup> John H. MacCallum Scott, Pall Mall Press Limited (Essex, Britain) to I.B. Tabata, 27 June 1960, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

on the English published price, “plus a substantial proportion of what is paid for the American edition.”<sup>163</sup>

Inside the South African edition, Tabata had been named as the author of other works, and a list comprising *The Awakening*, ‘The Boycott’ and ‘The Rehabilitation Scheme’ was given opposite the title page. In May 1959, Zulei Christopher reported to Dora Taylor – who was in England for four months - that a party had been held “to launch the new book of ‘the author of many books’”. Speeches had been made by Tabata himself and by “our people from the country”, including one which “commended Tabata for having once again added to our literature in spite of his ban”. The celebration of the booklet’s release was an event that honoured Tabata as someone who “was able to overcome ... the effects [of the ban] and make yet another contribution to our struggle”.<sup>164</sup> The May 1959 issue of *Ikhwezi* advertised Tabata’s booklet for sale and promoted it as “a penetrating analysis of Bantu Education”, and in October 1961, *Ilizwi LeSizwe* announced that a “limited number” were still available.<sup>165</sup> In June 1959, while still in England, Dora Taylor passed on “information” about Tabata to an academic, who she had identified as a potential reviewer of the booklet.<sup>166</sup> Authorship was indeed a harbinger of Tabata’s biography. In addition, the promotion of Tabata as author in his own name was a prelude to promoting him as a political leader of the movement, and not so much as the ‘cultured African’ social commentator that Pall Mall Press had hoped for.

As if to demonstrate that his main commitment was to projecting a collective political vision and rebuilding a political movement, Tabata spent two weeks in July and the beginning of August 1960 writing about the politics of the Pan-Africanist Congress “adventure” that had “exploded on the South African scene”. He had felt “teased by the idea” of doing so. He felt that “so many people” had been “swept off their feet” by “recent events” that “an assessment” was necessary. As a pamphlet, he felt it “could

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<sup>163</sup> John H. MacCallum Scott, Pall Mall Press Limited (Essex, Britain) to I.B. Tabata, 27 June 1960, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>164</sup> Zulei Christopher to Dora Taylor, 27 May 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>165</sup> *Ikhwezi Lomso*, vol 2, No 5, May 1959; *Ilizwi LeSizwe*, Vol 1, No 2, 18 October 1961.

<sup>166</sup> Dora Taylor to Professor Tingsten, 10 June 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

fulfil the same function" as 'The Boycott' and 'The Rehabilitation Scheme'. Tabata made an offer that it could be published by the AAC, which had "the first claim to it". Tabata did not mind if it was "published as from an individual and sold to the public". In any event, he felt that because he was "isolated", he was "at a disadvantage", and needed "comments and recommendations" in case he had missed "the precise ebb and flow, the accents of the people". 'The Pan-African Congress Adventure in Perspective' was published as a NEUM pamphlet, and was formally issued by its new president, Leo Sihlali in September 1960.<sup>167</sup>

The pamphlet presented a historical understanding and critical analysis of the "ad hoc" politics of the PAC anti-pass campaign and subsequent events. "The whole conduct" of the PAC "adventure" had showed "not only reckless irresponsibility", but also an "ignorance" that had made them "pawns" in the hands of the liberals. The build up of stay-aways, days of mourning and marches had been followed by a ruthless "reign of terror" on the people by the police and the military under a state of emergency. In Cape Town the liberals had persuaded 30 000 Africans to retreat quietly to the locations, where a "bitter lesson" was learnt that a location was "nothing less than a concentration camp". The state violence that had been unleashed was underplayed in the press, and "the heroes of yesterday" were "stripped, humiliated and returned to their ignominious anonymity". In this situation, the liberals, "as usual, excelled themselves" in "a veritable orgy of charitable activity", sweeping the population "into a paroxysm of trivial activity" and creating "a paralysis of mental activity".<sup>168</sup>

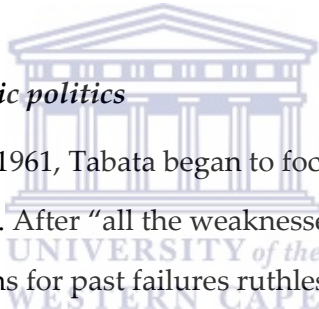
The pamphlet ended with an outline of the lessons learnt and the challenges for political organising. These were lessons about the futility of "the ad hoc form of struggle", and the opportunism of "using the people to achieve ... sectional aims", and the pointlessness of "sporadic, localised, isolated and sectional ventures". In place of this,

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<sup>167</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 2 August 1960; 'The Pan African Congress Adventure in Perspective', A Non-European Unity Movement Pamphlet, September 1960 (Issued by the NEUM, 1 September 1960), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. When this pamphlet was issued, the printers had erred in creating a cover page with an incorrect title, 'The Pan African Congress Venture in Retrospect'.

<sup>168</sup> 'The Pan African Congress Adventure in Perspective'.

the pamphlet put emphasised the necessity of “pooling the resources of the Nation-wide organisation under the guidance of the unified leadership of the National Movement”. And the leadership needed “to stress unceasingly the sustained national aspect of the struggle”. Part of the lessons learnt applied also to “the renegades” who had “turned their backs” on the NEUM, and who had “organised campaigns of slander” and organised “disruptive activities”. After having “[flung] swear-words, accusations of ‘Africanists’, etc. at the core of the Movement”, when “the real Pan-Africanists” came along, “they did not know what [had] hit them”. They “had lost anchorage” and had become “political flotsam and jetsam”, sent “into the political wilderness” by the new crisis. The people needed to be in a position “to weigh and discriminate in choosing their leadership”. The tasks of the leadership were “to bring this knowledge to the masses” and to teach the people “the meaning of organisation and all that is involved in belonging to it”.<sup>169</sup>



### *Presidentialism and biographic politics*

As soon as his ban expired in 1961, Tabata began to focus on rebuilding and restructuring the organisation. After “all the weaknesses in the Movement were thoroughly probed and reasons for past failures ruthlessly exposed”, a conference called by the NEUM’s executive of the movement’s leadership decided “to sponsor the formation of a political organisation on a nation-wide scale”. This finally took shape as APDUSA, set up to be an organisation that individuals could join directly. APDUSA would not only be “a weapon of defence or attack”, but would be “a vehicle for ideas that have to be carried to all corners of the country”. I.B. Tabata was elected to APDUSA’s presidency, the first time he held any central officiating position in a national organisation.<sup>170</sup>

The “high point” of APDUSA’s first conference was “the importance given to the role of the peasants and workers”. APDUSA needed to lift “the nameless masses from their

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<sup>169</sup> ‘The Pan African Congress Adventure in Perspective’.

<sup>170</sup> *Ilizwi LeSizwe*, Vol 1, No 1, September 1961.



state of anonymity to their true status as builders of civilisation". In his address to the conference, Tabata traced "the whole developmental pattern of western society". He ended the lesson in history and social development with the argument that "in order to succeed in our task of liberation", it was necessary for APDUSA to link itself "dynamically and inseparably with the labouring classes".<sup>171</sup> When the NEUM executive made the decision at the beginning of 1963 (following Tabata's secret overseas trip) to embark on armed struggle, APDUSA was designated "as the main vehicle" for implementing the new approach. Nevertheless, establishing an army was seen as secondary to the "political mobilisation of the oppressed", which would remain APDUSA's "main function".<sup>172</sup>

In order to execute its plans, the NEUM executive decided to send Tabata to Dar-es-Salaam with Jane Gool and Nathaniel Honono to petition the newly created African Liberation Committee (ALC) of the OAU in Tanzania for recognition.<sup>173</sup> Once recognised as a liberation movement, the NEUM would be eligible for material assistance for its plans for political and armed struggle, and would have a platform to ask for further assistance from newly independent African governments. The upshot of the NEUM's efforts at achieving recognition from the OAU was that it was rebuffed, because it had dared to argue that "the struggle must be conducted in such a way as to save us from neo-colonialism", and because it was "not known by the world". The response of the NEUM was immediately to "plead guilty to these charges" as "the poorest group of organisations in South Africa". Tabata and his colleagues immediately drafted a response aimed at "chang[ing] the mind of the ALC "in the name of an oppressed nation".<sup>174</sup> In the process they explained why there might have been lack of knowledge of the NEUM:

We are not known by the outside world because the agencies for publicity are in the hands of the same groups who regard

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<sup>171</sup> *Ilizwi LeSizwe*, Vol 1, no 6, May/June 1962.

<sup>172</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, "'Land and Liberty!'", p 8.

<sup>173</sup> 'South Africa: A Memorandum submitted to Committee of Nine by the All-African Convention and Non-European Unity Movement'.

<sup>174</sup> 'Statement by the AAC and NEUM justifying their rights to the funds voted by the Liberation Committee of Nine', December 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

us as enemies for the reason that we have had to expose their machinations in order to keep the movements free from their inimical and dangerous influences.<sup>175</sup>

Faced with the charge that they were not known by the world, Tabata and his colleagues presented a document about their organisations and their plans in order to supplement their original statement with which the NEUM's application for recognition had been made. To this they appended a list of the federal body with affiliates, names of officials and their regions in South Africa in order to give a sense of a national presence. But the key characteristic of this response was the adoption of biography as the prime method of asserting a real existence in the struggle against apartheid. And the biographic format that was chosen was the biography of victimisation and persecution. A cryptic list of repression experiences of NEUM officials was composed as proof of its existence. The experiences of Honono, Canca, Hassim, Mqotsi, Limbada, Tsotsi and Jane Gool of house arrest, imprisonment without trial, 'pegging', reluctant, enforced asylum, and banning were catalogued. The biography of persecution of I.B. Tabata, the president of the NEUM affiliate, APDUSA, was accorded special attention. It was he who "was the first to be imprisoned by the Verwoerd government" in 1948, who served a five-year ban, and who "narrowly escaped arrest under the 90-Day Detention Act". "All these incidents of arrests and banishments" had been "deliberately suppressed" because "our group of organisations [was] regarded as the direst enemy".<sup>176</sup>

In the next few years, following on from its response to the OAU rejection, the biography of victimisation and persecution represented one of the main modes through which the Unity Movement depicted itself, its structures and cadres. In December 1964, the Lusaka office of the AAC and the Unity Movement composed a much more extensive list of "instances of the victimisation of our people" that "did not hit the headlines of the outside world". The five-page list presented accounts of the experiences

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<sup>175</sup> 'Statement by the AAC and NEUM justifying their rights to the funds voted by the Liberation Committee of Nine', December 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>176</sup> 'Statement by the AAC and NEUM justifying their rights to the funds voted by the Liberation Committee of Nine', December 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

of persecution and state harassment on the part of more than thirty officials of the national and branch structures of the Unity Movement, the AAC and APDUSA. In addition to this biographic catalogue of persecution, it was argued that “a whole crop of ordinary members – workers and peasants” had been arrested and prosecuted or “subjected to intimidation” throughout South Africa. “Practically every official” of the Unity Movement, the AAC and APDUSA had “either been put under house-arrest, banned and gagged or simply banned and deported”.<sup>177</sup>

In 1965 this biographic list was followed up by a more detailed account of the “tale of persecution” of Leo Sihlali, Louis Mtshizana and Livingstone Mqotsi, who had been systematically persecuted “over a long period”. Not only was it necessary to publicise these experiences of state brutality, but it was also necessary to establish the credentials of these leaders of the Unity Movement for material support. Each person’s experiences of persecution were presented in elaborate detail alongside descriptions of their professional and educational achievements, and their political track records.<sup>178</sup> These extended biographies of persecution also placed on record a catalogue of facts about lives of resistance and victimisation, which gave authority to the claims of the Unity Movement to being a liberation movement in need of material support. These were claims put simultaneously to African governments as well as to solidarity structures that had begun to emerge such as the Alexander Defense Committee in the United States.

As the Unity Movement struggled for recognition and support from governments and solidarity movements, another biographic element began to take root alongside the life stories of persecution. The Unity Movement’s representation of its institutional structures took on an increasingly presidential character. Not only was its organisational name streamlined and made more specific and identifiable, but I.B. Tabata was also

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<sup>177</sup> ‘Verwoerd lets loose terror on All-African Convention and Unity Movement of South Africa’, Issued by the Lusaka Office of the All-African Convention and the Unity Movement of South Africa, December 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>178</sup> ‘In Verwoerd’s South Africa: A tale of persecution’, Issued by the Head Office Abroad of The All-African Convention and Unity Movement of South Africa, 8 March 1965, Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 2:DA13:84/10.

given authorisation to describe himself as the President of the Unity Movement. In 1963 when the application for recognition was made to the OAU, Tabata was the president of APDUSA and the “leader of the delegation”,<sup>179</sup> but this did not carry the authority of the presidency of the movement as a whole.

There is an element of ambiguity over how the presidency passed from Leo Sihlali to Tabata in August 1964. Sihlali had been elected NEUM president 1959, replacing Tsotsi who had been acting president.<sup>180</sup> In Dar-es-Salaam and Lusaka difficulties had arisen around the cumbersome and archaic name of the organisation and over the fact that the movement was not represented by its president in the rough-and-tumble of diplomacy and international relations. At a Head Unity Committee (HUC) meeting in South Africa, the exiled section was given the go-ahead to describe itself as the Unity Movement (UM), which was changed a few months later to UMSA. This decision was made, according to then joint secretary, Alie Fataar, for the sake of “convenience”. The argument was also presented that Sihlali’s house arrest and constant police surveillance made the performance of presidential functions difficult. As a result Sihlali “relinquished the position”. Fataar’s recollection was that following the request that had come from Lusaka, “Tabata was allowed to be regarded as the president outside”. At the time, Sihlali had been ill and banned. Some thought it might not have been the most appropriate thing to “demote” someone in this position.<sup>181</sup>

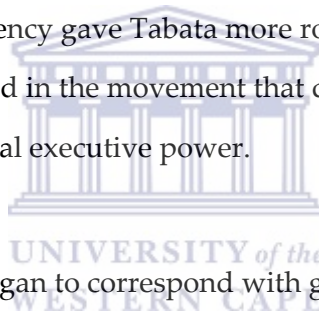
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<sup>179</sup> ‘South Africa: A Memorandum submitted to Committee of Nine by the All-African Convention and Non-European Unity Movement’.

<sup>180</sup> *Ikhwezi Lomso*, Vol 3, No 1, February 1960; Wycliffe Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 24 & 29 December 1959; I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 17 February 1960, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Wycliffe Tsotsi had expressed his dissatisfaction at being unseated as president of the NEUM by what he understood as “plotting” behind his back, and “a whispering campaign”. He expressed his relief that “the mantle of political organisation, which ha[d] all these years sent me up and down the country at great personal cost, ha[d] fallen on other shoulders”. Tsotsi was made Acting President of the NEUM in 1956 and held on to this position until Sihlali was made NEUM President in December 1959 at the Ninth Unity Conference. Livingstone Mqotsi and Alie Fataar were made Joint Secretaries.

<sup>181</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 11 August 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; interview with Alie and Ursula Fataar, 19 July 1991; L Mqotsi to All Members of the Unity Movement, the All-African Convention, the African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa and other affiliated organisations and bodies, May 1966, Livingstone Mqotsi Papers; Tom Karis, Notes based on taped transcript of interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, 19 March 1989 (I am grateful to Tom Karis for forwarding me a copy of these notes). It is interesting that on its letterheads, the movement styled itself as the more overtly nationalist sounding ‘All-African Convention (AAC) & Unity

While Tabata's presidency may have been regarded as a practical necessity, perhaps even for a limited duration, the effect of this decision - as fuzzy as it may have been - was that Tabata embraced the position, and Sihlali was henceforth described as the former president. The formal stage was now set for the embracing of presidentialism as a means of promoting the objects of the movement. Not only was I.B. Tabata's biography of repression experiences and political leadership marshalled to foreground descriptions of the movement, its statements and publications, but his writings were also distributed and republished as the work of a president of a liberation movement in the cause of the movement's promotion. The promotion of Tabata as president became a key focus in the work of establishing the organisation in exile, in continuing to petition for recognition and in soliciting funds and material support. In order to advance its cause, a viable and credible political movement required a convincing presidential figure. In addition, the presidency gave Tabata more room to manoeuvre. Any influence and authority he may have had in the movement that derived from his seniority now had greater gravitas and formal executive power.



From October 1964, Tabata began to correspond with governments and potential supporters as the president of the Unity Movement, as the organisation restyled the projection of its leadership. By January 1965, 'Unity Movement' had been extended to 'Unity Movement of South Africa –UMSA', which made Tabata's presidency seem more commanding and official in the protocols of international relations. The movement's liaison with the Zambian government now carried presidential and even proto-governmental, quasi-diplomatic authority.<sup>182</sup> His communication with Kwame Nkrumah - who had promised support for military training – took place on a president-

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Movement', with APDUSA and SOYA listed as affiliates, along with "Other Professional, Civic and Peasant Bodies". See, for example, I.B. Tabata to Berta Green, Corresponding Secretary, ADC, 2 April 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>182</sup> See I.B. Tabata (President, Unity Movement and APDUSA), N Honono (President, AAC), L Mqotsi (Joint Secretary, Unity Movement, General Secretary, APDUSA) and Miss J Gool (Chairman of the Working Committee of the Unity Movement) to The President and the Cabinet of Zambia, Lusaka, 24 October 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. This letter served to "salute the President, the Cabinet, the government and the People" of Zambia on their "great day of independence".

to-president basis, and he asserted presidential authority in his communication with official solidarity bodies in African states.<sup>183</sup> Tabata also undertook his tour of the United States under the auspices of the ADC in late 1965 as the president of UMSA. And the ADC ensured that Tabata's itinerary would be complemented by certain formalities and protocol arrangements, with someone to meet him at airports, accompany him wherever he went and to be at his "disposal at all times". Tour organisers were reminded that "under no circumstances" was Tabata to be placed "in the position of having to make a collection speech".<sup>184</sup>

The promotion of presidentialism also required evidence of leadership and authority, and this was provided in Tabata's speeches and writings. Tabata's 1948 letter to Mandela, which had become a key statement on the historical evolution of political forms and structures at the time, was turned into evidence of the Unity Movement's interactions with other political bodies, as well as of Tabata's communication – "in the best spirit of brotherliness" - with a "mentally restless young intellectual who was ... groping for political clarity". Unlike with its prior circulation in the late 1940s, Mandela was specifically mentioned as the recipient of the re-edited and republished version of the letter, and many would have been familiar with Mandela from the widely publicised Rivonia trial as someone "now serving life-imprisonment in Robben Island".<sup>185</sup>

The promotion of Tabata as a liberation movement president made use of the image-building process that had begun around Nelson Mandela. The letter to Mandela was reproduced as evidence of a relationship of political mentorship, as it was "designed by one who knew Nelson Mandela closely to help him solve his basic dilemma: to make the

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<sup>183</sup> I.B. Tabata (President, UMSA) to The President, Republic of Ghana (Kwame Nkrumah), 25 January 1965; I.B. Tabata to The Director, Bureau of African Affairs, 23 January 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>184</sup> Robert H Langston to Friends (Circular Letter), 23 September 1965; RL & BG (Robert Langston and Berta Green) to Friends (Circular Letter to All Chapters and Organisers of Tabata Tour), 4 November 1965, Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

<sup>185</sup> I.B. Tabata, 'Letter to Mandela on The Problem of the Organisational Unity in South Africa', Published by the All-African Convention, Unity Movement, Lusaka, March 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.



final choice between the subterfuges of opportunism and the real struggle for liberation". A new introduction that was added to the redeployed publication hoped that it would "throw some light on the differences in approach to the problem of organisation" between those structures in the Unity Movement and those outside. Tabata's letter to Mandela's fellow Youth League member, A.P. Mda was also added in order to demonstrate the Unity Movement's "consistent and serious" attempts "to engage in political dialogue with the leaders of the other political groups ... in the hope of bringing about principled unity amongst the oppressed people of South Africa".<sup>186</sup> Not only did this publication provide evidence against charges that the Unity Movement was peripheral and of little consequence, but it bore out Tabata's position of president by seemingly providing evidence of a long record of political leadership and mentorship, particularly over someone like Mandela, whose political biography was beginning to emerge as a project of anti-apartheid solidarity.<sup>187</sup>

In late 1965, Tabata's biography that was circulated as part of the arrangements of his ADC tour of the U.S. emphasised his position as an author, and described him as "the leading political theorist of the South African liberation movement". By then *Education for Barbarism* was virtually unobtainable, and the ADC purchased "the entire remainder" so that it could be put to the work of fundraising and education. ADC chapters were advised to "reserve" some copies "for circulation among key people" in their areas. In Southern California, 10 copies were sold for \$20, 00 each as "out of print gems", containing Tabata's autograph and "a message to the buyer". ADC chapters were also encouraged to consider raffling remaining copies as part of their fundraising. At the same time, meetings or discussions were arranged at receptions for Tabata with a range of possible publishers of a new edition. Among these were ADC sponsor, Paul Sweezy

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<sup>186</sup> I.B. Tabata, 'Letter to Mandela on The Problem of the Organisational Unity in South Africa', Published by the All-African Convention, Unity Movement, Lusaka, March 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. See also I.B. Tabata to The Honourable Minister, Home Affairs, Zambia, 30 June 1964 (I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925) in which Tabata enclosed a copy of his letter to Mandela, which he had "discovered in his files", and which "clearly portrays our relationship from the very beginning of his political career".

<sup>187</sup> See Chapter Four.

of Monthly Review Press, Harry Braverman of Grove Press and Alex Munsell of Marzani and Munsell publishers who also “specialise[d] in radical books”.<sup>188</sup>

The Unity Movement’s memorandum which was submitted to the OAU’s Committee of Nine as part of its unsuccessful application for recognition was turned into a political pamphlet by I.B. Tabata and given the name ‘Unity: The Road to Freedom in South Africa’.<sup>189</sup> Copies were circulated by the ADC national office to all the chapters in large quantities to be sold at meetings addressed by Tabata. But perhaps the most striking instance of presidential authorship was the publication by the ADC of Tabata’s presidential address to the first APDUSA conference in Cape Town in 1962. Tabata’s speech was turned into a presidential publication, and was called ‘The Freedom Struggle in South Africa’.<sup>190</sup> By the time I.B. Tabata embarked upon his fundraising and publicity tour of the United States under the auspices of ADC, the process of individuation that had been set in motion in the 1940s and 1950s by his experiences of repression and his emergence as an author of political tracts and history texts had given way to a politics of presidentialism as one of the key features of promoting the Unity Movement in exile.

Tabata was not a reluctant president of a liberation movement. Instead this was a politics of individual authority and power that he embraced keenly as ways were sought to place the Unity Movement on the map on the African continent and abroad. Having previously eschewed individual attention in favour of an adherence to political principles, especially that of collective leadership, I.B. Tabata emerged as the most visible leader of the Unity Movement, whose photographic portrait was widely

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<sup>188</sup> RL & BG (Robert Langston and Berta Green) to Friends (Circular Letter to All Chapters and Organisers of Tabata Tour), 4 November 1965; George Davis (for the ADC) to Supporters and Participants in the I.B. Tabata So. Cal. Tour’, n.d. (c. November 1965); Robert Langston to Friends (Circular Letter to All ADC Chapters and friends), 21 March 1966; ADC Itinerary for New York leg of I.B. Tabata’s Tour, 10-20 October 1965, Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

<sup>189</sup> ‘Unity: The Road to Freedom in South Africa’, Unity Movement pamphlet, c.1965, Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. Dora Taylor wrote an introduction to the pamphlet under her pseudonym, Nosipho Majeke.

<sup>190</sup> I.B. Tabata, ‘The Freedom Struggle in South Africa’ (Presidential Address delivered at The First National Conference of the African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa, April 1962, in Cape Town), Published by the Alexander Defense Committee, November 1965.

circulated as the embodiment of its leadership. Having previously hidden his authorship within the anonymity of the collective and the pseudonym, Tabata embraced the domain of authorship and publishing in his individual capacity. Later, Tabata's writings came to be considered as the corpus of an eminent author and theoretician, who was also feted as the president of a political movement.

After its structures inside South Africa were virtually decimated by repression in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the movement went into deep decline, and its efforts at mobilisation for military training abroad in large measure came to nought. Almost nothing was left except the "small contingent" of exiled leaders.<sup>191</sup> An intermittent programme of assembling, publishing and republishing Tabata's writings and conference speeches as a legacy kept up a semblance of organisational activity,<sup>192</sup> and continued to feed a grand illusion of presidentialism and organisational viability as the Unity Movement increasingly became a historical anachronism. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Unity Movement's significance was asserted in the valuable lessons of leadership to be drawn from the political lives of Tabata and his comrades, and the archive, drawn from his and Dora Taylor's political labours, was asserted as the repository of these lessons of history.

This maintenance of presidentialism and the assertion of biography as lesson and legacy were in sharp contrast to the code of principled biographic disavowal of the 1940s. In Tabata's case, authorship was a precursor to the emergence of his biography as central to the projection of the political movement. And Tabata's biography, as a linear narrative of resistance leadership and intellectual authority, was projected and disseminated as part of the modernist political project of defining 'the road to freedom'.

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<sup>191</sup> Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, "Land and Liberty!", p 18.

<sup>192</sup> See for example I.B. Tabata, *Imperialist Conspiracy in Africa*, Lusaka: Prometheus, 1974; *The Awakening of a People* was republished in Britain by Spokesman Books (Nottingham), 1974. After Dora Taylor's death in the mid-1970s, Norman Traub in Britain took up the task of promoting Tabata's writings as a legacy. See the republished *Education for Barbarism: Bantu (Apartheid) Education in South Africa*, London and Lusaka: Unity Movement of South Africa, 1980, and *Apartheid: Cosmetics Exposed*, London: Prometheus Publications for Unity Movement of South Africa, 1985. Norman Traub wrote the Foreword to the latter.

Tabata's biography did not emerge organically. Nor was it uncontested. It was produced by conscious biographic work by Dora Taylor, particularly from the early 1960s. And as much as Tabata's biography was asserted as part of the movement's political work, so it was also contested along with challenges to his exercise of power. It is to this record of biographic work and contestation that we must now turn.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DORA TAYLOR AND THE NARRATION OF I.B. TABATA'S LIFE: BIOGRAPHICAL RELATIONS AND RECIPROCAL CONSTRUCTIONS

In order to comprehend the history of I.B. Tabata's biography more fully, it is necessary to understand the relations through which it was produced. Indeed, Tabata's biography was produced through quite definite biographical relations, which were constituted in the public sphere as well as in settings that were behind the scenes. One such biographical relation - perhaps the most significant - was his connection with Dora Taylor, with whom he had a structured, ongoing relationship in a borderland between the public and the private domains. This relationship was sustained through different phases from at least the early 1940s. It was Dora Taylor who was Tabata's primary biographer, who produced the biographic narrations that were required as the politics of presidentialism took root in the 1960s as a decisive mode of political campaigning on the part of the Unity Movement in exile. This biographic work culminated in the creation of an archival collection, which was repatriated to South Africa and incorporated into a university archive as a legacy of resistance history and political leadership.

In the previous chapter, we saw that Dora Taylor's relationship with I.B. Tabata was that of the political associate and assistant. From about 1941, her political energies became almost exclusively directed towards assisting Tabata in his correspondence and in his political writing. Often, Taylor's work has been understood as that of the secretary and amanuensis. However, it is possible to argue that it extended beyond this, with Taylor being the co-author of ideas and strategies, as well as a range of written works that were published under Tabata's name or pseudonym. In this chapter, we examine the relationship between Tabata and Taylor more fully, in an attempt to historicise its development and understand its various dimensions. This is absolutely necessary because

Taylor's efforts were decisive in the production and moulding of I.B. Tabata as the political leader with a biography. In this perspective, it also becomes possible to look at reciprocal constructions and the ways in which people have narrated each other in relationships, especially ones that have been ongoing and formative.

### *Mutuality, history and culture*

I.B. Tabata and Dora Taylor encountered each other for the first time in the circles of the WPSA in the mid-1930s. In 1936 or 1937, Tabata was engaged by Dora Taylor to sing in a cultural production for the Spartacus Club. Shortly after coming to Cape Town from the Eastern Cape in the early 1930s after the death of his father, Tabata had begun to sing in the Reverend Gow's choir, along with Cadoc Kobus, who had also come to Cape Town from the Eastern Cape.<sup>1</sup> Tabata took his singing talents into the Spartacus Club, the public culture, lecture and debating forum of the WPSA, and sang songs that had been composed by Dora Taylor.<sup>2</sup> In a letter Taylor wrote to Tabata in the late 1930s, Taylor made reference to their emerging common interests of cultural performance and social and political analysis:

Dear Comrade Tabata, JG suggests coming in to our new hall next Saturday at 7 o'clock, allowing an hour at least for rehearsal before the lecture. That will save you the trouble of coming out this way. Please be on time and know the words of the songs. You know those which are quartets. Let us know if the time does not suit you. Did you look for the article? Yours comradely, Dora Taylor.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Cadoc Kobus, Qumbu, 19-20 July 1993; Interview with Amina Gool, 13 July 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Cadoc Kobus still remembered revolutionary songs composed by Taylor that he had sung with Tabata in the late 1930s in the Spartacus Club. He sang one of these songs for my recorded interview with him (Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Cadoc Kobus, Qumbu, 19-20 July 1993). Kobus became a member of the WPSA after his application was submitted in June 1936. See Cadoc Kobus, Application for Membership of the WPSA, 11 June 1936, WPSA Papers, UWC Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archive/Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand (Hereafter, WPSA Papers). I have copies of this collection in my possession, and personally ensured that a section entered the then Mayibuye Centre at UWC. The collection had by then been separated into two sections, the other of which was deposited in Cullen Library at Wits. Here, I deliberately cite them together to indicate that they are *one* collection separated into two sections after it had been found in the attic of Claire Goodlatte's former home in York Street, Woodstock.

<sup>3</sup> Dora Taylor to I.B. Tabata, nd, (1936?), Tabata Collection, BC 925. This letter in the Tabata Collection was later annotated and accorded significance by Taylor as "my first letter?" as she inscribed herself



Soon after Tabata arrived in Cape Town, he had found himself in the circles of the Lenin Club and thereafter the Workers Party and its public debating forum, the Spartacus Club. As we have suggested, Tabata's mentor in the WPSA had been Claire Goodlatte, and other members included Jane Gool, Paul Kosten, Ben Kies, S.A. Jayiya and Cadoc Kobus, J.G. and Dora Taylor, and later Goolam Gool, under the leadership of Yudel Burlak. Originally, therefore, Tabata and Dora Taylor were political comrades initially in the Spartacus Club and later in the WPSA itself. It is likely that Tabata and Taylor started working together beyond music and dramatic performance in the early 1940s as a WPSA decision, within the ambit of the discipline of the party. Tabata had been assigned the full time party duties of intervening in the national struggle from the late 1930s in the AAC<sup>4</sup> and other arenas and later in other public national formations such as the Anti-CAD and NEUM. From about 1941, Taylor was authorised to assist him in these endeavours.

In South Africa, this relationship spanned about twenty years of assistance by Taylor with Tabata's political writing, in the form of organisational and agitational letters, interventionist pamphlets and longer texts of political education and social analysis. During this time, their relationship also took on other dimensions, incorporating the soft touches of music and literature alongside the heady strategic world of political intervention. And in the everyday intensity of these entanglements, they also developed a love relationship. What began as a working relationship as party members grew into a vital intellectual and emotional partnership which went through different phases in South Africa and overseas, and lasted until Taylor's death in England in the mid-1970s. Their relationship was not a public one. In the first place, the political activities of the WPSA

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into the collection. Taylor had marked this as possibly written in 1936, but it might have been 1937 or 1938, when Dora Taylor was composing songs and writing plays and operas for programmes of the Spartacus Club. See Spartacus Club Programme, October Revolution Celebrations, Oddfellows Hall, 6 November 1937; May Day Celebrations, 1938, WPSA Papers. See also Dora Taylor to Paul Kosten (undated, 1937/8?), WPSA Papers, in which she asks Kosten if he wouldn't "mind telling Kobus and Tabata to bring {a} particular scene alas". Taylor only became a member of the WPSA underground in November 1938 (General Secretary, WPSA to Dora Taylor, 16 November 1938, WPSA Papers).

<sup>4</sup> See undated letters to The Secretary, AAC, Bloemfontein certifying that Isaac Tabata and Jaineb Gool were representatives of the Workers Party of South Africa (Cape Town Branch) (c1936); Minutes of the meeting of the WPSA, Cape Town Branch, held at 99 Hatfield Street, 18 May 1936, WPSA Papers. "Comrade Tabata" was listed as being "on Party business in Langa".

were shifted entirely to the underground after 1939. Moreover, there was a racial dimension: white party members did not engage in public political work. Dora Taylor's intellectual and political work was necessarily - in the Party's terms - covert and even clandestine. Indeed, this relationship was conducted in a borderland, a space between the public and private, and between the official and the clandestine which was simultaneously a space of desire.

In the unfolding of this political and personal relationship between Tabata and Taylor, political commitment and allegiance to party and political principle became overlaid by loyalty to each other and mutual devotion. Dora Taylor was utterly dedicated to Tabata, and to ensuring the success of his political endeavours, in ways that evoked the 'selflessness' and duty to the cause that Tabata spoke about in the political sphere. It was she who facilitated and assisted in the production of political ideas and strategies under Tabata's name. This effacing of the self on Taylor's part lasted until 1963 and that left her feeling publicly unacknowledged. In return, Tabata supported Taylor's efforts at literary and historical writing, and assisted in the attempts to have these published. These exchanges occurred in the everyday unfolding of their relationship. Even when Tabata was away from Cape Town, Taylor was moved to write to him about feeling "deeply lonely" in the process of writing, about its progress and her discoveries in her research.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1940s and early 1950s, Taylor researched South Africa's colonial past, seeking to revise the "distortions of history" in colonial and missionary archives. While her historical research was geared towards the writing of plays and novels, which were grounded in

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<sup>5</sup> Dora Taylor to I.B. Tabata, May 1945, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. By this time, Tabata had simply become 'B' for Taylor, a shortening used also by Wycliffe Tsotsi, but which for her became a term of endearment. 'B' was of course short for Bangani, his Xhosa name. By this time, Tabata had become known publicly by his initials, and was almost never addressed as 'Isaac'. To his comrades in the Unity Movement in the 1950s, he was sometimes referred to as 'Tabata' or the shortened - and partly anglicised - 'Tabbie'. Leo Sihlali addressed him affectionately as 'Taba'. In the age of presidentialism, when he had become the more formal 'Mr Tabata' in the movement, this was sometimes turned into the slightly less formal 'Mr T'. To Jane Gool, he was 'T' or 'Tee'. To his sisters, particularly Jocelyn or Funeka, he was affectionately called 'Old Boy', 'Smovana', 'Buti Smallie' or 'Bhuti Smallone', and to acquaintances of his own generation, with whom he had been at Lovedale (such as Govan Mbeki), he was known as 'Dwarf'. Some of his correspondents from the Eastern Cape and Transkei (such as George Matanzima) called Tabata by his clan name, 'Mndungwane'.

historical understandings, Taylor's pen was also deployed to produce historical texts. Her research in the mid-1940s attempted to "piece the whole story together" on the killing of Chief Hintsa by the British forces in 1835. This led her to question the methods of the Wesleyan missionaries whose letters, eagerly used by D'Urban, had been "designed to blacken the character and behaviour of Hintza (sic)".<sup>6</sup> Just as Tabata's writings were produced through a relationship with Taylor, so Tabata supported her writing through reading drafts of chapters, and assisting with roneoing copies for distribution.<sup>7</sup> In 1948, after Taylor had completed the play, *Hintsa*, with Tabata's help it was marshalled in the service of building the NEUM.

Tabata forwarded copies of *Hintsa* to influential activists in the fold of the NEUM around the country such as Nathaniel Honono and others. His purpose was to ask individuals to get their organisations to "consider staging [the] play ... with whatever means you have at your disposal". Tabata suggested that it be performed for fundraising on a fifty-fifty basis, with half the proceeds going to organisation which staged it, and the rest to the funds of the NEUM and to the "printing and translation fund". While the Unity Movement needed funds "very urgently", it was also "necessary that the play should be translated into the vernaculars before it can reach the masses of the people". Drama, he suggested was "one form of literature which can speak to the people directly". It needed to be introduced "not only to the intellectuals but to the masses of the people". Even "the illiterate" could "understand it, and themselves stage drama". And this play sought to give African youth "a past of which they can be proud and to restore also their self-respect". Through this play, they would become "aware of the true nature of the struggles of our people, [and of] the dignity and the spirit of resistance". Before any questions were raised, Tabata reiterated that "the authorship of the play" was "necessarily anonymous".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dora Taylor to I.B. Tabata, May 1945, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. On the killing of Hintsa more generally and the question of evidence, see Premesh Lal, 'The Grammar of Domination and the Subjection of Agency: Colonial Texts and Modes of Evidence', *History and Theory*, Volume 39, No. 4, December 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary, Entries for 14 February; 10 March; 24 June 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>8</sup> Circular Letter from I.B. Tabata, 18 August 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Dora Taylor recorded in her Pocket Diary (entry for 19 August 1948) that eight copies of *Hintsa* were mailed to the Transkei.

It was also out of Taylor's research on the killing of Hintsá that the wider project on the 'role of the missionaries' was initiated. In 1952, in the aftermath of the campaigns against the Van Riebeeck Festival, Taylor spent time writing a history of missionaries and colonialism in South Africa. In the middle of 1952, while Tabata was travelling in the Eastern Cape, Taylor wrote to him extensively about her feelings of "profound depression, even despair", and her frustrations with the process of writing *The Rôle of the Missionaries*. Tabata replied, agreeing with her that there were aspects of writing this book that may have been like "a dull duty" that had been imposed on her, one that did not give her "scope to unfold [her] wings". However, he impressed upon her the importance of completing this project before she returned to her "own particular field" of creative writing. Tabata put it to her that she had "no idea how necessary" the work was. "*The Missionaries* must come out within the next few months. The people are hungry for literature".<sup>9</sup>

In another letter written by Tabata to Taylor from Engcobo on the same day, Tabata expanded upon his argument about the value of *The Rôle of the Missionaries*. This he did from the experience of doing readings from the first part of the manuscript to his sister Jocelyn, Wycliffe Tsotsi and others:

Every evening they would gather around the fire and clamour for a reading. You know D the work has sequence. One is conscious of shape and form even in these few pages.... You have managed to get over the dryness of a presentation of historical facts, without resorting to floweriness of language or facile journalese.<sup>10</sup>

Tabata tried to put her mind at ease by advising her to "cease to be self-conscious about [her] new garb, and just write straight on". Then she would "do this job" in a way that

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<sup>9</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 1952 (c.23 July 1952), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata wrote this letter from Lady Frere, and his pocket diary puts him in Lady Frere on 23 July 1952.

<sup>10</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 23 July 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

was “tolerably easy”. In fact, he suggested to her that “it demands much less anxiety than you give to it.”<sup>11</sup>

Tabata went further, however, to explain to Taylor what he thought its significance was. He was “particularly pleased” to discover the extent to which it was “a compliment, nay more, a filling out” of ‘The Boycott’. This was without the two works “in any way crossing, clashing or intruding on each other”. He felt compelled to re-examine ‘The Boycott’, and found that it was “too concentrated” for many people “to fully grasp all its meaning”, even when it is read out to others. *The Rôle of the Missionaries* was needed by “the bulk” of the people “to bring them up gradually”. It gave “a fuller picture, a more detailed and more rounded explanation of the events”. Tabata felt “even more strongly” that the work needed to be finished before ‘The Boycott’ went “stale”. The two needed to be “read together”. Tabata admitted that he understood Taylor’s difficulty “in being forced to bend” her style, and “to cast it in a different mould”. Taylor’s style demanded “the flight of creative imagination - like Shakespeare’s poet”. History, on the other hand, “clips your wings and trammels your feet in shrubs of historical data.”<sup>12</sup>

In September 1952, Tabata reported to Seymour Papert that Taylor was “deep in the work, which grows”.<sup>13</sup> At the end of 1952, *The Rôle of the Missionaries in Conquest* was published by SOYA in Alexandra and its anonymous authorship was designated as ‘Nosipho Majeke’.<sup>14</sup> This pseudonym was carefully chosen by Taylor, perhaps with Tabata’s Xhosa language assistance, because it approximated a Xhosa-ised rendition of her own birth name, Dora Jack. The book stimulated “considerable interest”. Letters to SOYA, such as one from Patrick Duncan, who wrote from Basutoland, sent congratulations to Majeke for “her masterly treatment of the subject” and expressed hopes of being “in regular contact” with her. The Congress Youth League agreed it was “a good book”, which served “a

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<sup>11</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 23 July 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

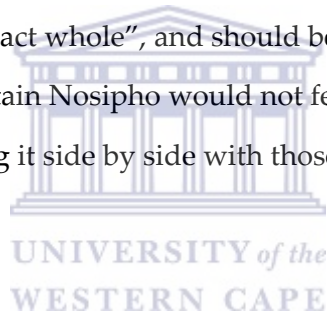
<sup>12</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 23 July 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>13</sup> I.B. Tabata to Seymour Papert, 19 September 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>14</sup> Nosipho Majeke (Dora Taylor), *The Rôle of the Missionaries in Conquest*, Alexandra, Johannesburg; Society of Young Africa, 1952. I would like to thank Irwin Combrinck for giving me his rare, original copy of this publication on long loan.

useful purpose in exposing missionaryism". Even the response from inside missionary institutions, where it was being sold, was "encouraging".<sup>15</sup>

Obviously aware of its authorship, Leo Sihlali wrote an anonymous letter to an anonymous recipient – obviously Taylor – upholding the book's anonymity. He expressed how much he had enjoyed it, for its good timing, its "readability" and sparingly used footnotes. In an obvious reference to Eddie Roux, who had authored *Time Longer than Rope* a few years before, Sihlali expressed his relief that this book refused to "pander to the chauvinists among the oppressed" by "clamouring for a history 'written from a Black Man's standpoint'". In response to the book's definition of "Western Civilisation" as "Christian Capitalist Civilisation", Sihlali declared that he "simply hugged that definition to my heart". Going further than Tabata's assessment, Sihlali concluded his letter by suggesting that *The Missionaries*, 'The Boycott' and *The Awakening* formed "one compact whole", and should be read "over again in that order". He ended by saying, "I'm certain Nosipho would not feel I was detracting from the value of her history by putting it side by side with those two other publications of the Movement".<sup>16</sup>



Sihlali was placing Taylor's book into a body of texts for the learning of history and politics, and as part of a body of writings that was beginning to be thought of as a canon, mainly of publications in Tabata's name. Sihlali may have known of Taylor's authorship, but he may not have been completely aware of how appropriate his inclusion of Taylor in the Tabata canon might have been, in that *The Rôle of the Missionaries* was also a creation of the single knowledge-producing unit constituted in Taylor and Tabata's relationship. Elsewhere in the movement, *The Rôle of the Missionaries* had been treated to what Taylor thought was a "spiteful review" by Hosea Jaffe in *The Torch*. Jaffe, who had published *Three Hundred Years* under the pseudonym Mnguni in the same year, had implied that Taylor's book had been "based on a part of his". Taylor later recalled that

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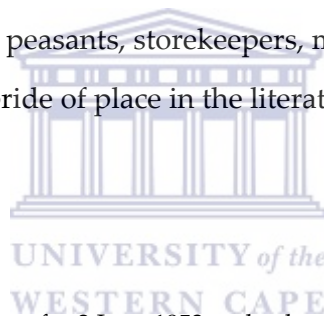
<sup>15</sup> Andrew Lukhele (National Secretary of SOYA) to I.B. Tabata, 10 June 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>16</sup> L (Leo Sihlali) to Unnamed Recipient (Dora Taylor), 14 June 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.



her text had been “written in its first form before his”. Indeed, Taylor added an annotation to her diary that Jaffe had “[come] to the house” and “had seen my notes on the subject”.<sup>17</sup> Tabata reported that A.C. Jordan had been moved to compare Taylor’s book with Jaffe’s. Mnguni had marshalled “dates and facts as ends in themselves”, Jordan had suggested, whereas in Majeke’s work, “facts and dates [were] used to support a thesis”.<sup>18</sup>

Tabata supported Taylor in her writing, and put some effort and “enthusiasm” into selling copies of her book “as never for his own”. He also read Taylor a letter sent from Fort Hare, which had expressed “deep-felt praise” for “the book by the unknown author”. It had “simplicity and feeling”, the writer suggested, and the author “ha[d] felt it in his/her soul”.<sup>19</sup> He also reported to Taylor that her book had “caused general excitement” at the 1953 CATA conference. It had been sold “to the queerest assortment of people - students, teachers, peasants, storekeepers, ministers and school managers”. It was “a document worthy of pride of place in the literature of the movement” and most



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<sup>17</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, entry for 2 June 1953 and subsequently added annotations, Dora Taylor Papers. I would like to thank Doreen and Michael Muskett for giving me access to these diaries. Note that the ‘extended diary’ should be distinguished from the ‘pocket diary’, which recorded activities and feelings intermittently in very cryptic ways, much like a journal. Dora Taylor’s extended diary was her means of recording her political thinking as well as her feelings about her writing, relationships and place in the world. Written in seclusion, Taylor recorded her insecurities and private inner conflicts. Though some of her passages were written to Tabata, it is likely that part of her may not have intended these for perusal. But another part of her must also have had some knowledge that it might be read in the future. For a discussion of this paradox, especially in the case of diaries of women authors, as well as other questions such as their cumulative, cyclical structure, see Judy Simons, *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women from Fanny Burney to Virginia Woolf*, London: MacMillan, 1990.

<sup>18</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 1 July 1953, Tabata Collection, BC 925. Hosea Jaffe (‘Mnguni’), with whom Taylor and Tabata were beginning to have political differences from the early-to-mid 1950s, published *Three Hundred Years: A History of South Africa* (Cape Town: New Era Fellowship, 1952) to coincide with the boycott of the Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival of the apartheid state. See Ciraj Rassool, ‘Going Back to Our Roots’ and Bill Nasson, ‘The Unity Movement: Its Legacy in Historical Consciousness’, *Radical History Review*, No 46/7, January 1990. For a discussion of resistance to the Van Riebeeck Festival in 1952, see Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, ‘The 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival: Constructing and Contesting Public National History in South Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 34, 1993 and Leslie Witz, *Apartheid’s Festival: Contesting South Africa’s National Pasts*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, entries for 25 & 27 May 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

people had asked for the book to be translated.<sup>20</sup> Then Tabata also admitted his own affinity for Taylor's book, and claimed a seemingly acknowledged hand in its creation:

What am I supposed to feel about it? Proud or jealous? I must confess I had what I imagine to be the pride of a father when he receives the news in the next room that his wife has successfully delivered a son after a difficult labour. He feels as if he had something to do with it....<sup>21</sup>

Taylor recorded in her diary that the anonymity of the book's authorship and its publication in SOYA's name had been agreed upon "so as to protect me if the police should make enquiries". Taylor may not have been a public activist, and the historical text may not have been the primary means of expression by which she may have wanted to enter the public domain and influence young minds. In addition, she had become accustomed to an unacknowledged and unacknowledgable position of the clandestine and anonymous facilitation of political strategy and written political expression.

Nevertheless, with only a few in the movement in the know, Taylor's politically charged historical research entered the public sphere in a way that directly influenced young activists in the movement and outside. The publication of *The Rôle of the Missionaries* may have made up somewhat for her public unacknowledgability. However in the form that it was published, it also simultaneously deepened her public anonymity. Ironically, this anonymity was decided upon and came to define Taylor's relationship with the domain of public politics at the same time as Tabata had begun to emerge publicly as an individualised political leader and author of works under his own name. While Tabata's position was consolidated as an individual leader, the publication of Dora Taylor's historical writing contributed to the entrenchment of her selflessness.

And it was Tabata who provided Taylor with access to the public sphere. Their space of mutually supportive intellectual production was simultaneously a space of interdependence. As Taylor depended upon Tabata for affirmation, for knowledge of

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<sup>20</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 1 July 1953, Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>21</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 1 July 1953, Tabata Collection, BC 925.

the eastern Cape about which she wrote, and for access to readers who mattered to her, Tabata relied upon Taylor for support with his writing and political endeavours. Having set out as political comrades in the WPSA, who worked together to extend the party's influence and spread its strategies of political mobilisation through Tabata's public activism, Tabata and Taylor's political and intellectual relationship of mutual dependence became more multifaceted and deeply entangled, and extended substantially to the emotional and the personal. Alongside their political work and authorship, they shared common bonds and passions over the literary works of Shakespeare, and the art of Chaplin. They both became intensely aware of each other's strengths and vulnerabilities. And it is clear that by the late 1940s and early 1950s, they had fallen in love.

Forgetting to take his copy of Shakespeare's sonnets on his trip to the Eastern Cape in 1951 was enough cause for him to write to Taylor imploring "to be welcomed home by [a recital of] one" by her.<sup>22</sup> Lines from *Macbeth* and other Shakespearean works were incorporated into the political analyses and cultural observations, which they exchanged on an almost daily basis, and Shakespearean texts were major references for Taylor in her processing of the political and emotional complexities she was embroiled in and for Tabata to make sense of rural social experience.<sup>23</sup> When Seymour Papert spent time in Cape Town in 1953, Tabata and Taylor presented him with Shakespeare and Tabata read Shakespeare's works out aloud to him as an integral part of clarifying the political problems of Johannesburg.<sup>24</sup> In the 1950s, Richard Wagner's opera based on the legend of Tristan and Isolde, which explored different facets of mature adult love, formed another cultural reference in their unfolding relationship.<sup>25</sup>

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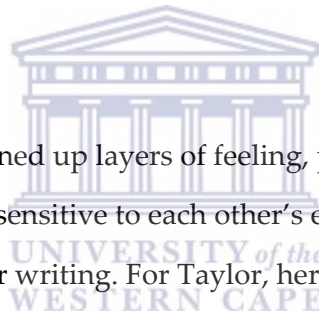
<sup>22</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 23 August 1951, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>23</sup> Dora Taylor, *Extended Diary*, Entry for 11 June 1953, Dora Taylor Papers; I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 23 August 1951, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>24</sup> Dora Taylor, *Extended Diary*, Entry for 12 August 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>25</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 6 January 1956; 9 April 1956, I.B. Tabata Papers, BC 925. Tabata ended these letters to Taylor with the phrase "Tristan make room".

In addition to Shakespeare and the story of Tristan and Isolde, the art of Chaplin was an undoubted source of inspiration. Taylor reflected upon their mutual regard for Chaplin in her journal. While the medium of film may have been “debased by mass production”, she wrote, Chaplin had an ability to “translate his personal experience in childhood into a universal waifdom”. After having listened to a record at Taylor’s house, which made him think of “a bird with a broken wing”, Tabata went to see the film, *Limelight*. Even though Taylor could not have viewed it with him legally, Tabata knew that she “was watching it ‘with’ him”. And when he called her afterwards to talk about it, he was “too moved to say much” as his “heart was broken [to see] a great artist die”.<sup>26</sup> This shared knowledge was the source of the phrase “broken wing”,<sup>27</sup> which Tabata used regularly in his communication with Taylor. Alongside Shakespearean references, this also represented a layer of shared meanings between them as they found common ways of processing their vulnerabilities and insecurities in their authorial positions as creative and political writers.



This cultural communion opened up layers of feeling, passion and mutual attachment that made Taylor and Tabata sensitive to each other’s emotional temperament, especially as this affected their writing. For Taylor, her own childhood had been characterised by “rootlessness”, which was the cause of her “uncompromising attitude to family relations”. Her experience of being abandoned and adopted in those first years of her life had made her “stunted and warped through lack of a child’s first necessity, security”. It also guided her “intuitively rather than by reason”. This “psychology of the child” as “the human being who doesn’t belong” was also “the psychology of the whole people in SA - the Non-Europeans”. This personal affinity should have enabled her “to write truly” about the social conditions of the oppressed. Tabata’s early years, on the other hand, had been “rooted ... in a happy family life” and this, she felt, had given him “a basic security in himself”.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, Entry for 20 August 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, Marginal Note added in 1976 to Entry for 20 August 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>28</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, entries for 6 May & 6 August 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

While she was writing *The Rôle of the Missionaries*, Taylor expressed her sense of depression and despair to Tabata both about writing history and about political tensions and intrigue in the movement. He replied that it was because of Taylor's "particular temperament" and because she was an artist, who "[felt] the atmosphere sooner than others", that her feelings took "a very sharp form". And because her "tentacles [were] always spread out to feel [her] environment", she was able to write. But "that same quality" also exposed her "to tortures occasioned by the changing temperatures in winds, the cross-currents or even social torrents". And these 'tortures' were "not felt as such by the majority". Because she was an artist, Tabata felt that Taylor had experienced the internal political crisis in the Unity Movement that had "crept into our very lives, into our blood and bones and ... our very hearts" even more acutely. For her to get "fits of despondency" was not a "sign of weakness", as she seemed to think. It was normal, Tabata felt, that Taylor was "bound to sense the coming storm long before it overtakes us".<sup>29</sup>

It was with these emotional insights that Tabata encouraged Taylor to write. She recorded in her diary: "B urges me to liberate my pen by writing my own story". Rather than be "egoistic", however, Taylor thought she would try "to speak for all children who [had been] violently deprived of security in the society of violence". After almost two weeks, Taylor made "a small beginning" to the story of 'Linda' (as she had decided to name this character). Doubting whether she would succeed, Taylor felt fear come to her "straight away".<sup>30</sup> She identified some of her difficulties in writing this story:

It is her mother – my mother – I must recreate. Yet it concerns her child too when she was grown up. Its underlying theme is the bondage of woman in this society and the betrayal of youth. But she is eager to grasp life, knowing nothing of it. It is my daughter's too. Or girlhood. The characters make faint, tentative movements of life.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 1952 (c.23 July 1952), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>30</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, entries for 6 & 18 August 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, entry for 18 August 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

But Taylor persisted with the exercise in writing about her life in this fictional way, as a means of 'liberating' herself. It was Tabata's "deep imaginative insight" that "worked out the need to take up this writing first". And Tabata's suggestion was based on his reading of Richard Wright's seminal 1940 autobiography, *Black Boy*, which was an account of his childhood and young adulthood in the Jim Crow South, as he experienced extreme poverty, white prejudice and violence, and of his growing awareness of a literary interest.<sup>32</sup> Drawing on a key element of Wright's work, Taylor agreed that the writing of autobiography contained an element of fiction. Tabata's suggestion came from serious consideration of the place of autobiography and the use of fictional elements in revealing social conditions. For Taylor, in recreating and adding to incidents, "the emotion well[ed] up for the beginnings of life." Nevertheless, "through writing, what was dreamed up [was] liberated." Instead of waiting for "the inspiration ... to come from the skies", and "for confirmation to come from others", Taylor attempted to "make ... just claim" to writing, and "give [herself] with confidence to the effort of it".<sup>33</sup>

As a way of addressing the "tautness that is against writing", Taylor had learnt "the necessity of the relaxation of the whole being" from Tabata.<sup>34</sup> Even with Tabata's encouragement, there were hurdles to be overcome. As she wrote in her diary in her solitary communication with Tabata:

B, my heart is full as if I were the young mother I was trying to create. I do not know what it is to feel as a daughter to a mother or to a father. It is a tremendous gap in the life of a child. And somehow I must convey it. It is the whole absence of a set of social sensations that must affect one's own experience as a mother with daughters.<sup>35</sup>

In spite of the obstacles and challenges, the result was her "most mature work", *The Rebel*. Taylor recorded that she had "finished the story for B", a work which was "born

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<sup>32</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, entry for 6 August 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>33</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, entries for 6 & 20 August 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>34</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, entry for 6 May 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>35</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, entry for 20 August 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.



out of the strains and pressures of the last six months". "Oh, the joy of reading it to him! And his joy in the work!"<sup>36</sup>

And in the 1950s, Taylor continued to write 'for B' alongside the varied forms of support she gave him with his political work and political writing. And in return for these services, Tabata continued to encourage Taylor's authorship, and to champion the cause of its dissemination and publication. In 1957, while he was banned, Tabata wrote to *The London Magazine* with a short story, 'Tread Softly', written by Taylor, which he asked to be considered for publication. In interceding for Taylor, Tabata introduced himself as "an African ... deeply involved in the activities of my people in their struggle for liberation", and as an author, who had "written a history of the movement" in South Africa. This position, he implied, qualified him to explain the significance of Taylor's text.<sup>37</sup>

Up to the first half of the twentieth century, he suggested, South African writers had been "mainly Europeans", who wrote "from a particular distorted angle and presented us as less than human – objects of pity or laughter – or as the noble savage". While some white writers since 1950 had written with "a certain amount of sympathy for the African", they wrote as "onlookers seeing us as from a distance". Dora Taylor, on the other hand, had transcended this distance, and according to Tabata, the story written by her in her own name indicated that she "writes for us", not "about us".<sup>38</sup> Through this authorial location, Tabata contended that Taylor gave "artistic expression to our feelings as human beings plunged in the various situations of the complex racial system of South Africa." Taylor wrote "simply", he argued, "without the intrusion of any extraneous attitudes". Those outside may not understand how difficult this was because of "the constant pressures imposed by the racial situation in this country".<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, entry for 5 October 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>37</sup> I.B. Tabata to Mr Lehmann (*The London Magazine*), 29 June 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>38</sup> I.B. Tabata to Mr Lehmann (*The London Magazine*), 29 June 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>39</sup> I.B. Tabata to Mr Lehmann (*The London Magazine*), 29 June 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

Tabata and Taylor's relationship constituted a space of political, historical and literary enquiry and production. Here, they gave each other mutual support in their authorial endeavours. They also attempted to reach beyond the bounds of this space, to influence the consciousness of people in political and cultural ways through their analyses of South African society as expressed in their political, historical and fictional writing. They also attempted to influence layers of society through Tabata's public political activism and interventions in the movement of national liberation. Having had its origins in the political interventions of the Workers Party, the space of Taylor and Tabata's relationship took on a logic of its own once the party had disintegrated. In the 1950s, it became a space of sustenance to which they were able to retreat in the face of threats from the apartheid state and from malicious attacks arising out of internal turmoil in the movement.

Except for occasional lectures on literature to the TLSA and NEF, Taylor was largely isolated from public political activity in her own name. A few of Tabata's closest comrades and protégés, such as Tsotsi, Sihlali and Papert knew that she was important to the facilitation of Tabata's political work. A wider layer were aware that Taylor was the author of *The Rôle of the Missionaries*, literary works and historical plays, even though these were published anonymously. Nevertheless, Taylor felt isolated in her relatively unpublic position. While Tabata was banned in the late 1950s, Taylor took on the task of being his proxy. This measure was a means of evading security surveillance and also had the effect of partially reducing her feeling of isolation.

Taylor mediated the relationship that Tabata had with activists in the movement that was reconstituting itself. She was the recipient of progress reports that were intended for Tabata on matters ranging from political organising in SOYA and CATA, the unfolding conflicts at conferences and the progress of *Ikhwezi Lomso*.<sup>40</sup> Even members of his family

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<sup>40</sup> Leo Sihlali to Dora Taylor, 4 October 1957, 22 December 1957, 24 August 1958, 28 August 1958; A.K. Tom to Dora Taylor, 20 January 1958, 4 June 1958, 18 December 1958, n.d. (c.1958); A Carolissen to Dora Taylor, 23 March 1958; Kini Sihlali to Dora Taylor, 10 April 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. The last letter is significant because the sender, Kini Sihlali was a proxy as well, for her husband Leo,

who were involved in the movement communicated with Tabata through Taylor.<sup>41</sup> With this work, Taylor and Tabata became even more of a single unit of political production, drawn even closer by repression into a vicarious relationship, and even one of substitution. With this slightly wider contact, Taylor also cultivated intellectual relationships with younger activists in the movement on her own terms, particularly around cultural and literary questions.<sup>42</sup>

### *Devotion, desire and biography*

From the late 1940s, Tabata and Taylor's relationship was also a space of biographic production. Here they reflected upon, conceptualised and evaluated each other's formation as persons and writers. They drew upon their readings in the field of literary autobiography. In reciprocal biographic acts, Tabata and Taylor narrated their own and each other's lives as intellectuals and writers, away from the public duty of collective leadership, adherence to principle, and the rejection of individualism. And having come to understand each other's individual formation and social commitments, they offered each other sanctuary, support, sustenance and the benefits of each other's knowledge and experience. This intense space of authorial production, political intervention and biographic narration was a meeting place of the self and the movement, the individual and the collective, the personal and the political. It is here where private lives and public identities intersected. Political desires about "full democratic rights for all people in South Africa"<sup>43</sup> were honed and nurtured behind the scenes in this borderland. This was also a hybrid space of cultural expression and of theorising a politics of location and identity of the self and nation.

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who was referred to in the letter through the coded nickname, 'The Cub'. In later years, Alma Carolissen changed the spelling of her first name to 'Elma'.

<sup>41</sup> Jocelyn Tabata to Dora Taylor, 1 April 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>42</sup> We have already drawn attention to the connection Taylor had with Seymour Papert. She also had a serious and wide-ranging literary and cultural correspondence with young activist, Neville Alexander in the late 1950s, when he was a doctoral student in Tübingen, Germany. They communicated about Brecht, Chinese theatre, epic theatre and Dora Taylor's plays. Of course, this correspondence was also a means of keeping in touch with Tabata about progress on the idea of a German edition of *Education for Barbarism*. See Neville Alexander to Dora Taylor, 23 November 1958; 12 December 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>43</sup> I.B. Tabata to Mr Lehmann (*The London Magazine*), 29 June 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

A bond of mutual longing and personal desire underpinned these political and cultural yearnings. It is not apparent when exactly Taylor and Tabata's political and cultural mutuality and reciprocity also became a relationship of love. But it is clear that emotional dependence and sexual longing became an unmistakable aspect of their attachments, with all the difficulties and complexities that this entailed. Out of this love came Dora Taylor's absolute devotion and unconditional loyalty to Tabata. In the 1960s, this devotion lay behind Dora Taylor's monumental biographic work on Tabata's political life, which was the decisive element in the construction of an aura of presidentialism around him in the 1960s. It is this that saw Tabata emerge as a leader with a biography of gifted leadership, survival of repression and heroic resistance.

To suggest that Tabata and Taylor's relationship was one of love and devotion may be interpreted by some as sacrilege against the memory of Jane Gool, who is conventionally seen as the person with whom Tabata had established "a life-long personal and political partnership".<sup>44</sup> At the same time, historians of the Unity Movement have continued to refer to Dora Taylor simply as Tabata's Workers Party comrade and political secretary, and a movement supporter. These conceptions have failed to understand the nature of Tabata and Taylor's relationship and Taylor's significance in Tabata's political and personal life. They have also imposed a monogamist moral framework for comprehending these issues. Tabata certainly had a personal relationship with Jane Gool since at least 1938.<sup>45</sup> But they only started living together from May 1953 when Tabata

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<sup>44</sup> Robin Kayser, 'Land and Liberty!', p 25.

<sup>45</sup> This was a few years after Tabata and Gool had met, and after Tabata had persuaded her not to leave the shores of South Africa for France with the artist Ernest Mancoba who had asked her to leave with him by ship. Mancoba was one of Tabata's friends from Fort Hare, where he had acquired the nickname 'Stereo' on account of his capacity to identify stereotypical thinking. He had visited Cape Town in 1935-36 and had spent many days and nights in discussion with Tabata in District Six and at Woodstock Beach about Marxism, religion and literature. During this time, Mancoba also came into contact with the WPSA through Tabata and Gool, and he and Gool had a brief relationship. In 1938, Gool's brief consideration of the idea of departing with Mancoba for France was a significant factor in precipitating a new phase in her and Tabata's relationship when they became lovers in addition to being comrades (Ciraj Rassool, Notes of Interview with Jane Gool, Cape Town, 20 April 1993; Ciraj Rassool, Interview With Jane Gool, Cape Town 17 October 1993, assisted by Bridget Thompson; Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Ernest Mancoba, Cape Town, 25 April 1995, assisted by Wonga Mancoba;

moved into Gool's newly rented house in Milan Street, on the edge of District Six. In the early 1940s, Jane Gool had acquired a special emotional place in Tabata's life as someone who "knew she could hurt me".<sup>46</sup> Tabata and Gool were certainly comrades and lovers. Taylor, on the other hand, was married to psychologist and fellow WPSA member, J.G. Taylor, with whom she had three daughters, Sheila, Muriel and Doreen. Apart from Tabata and Taylor's immersion in other long-term relationships, the 1950s were also a time of the absolute legal prohibition of sexual relations between black and white.

Even though both Tabata and Taylor were involved in long-term relations, the intensity of their political, intellectual, cultural and literary exchanges spilled over into the domain of the heart, and from the late 1940s, they began to acknowledge the depth of their feelings for each other. They had already become each other's sounding board by the mid-1940s, and during Taylor's travels, she was moved to report in detail to Tabata on her experiences and observations.<sup>47</sup> In 1948, Taylor undertook an extensive research visit to Bechuanaland, Johannesburg and Basutoland at the same time as Tabata set out for the Transkei. At this time, her need for Tabata as a confidant had become more urgent. She kept an almost daily journal of descriptions, analyses and observations, which she wrote specifically for Tabata. In addition, Taylor recorded her anxieties and emotions wrought by their separation:

My B, I now know to the full the tricks which time plays during separation, with no means of communication. The gap of time does not bear description. And it has the effect which falling must have, it paralyses the whole being, feeling, memory, imagination, perhaps in self-defence. I know what happens to you in this respect when you go out. I have said: "Do you

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'Artists' birthday calendar, 1993' (Johannesburg: Fuba Academy, 1992); Elza Miles, *Lifeline out of Africa: The Art of Ernest Mancoba*, Cape Town & Johannesburg: Human and Rousseau, 1994; Ernest Mancoba to Claire Goodlatte, 21 October 1936, Workers Party of South Africa Papers).

<sup>46</sup> In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Tabata also showed a fleeting interest in Jane Gool's sister, Minnie, who he liked for her "open-heartedness" and "joviality". After all, it was Minnie Gool who first met Tabata in the library of the Liberman Institute in Hanover Street, District Six, and introduced him to her sister Jane and brother, Goolam. (I.B. Tabata, 'Brutality: Yes, Brutality of man', Private journal entry, c.1941, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; Ciraj Rassool, interview with Amina Gool, 13 July 1993).

<sup>47</sup> One such occasion was her detailed letter to Tabata about her visit to a Johannesburg mine compound in 1944, which she had undertaken as part of her general research on the political economy of African lives. See Dora Taylor to I.B. Tabata, 24 July 1944, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

remember me?" The question is not answerable, not in simple terms.<sup>48</sup>

Taylor conducted her travels as part of a conversation with Tabata and as something she was doing for their relationship. "[A]s soon as I enter a new place, a new room", she wrote to him, "I invoke you almost aloud.... [I]t is all I can give in your absence".<sup>49</sup> She narrated her experiences in this conversation with Tabata, one that would be picked up more properly when they were reunited. And she expressed her awareness of how vital this communication was for her:

I write home regularly, but I find I do not describe the same things to them as to you (or is it to us two?). Writing quickly both to them and to you, I do not deliberately make the difference, yet my mind remembers different things as the pen flows towards you.<sup>50</sup>

Yet, the inability of Tabata to reply instantly also frustrated Taylor, as she reflected on the importance of reciprocity in their relationship:

It is so painfully one-sided writing what I do and see and think, with not a word of what you are doing and thinking – doing so much more than I. The essence of our rich relationship is its capacity to give and receive in equal measure. And this is violently broken at the moment.<sup>51</sup>

And the craving of reciprocity was not only intellectual. In 1951, while Taylor was away in Britain for a few months, it was Tabata's turn to communicate his desires to Taylor. He wrote a letter reporting on a series of meetings in the Eastern Cape, including the AAC executive meeting, which had "come off very well" with the attendance and participation by "a car load of peasants from Natal" and from other districts. He ended

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<sup>48</sup> Dora Taylor, Diary to Tabata, 9 September 1948 (Mochudi), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. I have called these communications 'diaries' to Tabata following Taylor's own description of them in these terms. These were hybrid communications, part letter, part diary and part journal entry, which also contained a personal, emotional record.

<sup>49</sup> Dora Taylor, Diary to Tabata, 10 September 1948 (Palapye), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>50</sup> Dora Taylor, Diary to Tabata, 12 September 1948 (Serowe), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>51</sup> Dora Taylor, Diary to Tabata, 18 September 1948 (Mochudi), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Ironically, this was written the day after Tabata's arrest at Mount Ayliff, and five days before Taylor found out about the arrest. See Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary entries for 17-23 September 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.



off by expressing his “envy” of the letter “so that I may be held by those warm hands that are to receive it”.<sup>52</sup> In February 1952, while on an extended tour of Natal, he wrote to Taylor about the toll the speeches had been taking on his voice and his energy, and how he was sustained by their relationship. He added:

I am looking forward with impatience to those few minutes of meeting you in Durban.... I just want to set my eyes on you, and hear your voice speak and what of that laugh? If my eyes can take you in, my senses embrace you, my pores drink your presence, then I can go on indefinitely.<sup>53</sup>

In 1956, a month after Tabata had been banned, Taylor travelled to Northern Rhodesia to be with her daughter Sheila. Tabata wrote to her about the agony of being banned, as well as the anguish of being separated from her. After all, his relationship with Taylor was his main point of reference. All he had in her absence were the moments when he stopped “to commune” with her.<sup>54</sup> Tabata was able to express these emotions articulately and at length to her:

I have been writing letters to you in my head. Each day I write a fresh one. Each day I open up with one and the same phrase: “D! Where are you? Where are you, D?” The theme is the same. It has become a refrain. It is strange is it not? When you were in Austria, I knew where you were and what you were doing. My spirit could cross the oceans in one brief moment and touch you, literally feel your warmth and back again. I knew when you sat on a fallen branch of a tree leaning your back against a living trunk. Even when you crossed over to Italy and traversed that country I followed you and saw you with my night’s eyes which saw all too clearly when darkness came.... How is it that now when you are next door in Africa, I cannot easily contact you?<sup>55</sup>

Jane Gool was certainly aware of emotional closeness between Tabata and Taylor beyond politics and culture, but later made this seem like support that Tabata gave to a vulnerable comrade with whom he did vital political work. Taylor, Gool said, was like

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<sup>52</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 23 August 1951, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>53</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 6 February 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>54</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 9 April 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. This was the term Tabata used for his acts of writing letters to Taylor. See also I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 6 January 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>55</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 19 April 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

“a wounded bird”, who would “smile and do anything” for Tabata if he was just able “to say a word to her”. She “would tear the clothes off her back to give to him, because he understood her”. Tabata “could sympathise with her” and “he felt with her”. Taylor was “full of life and energy”, whereas her husband, J.G. was “tied to the chair” as a physically disabled person. While J.G. may have been “a good companion” to Taylor, in Gool’s view, he did not seem to satisfy her boundless energy.<sup>56</sup> This may be part of the explanation of what drew Taylor to Tabata. They were also attracted to each other by powerful desires and emotions, which drew upon the bedrock of their relationship of political and cultural interchange and mutual reinforcement. And Taylor’s daughter Doreen was her and Tabata’s fantasy child, whom Tabata described to her as “our daughter”. In Taylor’s absence, Tabata “carried” her “eyes” with him “all the time” by spending time with Doreen.<sup>57</sup>

Tabata may have felt some responsibility for Taylor’s feelings of political isolation that flowed from her unofficial political status. She recognised the “danger” for her of being “necessarily cut off from contact for a number of reasons” except “through” Tabata. This position was “fatal” for her “politically” and “from the point of view of [her] writing”.<sup>58</sup> And these feelings of the fatality of her isolation were amplified by a change in status in Gool’s relationship with Tabata, when he moved into Milan Street with Gool in May 1953. This was a difficult moment for Taylor, and Tabata’s decision to make this move was a contentious one in his and Taylor’s relationship. But he did so out of a sense of political duty and orderly masculinity, which the demands of a rational movement with a rational leadership required. The words Taylor recorded in her diary of these moves and feelings were: “He has to decide now and feels the conflict but has no choice”.<sup>59</sup> Later, remembering these feelings, Taylor added a marginal note to her diary:

He had to agree to go to Milan Street and live there till exile  
~~together~~... Their house there became a centre for meeting.

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<sup>56</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Jane Gool, Harare, 25 January 1991.

<sup>57</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 19 April 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>58</sup> Dora Taylor, Notes added to Extended Diary, 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>59</sup> Dora Taylor, Extended Diary, entry for 6 May 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

They had a full life and she a full status there at his side, two fighters for the movement. People came daily.<sup>60</sup>

“Painful as it was” for him, Tabata’s move into Gool’s house was nevertheless a “logical step”, which he made with “no hesitation” and because he was “dedicated ... to the movement”.<sup>61</sup>

And at the same time, Taylor and Tabata took the decision to exercise restraint over their mutual emotions and desires. A month after the move, Tabata and Gool had quarrelled. Taylor wrote that this had the consequence of “always drag[ging] his spirit, and mine”. Taylor tried to “lift him out of his lowness of spirit”, which had been “cabined, cribbed and confined ... as never before”. In doing so, she regretted the “mature” way in which they had decided to “behave” and the consequent “muted quality” of their relationship. She “secretly rebelled” and revelled in a “miracle of momentary happiness”, when the “smiling, dancing” Tabata presented her – for the first time – with a pink rose from the Taylors’ winter garden. “The moments with him are precious”, she recorded.<sup>62</sup>

Four years later, during his ban, and with the “treachery and sabotage of one-time fellow fighters” bearing down on him, Tabata made the journey to the Eastern Cape to his mother’s funeral. For Taylor, this was a time when her “affection, sympathy, memory and anger against enemies”, as well as Tabata’s “reverence for the dead” all “co-mingle[d] in the living, pulsing tissues of [her] brain, day and night, through work and even sleep”.<sup>63</sup> On Tabata’s return, Taylor recorded her anguish about the public barriers against their togetherness, and the heartache she felt about the necessity of their emotional denial, especially at that time:

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<sup>60</sup> Dora Taylor, *Extended Diary*, Annotations to entry for 6 May 1953, Dora Taylor Papers. Taylor struck out the word ‘together’, perhaps tempering the memory of her pain, as she recorded her feelings of 1953.

<sup>61</sup> Dora Taylor, *Extended Diary*, Annotations to entry for 6 May 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>62</sup> Dora Taylor, *Extended Diary*, entry for 11 June 1953, Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>63</sup> Dora Taylor, *Extended Diary*, entry for “Saturday night April 1957”, Dora Taylor Papers. I think Taylor made this entry on Friday night, 5 April 1957, when Tabata returned from his mother’s funeral. See I.B. Tabata *Pocket Diary*, Entry for Friday 5 April 1947, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

I feel the pang of being unable to meet you [with] the knowledge that others will gather around you, as by right, joyously surrounding you, and you greeting them and returning to the house, and talking and laughing and exchanging word and touch. But I, full to the brim with those burning images, have no means of outlet, no relief, no possibility to go simply sit by your side, and talk and talk and listen, sharing all that you have been through. Instead of that, I must remain quiet and passive, and far away, denied all natural expression of this tide of feeling. How should I then feel [about] a mounting pain as the hours pass, knowing that you can only come when it is convenient to come...? What of all those burning images with which I have shared your absence? Must I carry them in my breast like a dead child?<sup>64</sup>

And the anxiety Taylor felt about seeing Tabata was mutual. In 1959, while Taylor was in England for five months, Tabata expressed his anguish at her absence, amid all the complexities of his ban, mounting internal bloodletting, and their decision to temper their mutual desires. In a letter that did not make it into the Tabata Collection, Tabata wrote:

Now that my emotions are thawing I am becoming restive. I want to tackle something but you are not there. I find it hard to take in the fact that for the next 4-5 months I shall not see you. I must have been sick or sleeping when you planned your trip to last so long without any protest from me.<sup>65</sup>

Having started as Workers Party comrades, Tabata and Taylor's relationship had developed as one of reciprocal political and literary interchange, and mutual commitment to political mobilisation and political principle. From about the late 1940s, Tabata and Taylor's relationship of political and cultural production drew an added element of emotion and sexuality as they were increasingly drawn to each other beyond their political work. By the 1950s, under very tricky conditions of repression and internal political division, Tabata and Taylor made the difficult decision to temper their

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<sup>64</sup> Dora Taylor, *Extended Diary*, entry for "Saturday night April 1957" (5 April 1957), Dora Taylor Papers.

<sup>65</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor (in England), 24 May 1959, Dora Taylor Papers.

emotional and sexual desires as the tasks of rebuilding a political movement took precedence.

From around 1962, after Taylor had left South Africa permanently, the narration, reproduction and dissemination of I.B. Tabata's biography as part of the Unity Movement's political agitation in Africa, Europe and North America became one of her chief areas of work. This work built upon a significant mutual biographic element that had been a feature of their many-sided relationship in South Africa. As Tabata's primary biographer, Taylor conducted her biographic work as part of her political commitment. Tabata's biography was also a labour of love. Dora Taylor poured her energies into telling the story of Tabata's political life as an expression of her personal commitment to supporting his political efforts. In the process, their relationship of mutuality and exchange became increasingly one-sided, geared towards promoting the political movement and its president, I.B. Tabata. In the process, Taylor paid the price of sacrificing her literary work as the urgency of political agitation gradually gave way to the politics of presidentialism. And in return, as a means of settling his enormous debt of gratitude, Tabata ensured that Taylor overcame her political isolation by being invited to join the Executive Committee of the Unity Movement in exile.

In April 1962, Dora Taylor arrived in Britain from Northern Rhodesia, after having left Cape Town in the previous month. Five weeks later, after having secretly left South Africa, I.B. Tabata embarked on an 'epic' journey and joined her in Hemel Hempstead in a personal and political reunion that she called a "miracle".<sup>66</sup> Amid visits to museums and galleries in London, to King's College Chapel in Cambridge and to Karl Marx's grave, Tabata and Taylor resumed their political work. While Taylor typed fresh copies of Tabata's addresses to SOYA and APDUSA, Tabata set about meeting and attempting to lobby Tanganyikan, Ghanaian, Chinese, Polish, Soviet and Czech officials in London. Tabata and Taylor also circulated Tabata's publications and addresses to potential supporters or influential publicists in Britain, such as Colin Legum and Basil Davidson,

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<sup>66</sup> Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary, entry for 25 May 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

and to correspondents and officials in Tanganyika, Nyasaland and Moscow, including to the Soviet Africanist, Professor Potekhin.<sup>67</sup> The stated aim of Tabata's "mission" was to make his way to China "for consultation and discussions" and to seek political and material support.<sup>68</sup>

Tabata also sought assistance from activists from the Fourth International, who had been re-evaluating their position on national and anti-colonial struggles. He met with Ted Grant and Jimmy Deane, who gave advice on the value of seeking support in Algeria. He initiated correspondence with Michel Pablo (M.N. Raptis), who was a political adviser to the Ben Bella government and whom he and Taylor met in Algiers a few months later. In travelling to Algiers, Tabata and Taylor held discussions with Bentoumi, the "second in command" of the FLN, and also asked for support from the Yugoslav consul. They also made enormous efforts to meet with M. Verges, the head of the African section of the Algerian Foreign Affairs Department.<sup>69</sup> In Rome, Fourth Internationalist Livio Maitan assisted them with arrangements. This period may also have been when Tabata initiated contact with Fourth International member, Ernest Mandel. It was Mandel who later gave Tabata advice on approaching Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah for assistance, as Nkrumah was thought to have much more sympathy for the "radical wings of the liberation movement". Mandel also advised that this help should be sought through George Padmore's widow Dorothy who was the co-ordinator of all Nkrumah's "non-governmental foreign contacts".<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Dora Taylor, *Pocket Diary*, entries, 26 May – 7 November 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>68</sup> I.B. Tabata, Letter of Introduction to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, UK ("Letters of introduction to Embassies in the UK"), June 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>69</sup> Dora Taylor, *Pocket Diary*, entries, 7 October – 18 November 1962; 'Meeting with Bentoumi, representing the political Section of the F.L.N.', Algiers, 7 November 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>70</sup> Ernest Mandel to 'Friend' (Dora Taylor), 10 December 1963; Ernest Mandel ('Walter') to Friend (Dora Taylor), 6 February 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection BC 925. While the first letter was signed 'Ernest', all his others were written under his pseudonym, 'Walter'. In keeping with the anonymities of this encoded correspondence, Tabata was referred to as 'Tom'. 'Tom Bejula' and 'Anna Jack' were the pseudonyms that Tabata and Taylor generally used at this time when the need for secrecy arose (see Telegram from Tom to Anna Jack, 18 December 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925). Mandel's recommendation that Tabata hasten "to get to Accra" was reasserted in early 1964, after the Unity Movement's unsuccessful application for recognition to the OAU's Committee of Nine. Mandel suggested that in places like



### *Fashioning Tabata's biography*

Virtually from the beginning of Tabata's secret sojourn in Britain, Taylor undertook the work of fashioning a written political biography of Tabata's life. This work started off as a letter of introduction, written to the Chinese and other embassies, which sought to explain the political history of the AAC and NEUM and its attempt at building a national movement structured on a federal lines and premised on the principled basis of non-collaboration. It also outlined the purposes of the formation of APDUSA. The letter presented an analysis of the apartheid state's attacks on the ANC and PAC who were seen as "the protégés of the liberals", while reiterating that repression was also meted out on the leaders of the AAC and NEUM, who had been "imprisoned, banned and banished". In spite of these attacks, the letter asserted that "the spirit of the people [was] hardening", and the "movement ... spreading", with new challenges exercising "the minds of the leadership".<sup>71</sup>

What is significant for our purposes is that the letter was written as an autobiography of I.B. Tabata's life as a political activist, author of political histories and analyst of political conditions. An eleven-page draft in Dora Taylor's handwriting suggested that its creation in Hemel Hempstead probably entailed dictation and careful thought over its composition and argument. Written in the first person, it started off introducing Tabata as follows: "I am an African born in South Africa. I have been associated with the liberatory struggles in SA since 1934. Shortly after leaving the College of Fort Hare, I joined the African Voters' Association in Cape Town". The letter explained the emergence of the AAC, which had been set up to be "the mouthpiece of the African people", and whose founding he had "participated in".<sup>72</sup>

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Accra and Algiers, there were "great possibilities" of having the Committee of Nine's decision reversed.

<sup>71</sup> I.B. Tabata, Letter of Introduction to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, UK ("Letters of introduction to Embassies in the UK"), June 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>72</sup> I.B. Tabata, Letter of Introduction to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, UK ("Letters of introduction to Embassies in the UK"; Draft in Dora Taylor's script), June 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925 (Draft in Dora Taylor's script). This document also bears an annotation by Taylor that it had been "dictated".

The letter also charted Tabata's history as a writer of political pamphlets, books and other tracts, and discussed the political significance of key publications. In the autobiographical voice, the letter explained that:

It has been my life's work to spread political enlightenment through the medium of books, pamphlets, many articles in various newspapers, leaflets for the organisation as well as conference speeches which are often published by the organisation in pamphlet form, not to speak of constant correspondence with fellow-workers and peasants throughout the country.<sup>73</sup>

The letter outlined Tabata's direct experience of state repression in the form of his arrest on charges of incitement in 1948 and his 5-year ban imposed in 1956. It ended in Tabata being introduced as the President of APDUSA, and reiterating that his organisation had entrusted him with a mission, which had instilled in him "a strong sense of urgency". This made him want his absence from South Africa to be "as brief as possible".<sup>74</sup>

Building upon Taylor's brief biographical sketch which she had sent to a potential reviewer of *Education for Barbarism* in 1959, and more generally on their years-long discussions on biography, the narrative emphases and explanations of this biographical document were the outcome of a co-authored process, and constituted an auto/biography, which Taylor and Tabata fashioned together.<sup>75</sup> The purposes of this founding biographic text were diplomatic in enabling Tabata's credentials to be presented to officials of foreign governments as part of a dossier that explained who the AAC and NEUM were in their quest for support. As a testament of the life of a South African resistance leader, Tabata's biography was intended as a mediation that would facilitate direct meetings with embassy officials. During the remainder of 1962, Taylor

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<sup>73</sup> I.B. Tabata, Letter of Introduction to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, UK ("Letters of introduction to Embassies in the UK"), June 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>74</sup> I.B. Tabata, Letter of Introduction to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, UK ("Letters of introduction to Embassies in the UK"), June 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>75</sup> Also significant here was the suggestion a few months earlier made to Taylor by her husband, J.G., about Tabata that she "write his life". J.G. Taylor had just remarked that "to have known [Tabata]" was "to have been enriched". At the time, Dora Taylor noted that it was "strange for him to say that I should do so". See Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary, entry for 24 March 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

continued to rework and re-edit Tabata's biography,<sup>76</sup> making use of the first-person dictated text as the raw material. Out of this, Taylor developed a five-page biography in the third person, which largely followed the narrative structure and emphases of the first person text. This document also stressed Tabata's capacities as author and orator, and concluded with a foregrounding of Tabata's presidency of APDUSA, a "new body" created for the purpose of building "mass organisation".<sup>77</sup>

This was the biography sent by Taylor to the Yugoslav official, M. Tomac and the Algerian, M. Verges, on Tabata's behalf. Tomac had indicated that he was "preparing material on political movements and leaders in Africa". The "brief political biography" that Taylor had written was sent partly as a means of overcoming the "conspiracy of silence" against the Unity Movement. Taylor feared that the biographic document may have been "too long" for Tomac's purpose, and offered to "write a shorter biography" if he needed one. In her covering letter to Verges, Taylor apologised that the biography of Tabata she had written was "very short" and that in all likelihood, it did not "adequately cover either the complex political background or his work". She repeated her hope that it may "in some degree" break the "conspiracy of silence" against the AAC and NEUM and "their influence in South Africa".<sup>78</sup>

It is significant that these letters were sent by Taylor under her own name, and in the absence of Tabata, who had departed two weeks before for South Africa via London, Belgrade, Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam and Salisbury. With Tabata unable to continue this communication directly because of the need for secrecy, these responsibilities fell to Taylor in England, who now engaged publicly on behalf of the Unity Movement under her own name. Following on from her period of being Tabata's proxy during his ban in the late 1950s, these communications and the meetings that she conducted at Tabata's

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<sup>76</sup> See for example, Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary, entries for 11 June & 2 November 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>77</sup> 'I.B. Tabata – South Africa: A Founding Member of the All-African Convention (1935) and the Non-European Unity Movement (1943), President of the African Peoples' Democratic Union of Southern Africa (1961)', I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>78</sup> Dora Taylor to M. Tomac, 1 December 1962; Dora Taylor to M. Verges, 5 December 1962; Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary, entries for 3 & 7 December 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

side with foreign officials in Algiers in the previous month represented the beginning of Dora Taylor's political 'coming-out'. Her Hemel Hempstead address was given to foreign officials as the place for them to send their communications.

After Tabata's departure for South Africa, Taylor immersed herself in political work "single-handed",<sup>79</sup> retyping Tabata's APDUSA presidential address, "preparing notes, to write up the history of the movement", composing articles on South Africa and the movement, and mailing reprinted pamphlets back to South Africa. She also "retyped [the] biography of B" and felt "pain all the way" as she retraced the London sites and "familiar streets" of her and Tabata's reunion.<sup>80</sup> In their correspondence, Taylor and Tabata reported to each other on the progress of their political work. And they also reminisced about their time together in England, Algiers and Rome. In these exciting settings, they had experienced the frisson and stimulation of being reconjoined in the passions of political work and the intimacies of each other's company. "If we were not mad we would never have had our Algiers", Tabata declared to Taylor. Tabata also expressed his satisfaction with Taylor's ongoing biographical labours, and with the possibility of his life history being included in Tomac's work: "I am glad about the profile. It will be a good thing if your fellows can get in the who is who".<sup>81</sup>

At the end of December 1962, Taylor left for Cambridge, Massachusetts, where J.G. had gone to do research two months previously. Tabata returned to Cape Town to the news of Goolam Gool's tragic death and Nathaniel Honono's house arrest. Both Tabata and Taylor immersed themselves in the politics of biographic narration. Tabata addressed a series of meetings to pay "homage" to Goolam Gool. In Cape Town, at an extended executive conference held in semi-secret at Witsands, Tabata gave a "real tribute to that gallant spirit", presenting what some thought was "a tribute worthy of the man and of

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<sup>79</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 2 January 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

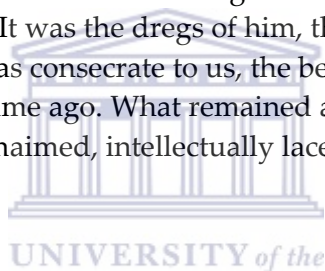
<sup>80</sup> Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary, entries for 22 November-20 December 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>81</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 14 December 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

us". Goolam Gool, he had argued, was someone who had "died several years ago", though he had been "buried only a few weeks ago".<sup>82</sup>

In Pietermaritzburg, at a commemoration held by the APDUSA branch, Tabata expanded on his Cape Town presentation, and dealt inter alia with Goolam Gool's social origins and his formation as someone with "a rounded outlook" from which "his political ideas and principles were drawn". Gool had been "the embodiment of all that the organisations [had] stood for". That was why it was necessary, Tabata argued, "for the renegades to destroy him" when "the great land-slide of the whole Coloured petit-bourgeois, the intellectuals, left the movement". It had been necessary "to destroy the man in order to facilitate the destruction of what he stood for".<sup>83</sup> Tabata ended by suggesting that

what had been buried a few weeks ago ... was not the Dr G.H. Gool we all knew. It was the dregs of him, the earth and dust. That part which was consecrate to us, the better part of him, was killed a long time ago. What remained and lived on was a being, spiritually maimed, intellectually lacerated and morally wounded.<sup>84</sup>



Tabata also expressed his frustration with the lack of public knowledge about Nathaniel Honono, who had been described in reports about his ban as "just a managing director of an insurance company, as if a man can be banned for being just that". Tabata had resolved "to write about it to expose the role of the press". And he announced to Taylor that he had "already made a draft".<sup>85</sup> The result was an anonymously written biography of Nathaniel Honono, which attempted to set the record straight about his political contribution as a member of CATA, and about the effects of repressive measures that he and his colleagues had experienced.<sup>86</sup> This tract authored by Tabata represented the start of the focus on biographies of repression, which became one of the means by which

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<sup>82</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 7 December 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>83</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 24 January 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>84</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 24 January 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>85</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 2 January 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>86</sup> 'Who is this Mr N. Honono Now Serving a Five Year Ban and Placed Under House Arrest?', n.d. (c. February 1963), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

the Unity Movement presented its case for material and political support during the 1960s. The biography of Honono was included in parcels of publications and published addresses that Tabata forwarded to Taylor to be sent to potential supporters.<sup>87</sup>

Taylor, in the meantime, availed herself of her proximity to the Asian and African Studies Program of Amherst, Smith and Mount Holyoke Colleges and the University of Massachusetts, where Gwendolyn Carter was based. Taylor began to correspond with Carter, who had just published a book on South Africa, as an avenue of overcoming the ‘conspiracy of silence’ against the AAC and NEUM. In her book, Carter had commented on “how difficult it was ... to acquire accurate information – and literature – about all the political movements in South Africa”. Drawing no doubt on the notes she was preparing on the history of the movement, Taylor’s letter presented a cryptic account of the history of the AAC and the NEUM, which Carter’s book had failed to refer to. She was careful to explain the divergence between the AAC and ANC as “two different paths taken by the Non-White political movements”. Taylor ended off her letter explaining that she had stressed the AAC and NEUM because “their role ha[d] not been sufficiently assessed, and their leaders too often slandered and belittled”. Throughout her letter, she referred Carter to Tabata’s writings, and foregrounded her discussion of the movement with Tabata’s record of political leadership. In addition, Taylor also sent Carter a copy of Tabata’s biographical note about Nathaniel Honono and a copy of *Education for Barbarism*.<sup>88</sup>

As political biography became an increasingly central element of the political engagements of both of them, Taylor expressed her concern to Tabata that satisfying the increasing requests for biographical sketches represented a “departure from [their]

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<sup>87</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 28 February 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>88</sup> Dora Taylor to Gwendolen Carter, 16 March 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925, also reproduced in Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection (2:XT1:92/1). In July 1963, Carter followed up this communication by meeting with Tabata, Honono and Gool in Mbabane in July 1963, and further contact led to Carter asking Tabata or his colleagues to furnish her with a “detailed chronological account” of the AAC and NEUM’s activities, and “more ... detail about the associations of these groups with other nationalist organisations”. See ‘Tabata, Honono, and Miss Gool, near Mbabane, Swaziland’, (notes of Gwendolen Carter’s discussion with Tabata, Honono and Gool), July 25, 1963; Gwendolen Carter to Dora Taylor, 24 December 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.



political practice". Tabata assured her of "the correctness of the step" that they had taken: "There can be no going back now. We must go forward on that road. Our future lies in that direction".<sup>89</sup> And as if to confirm that the new approach marked a shift away from anonymity in favour of acknowledging and asserting political agency, Tabata informed Taylor that her decades of selfless political labour in the shadows of obscurity and isolation were over. After having already 'come out' a few months before in being at Tabata's side in meetings with potential supporters, now Taylor acquired a formal status in the movement itself.

From the moment of his return to Cape Town from his secret overseas journey, Tabata had decided that the time had come for Taylor to be accorded recognition for her work, and for the cloak of anonymity to be removed. Tabata reminded Taylor of how she used to worry "that nobody will ever know how hard we worked". And he agreed people "had no conception" of her efforts.<sup>90</sup> However, at the beginning of 1963, this began to change, and Tabata wrote the following words to Taylor:

I have been talking and talking and talking. Now they have a pretty good idea. I am glad of one thing. For the first time in our life I have been able to talk about you simply, naturally and forcefully. For the first time you have taken your rightful place in the centre of things. It gives me great pleasure to be able to accord an individual a place due to her. As we grow older we have no time for extraneous considerations of false modesty. I myself in talking about it all acquire a fresh sense of appreciation and a profound respect for a comrade whose single-mindedness and devotion developed under conditions of anonymity without the aid of public acclaim or the ambition spurred by the foot-lights of public performances.<sup>91</sup>

A few days later, at the NEUM's extended executive conference, which was "the most interesting and successful gathering of the tribes for many years", Tabata made a presentation in which he "held the floor for 5 hours". In his speech, "for the first time",

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<sup>89</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 7 January 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>90</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 2 January 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>91</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 2 January 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

he was able “to put D in the centre publicly”. “From now on”, he wrote to Taylor, “there is no more isolation or anonymity”.<sup>92</sup>

In the succeeding months in 1963, there were intermittent moments when Taylor stepped back into the necessary anonymity of her pseudonym, ‘Anna Jack’. This was the name with which she communicated with the Tanganyikan Ministry of External Affairs and Defence about Tabata, Jane Gool and Nathaniel Honono’s arrival in Dar-es-Salaam after they had found refuge in Swaziland for two months.<sup>93</sup> On two occasions in 1965 and once in 1971, Taylor again made use of her old 1952 pseudonym, Nosipho Majeke.<sup>94</sup> But by then, in some ways, Taylor had almost affectionately adopted this Nguni version of her birth name as part of her own acquired Africanness. Apart from these cases, Taylor began to engage publicly as a leader of the Unity Movement *in her own name*. In July 1964, she joined Tabata and other Unity Movement members in Cairo at a hearing under the auspices of the OAU Council of Ministers.<sup>95</sup> And in August 1964, Taylor was made a member of the executive of the Unity Movement, and “officially a member of the delegation in exile”. When Tabata informed her of this decision, he suggested it was “the greatest tribute that has been paid to anybody in our movement. No longer will you be able to say nobody knows you or is unaware of your existence.”<sup>96</sup>

In Britain and Canada, where she moved in August 1964 to join J.G., who had taken up another temporary research appointment, Taylor continued her biographical work. This work was spurred on as a response to the charge made by the OAU’s Committee of

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<sup>92</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 7 January 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>93</sup> C.S. Mengisen, for Ag. Permanent Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs and Defence to Anna Jack (Dora Taylor), 7 August 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Interestingly, the entry of “Mr and Mrs Tabata” and Nathaniel Honono into Tanganyika was facilitated by a cable from the ANC, which recommended that the chief immigration officer issue entry permits and travel documents. See Sam Kahn (Maurice, Tarlo, Cohen & Co, Solicitors) to Dora Taylor, 8 August 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>94</sup> See Chapter Five, footnote 17.

<sup>95</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 10 June 1964; 11 August 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. In June 1964, Taylor spent a few weeks with her daughter Sheila in Northern Rhodesia before travelling to Cairo. After Cairo, Taylor moved to Canada, at “the other end of the globe”.

<sup>96</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 11 August 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. This decision was made at the same meeting at which Tabata was made Unity Movement external president.

Nine that the AAC and Unity Movement were not known. It was also driven by the need to influence the academic archive of South African resistance history, as represented by the requests made by Gwendolen Carter and Tom Karis. In addition, Taylor's biographical work was also directed at publicising lives of persecution, as she sought to document the repression experienced by members of the Unity Movement.<sup>97</sup> From about April 1965, with the continued denial of OAU recognition and with delays in securing support promised by Kwame Nkrumah, the efforts at securing material and financial support for the AAC and Unity Movement became connected to the solidarity work of the Alexander Defense Committee.<sup>98</sup> Just a few weeks before, Tabata and his colleagues had challenged the "attempts" to "dissociate" Neville Alexander "from the Unity Movement" and insisted that the "well-known" facts of the political affiliations of Alexander and his colleagues be made known.<sup>99</sup>

In 1965, Dora Taylor was instrumental in facilitating the Unity Movement's connection with the New York ADC. She began to supply the ADC with key documents of the movement, and she visited its New York headquarters for meetings and to give lectures. She also prepared brochures for use by the ADC. She provided research materials to the newly formed Canadian ADC. She kept in touch with Tabata about the progress of her work, about movement publications, and about plans for him to undertake a U.S.

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<sup>97</sup> See Dora Taylor to Fenner Brockway, 27 November 1964; 'Defend victims of apartheid persecution' (draft brochure for Alexander Defense Committee, Canada), Many 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; 'In Verwoerd's South Africa: A tale of persecution', Issued by the Head Office Abroad of The All-African Convention and Unity Movement of South Africa, 8 March 1965, Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 2:DA13:84/10. Taylor continued work on the "stories" of Leo Sihlali, Louis Mtshizana and Livingstone Mqotsi. See Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary, entries for 23-26 March 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection BC 925.

<sup>98</sup> The ADC's head office in New York had just presented a memorandum to the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid, which Tabata suggested was "unchallengeable and cogent". See 'Memorandum Dated 8 March 1965 from the Alexander Defense Committee, New York', 16 March 1965; I.B. Tabata to Berta Green, Corresponding Secretary, ADC, 2 April 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>99</sup> 'The Animosity of the S.A. Press', Statement issued by the Lusaka Office of the All-African Convention and UMSA, 1965 Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 2:XA5:92. This document was also incorporated into the last four pages of 'In Verwoerd's South Africa: A Tale of Persecution', Issued by the Head Office Abroad of The All-African Convention and Unity Movement of South Africa, 8 March 1965, Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 2:DA13:84/10.

speaking tour.<sup>100</sup> Taylor also continued reworking and developing Tabata's biography, and prepared a typescript about his political career especially for the New York ADC.<sup>101</sup> Taylor also reworked part of Tabata's "profile" to "fit in the coloured front".<sup>102</sup> By this time, the biographical sketches that she had constructed and circulated for diplomatic purposes a few years before had grown into a substantial biographical article or document that befitted a president of a liberation movement. It was printed and widely circulated under the auspices of the ADC and to members of the Unity Movement in Africa and Europe. This document acted as the main source for the cryptic biographic pamphlets of Tabata that were circulated around the United States to different ADC chapters as part of their resource packs, as preparations were made for Tabata's speaking tour of the United States in 1965-66.<sup>103</sup>

In this narrative Tabata was described as having "devoted a lifetime to one single purpose, the liberation of the oppressed people of South Africa". The biographic article began by establishing "the foundations of his search for liberty" as lying in Cape Town, where he encountered "the harsh impact of city life in the segregated slums set aside for non-Whites". It was this that "equipped him with the political understanding of the nature of that society which oppresses and exploits his people", and "it steeled" him to become a "political leader of integrity and unswerving resolve". Alongside a discussion of the emergence of the AAC and its federal strategy of mobilisation and political unity, and of the birth of the NEUM out of a call for unity sent out by the AAC, the document also made mention of Tabata's special attributes and contributions. Tabata was "an indefatigable organiser, concentrating especially in spreading the idea of a united, co-ordinated struggle for liberation amongst the peasants of the Transkei". He also

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<sup>100</sup> Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary, entries between 3 April and 5 June 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>101</sup> Nosipho Majeke, 'I.B. Tabata, President of the Unity Movement of South Africa: For Full Democratic Rights' (1965), Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, also found in Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 2:XT1:92/3. Another version of this text is to be found in the Tabata Collection. See Dora Taylor, 'I.B. Tabata: President of the Unity Movement of South Africa', n.d. (c. 1965), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>102</sup> Dora Taylor, Pocket Diary, entry for 9 June 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>103</sup> See Chapter Six.

authored pamphlets aimed at “clarifying the political tasks confronting the oppressed people of South Africa as a whole”.<sup>104</sup>

The biographical article drew attention to the “important part” Tabata played in resistance to the Rehabilitation Scheme, which it suggested the AAC “was helping the peasants to organise”. It also made mention of Tabata’s arrest and acquittal, which “gave considerable impetus” to peasant resistance. The article surveyed Tabata’s major written works and speeches and discussed his experience of being banned by the apartheid state. It ended with a discussion of his presidential address to the first APDUSA conference.<sup>105</sup> In the process, the Taylor’s article referred to Tabata’s special attributes, of how

he holds a listening crowd with the clarity and forcefulness of his political ideas made vivid by the vigour and homeliness of images that speak to the peasant, especially when he addresses them in Xhosa.<sup>106</sup>

And “in dealing with opponents”, it suggested, Tabata was “swift and formidable in his intransigence”, especially when it came to the violation of “a question of principle”. Outside South Africa, the article concluded, Tabata continued to pursue the cause of liberation “with the same indomitable spirit that sustained him through quarter of a century of struggle in his home country”. The struggle for liberation was “his life”, and it was “in the principles of the Movement” that one was able to “perceive the quality of the man”.<sup>107</sup>

Taylor’s biographic work, especially that done in the early-to-mid-1960s represented the most substantial mediation in the development of the idea of Tabata as an individual

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<sup>104</sup> Nosipho Majeke, ‘I.B. Tabata, President of the Unity Movement of South Africa for Full Democratic Rights’ (1965), Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

<sup>105</sup> Nosipho Majeke, ‘I.B. Tabata, President of the Unity Movement of South Africa: For Full Democratic Rights’ (1965), Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

<sup>106</sup> Nosipho Majeke, ‘I.B. Tabata, President of the Unity Movement of South Africa: For Full Democratic Rights’ (1965), Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

<sup>107</sup> Nosipho Majeke, ‘I.B. Tabata, President of the Unity Movement of South Africa: For Full Democratic Rights’ (1965), Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

leader of the Unity Movement with a significant political biography. Taylor's biographic profiles and articles about Tabata, produced as part of the quest for funds and material support from international sources, were absorbed into the literature of the movement and acquired canonical status alongside Tabata's writings. Initiatives to republish Tabata's works were accompanied by Taylor's narrative of Tabata's life.<sup>108</sup> The resistance narrative that these biographic texts conveyed was the product of the long history of mutual biographic conversations between Tabata and Taylor, and particularly of their co-authored first-person text. This biographic stage was also partly the product of a longer history of individuation that had emerged out of Tabata's history of writing and authorship. And this transition from biographic aversion to biographic narration was also depicted through the lens of the camera as collective leadership gave way to presidentialism.

From the 1960s, the auto/biographical narrative of Tabata's life seeped into the veins of the movement, with concealed aspects of underground Trotskyist activism added when conditions allowed. Veneration of Tabata and knowing the biographical narrative of his political contribution became a vital element of political commitment within the structures of UMSA. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a presidential politics of an exiled national movement, centred on Tabata's leadership and a biographically constructed sense of greatness, was consolidated. This coincided with the movement's increasing dislocation from political structures inside South Africa, under the impact of heightened levels of state repression. As a consequence, all the work of biographic mediation and

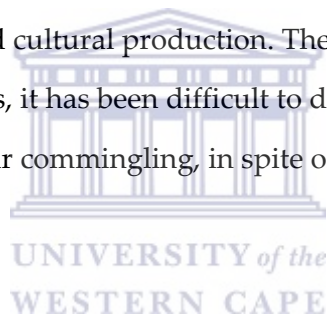
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<sup>108</sup> The result of all this effort was the unpublished manuscript, which sought to republish a range of Tabata's writings as a coherent whole, and that was edited by Dora Taylor, who also wrote the introduction. UWC graduate student and Cape Town activist, André Marais, who had found the manuscript on a street with a pile of other papers, passed it on to me. See Dora Taylor (ed), *The Dynamic of Revolution in South Africa: Speeches and Writings by I.B. Tabata* (Unpublished manuscript, c.1969, in author's possession). In 1971, Dora Taylor also sought to turn her introduction to this unpublished text into a separate pamphlet, whose focus was extended to include a report on the arrests of APDUSA members in 1971. This document was also found by Marais and passed on to me. See Nosipho Majeke, 'The Dynamic of Revolution in South Africa', Unpublished pamphlet, 1971 (author's possession).



production of I.B. Tabata made a minimal direct impression on organised resistance against apartheid inside South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>109</sup>

Nevertheless, Taylor's biographical texts on Tabata were also absorbed into the collections of various libraries and archives in the United States, and formed the basis of the profile of Tabata's political life published in Karis and Carter. In the archive, Taylor's biographical work acquired the status of primary sources, where they were utilised by historians as largely unmediated documents on the facts of Tabata's political life. The idea of Tabata as having a political biography was, in the main, the product of the political labours and personal devotion of Dora Taylor. This idea was the outcome of a decades-long relationship in a borderland space of desire between the private and the public, and the personal and the political. For much of its existence, this multifaceted relationship was marked by intensity and mutuality, as each utilised the other as a resource for their political and cultural production. The reciprocity of their relationship was such that at critical points, it has been difficult to disentangle individual authorship of ideas and writing from their commingling, in spite of public claims to individual authorship.



From the early 1960s, as collectivity and anonymity had given way to individuation and biography, Dora Taylor's political 'coming out' and acquisition of formal status in the movement represented an acknowledgement of her political work and commitment. Tabata and Taylor experienced the excitement of public political engagement during excursions to Algiers and Rome in 1962 and Cairo in 1964, as Taylor took her place in her own name at Tabata's side. They rekindled the thrill of travelling together for political work in 1965, when Taylor once again took her place at Tabata's side during

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<sup>109</sup> Under the influence of APDUSA activists such as Bobby Wilcox and Frank Anthony, who had been released from Robben Island, an APDUSA structure that was loyal to Tabata and the external leadership was reconstituted in Cape Town in the early 1980s.

much of his speaking tour of the United States under the auspices of the Alexander Defense Committee.<sup>110</sup>

In spite of the movement's formal recognition of Dora Taylor, the nature of her and Tabata's relationship changed substantially and became more one-sided. Mutuality gave way to presidentialism and culture and literature gave way to political struggle. Taylor's intellectual life became increasingly devoted to promoting Tabata and his writings. Tabata's rise to the position of liberation movement president with a biography in the 1960s coincided ironically with publishers rejecting Dora Taylor's literary works. Between February 1962 and June 1965, Taylor submitted her manuscript of a novel, *Rage of Life*, to publishers including Heinemann, Collins, Hodder and Stoughton, and Little Brown. However, it was rejected and returned by all of them.<sup>111</sup> This was most likely Taylor's novel that had drawn upon her own experience of childhood abandonment. Saddened by the manuscript's rejection, Taylor found solace in her political work. However, in spite of her being formally accepted into the movement, there was still "no place" for Taylor in Lusaka with the external leadership, "because of strains".<sup>112</sup> Taylor's

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<sup>110</sup> During the tour, Taylor chose to stay in Chicago, while Tabata went on to Milwaukee, Madison, Minneapolis, Denver and San Francisco. In Chicago, she felt she would be "of far greater assistance" close to Gwendolen Carter (who had moved to Northwestern University), whom she described as having "by far the best files on South African 'movements'" in the U.S. Taylor sat for an interview at Northwestern University about the AAC and NEUM, which devoted substantial biographic attention to Tabata. See 'Transcript of a conversation with Dora Taylor at Northwestern University on Nov. 20, 1965, regarding the role of the All African Convention and the Non-European Unity Movement in the South African nationalist movement', Karis-Carter Microfilm Collection, 2:XT1:92/2; see also Dora Taylor's *Diary of Tabata and her U.S. Tour, 1965*, 6<sup>th</sup> Installment, Unity Movement of South Africa Papers (courtesy, Jane Gool, Harare 1991). In 1970, the Committee for a Free South Africa invited Tabata to undertake another speaking tour of the United States. See Dora Taylor, 'I.B. Tabata, President Unity Movement of South Africa: A Biographical Note', March 1971, author's possession. This biographic text was also found and passed on to me by André Marais. It no doubt represented one of the last biographic tracts of Tabata that Taylor produced.

<sup>111</sup> Movement publisher, Prometheus, had been the publisher of Taylor's last literary publication in February 1962 before she left South Africa. This was a play, *Bitter Waters*, based on the novel *Fontamara*, and Tabata had facilitated its publication. See Dora Taylor, *Pocket Diary*, entries for 14 & 27 February 1962, 6 & 26 April 1962, 15 May 1962, 30 June 1962, 11 September 1962 and 22 June 1965; *Ilizwi leSizwe*, Vol 1, No 4, February 1962, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>112</sup> Dora Taylor, *Pocket Diary*, entry for 4 July 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Serious internal political tensions only really erupted in 1966. In early 1965, there had been minor strains, especially in relation to Livingstone Mqotsi, who had given Tabata "cause to worry". But these were temporarily resolved. By July 1965, I think the 'strains' that kept Taylor from joining the leadership in Lusaka as she had wished, most likely related to the anxieties experienced by Jane Gool about the special

political work in the movement, in many ways, continued to be an expression of selflessness and sacrifice as loyalty to the cause of liberation increasingly became defined as loyalty to Tabata. More than anyone, Taylor performed this duty unquestioningly with diligence and devotion.

Perhaps the most significant biographical tribute to Tabata that Taylor constructed was the archival collection that entered the University of Cape Town from 1989. This archive, constituting the foremost biographic ordering of Tabata's life, was the product of Dora Taylor's duty and service to the cause of the movement and I.B. Tabata. The collection was not merely a chronological assemblage of the traces of Tabata's political career. More than a mere repository, it bore the traces of a range of interventions, mediations and processes of production. And the primary form of mediation (and even authorship) that left its mark on almost every feature of this collection was the efforts of Dora Taylor. Subsequent interventions by UMSA activists in Britain, such as the work that Ronnie Britten did in preparing documents for mailing to UCT,<sup>113</sup> were not able to wipe away the primary mark of Dora Taylor, nor the extent to which the collection is a biography of Tabata and Taylor's relationship of intensity. Through the constitution of these papers as a collection in a university archive, Taylor's mediations and her and Tabata's relationship of politics, culture and intimacy found a place in the academy and the institutions of public culture. It might indeed be more appropriate that the collection be thought of as the Tabata-Taylor Collection.

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relationship that Tabata continued to have with Taylor. And because the attractions and emotions in Tabata and Taylor's relationship continued to extend beyond political comradeship, I think Gool had put her foot down and prevented Taylor from moving to Lusaka. These tensions were confirmed in unrecorded conversations with Jane Gool in 1993.

<sup>113</sup> It was Ronnie Britten, who undertook the task of preparing and sending documents to UCT between 1988 and 1994. Taylor had been in charge of the files until her death in the mid-1970s. This "repatriation" first began anonymously, with Britten using the name, B Johns, and included materials from a final foray he made in 1993 into the Taylor Papers, which her daughter, Doreen Muskett kept in Duntish, England. The materials that Britten borrowed found their way into the Tabata Collection and were never returned to Muskett. There is an extensive correspondence in the Tabata Collection between B Johns/Ronnie Britten and Margaret Richards of UCT between 1988 and 1994 about the logistics, delivery and sorting of the Tabata Papers. At the time that Britten was doing this work, Jane Gool suggested to me that in discharging the onus of Tabata's promise in his 1987 letter to Francis Wilson, Britten had perhaps taken on an inappropriate "mantle of leadership" (Jane Gool, personal communication, 1994).

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### TAKING THE NATION TO SCHOOL: NARRATIVE AND COUNTER-NARRATIVE IN THE PRODUCTION AND CONTESTATION OF I.B. TABATA'S BIOGRAPHY

The rise of presidentialism in the 1960s and its emergence as a kind of cult in the organisational practice of a movement in decline needs to be understood in the context of relations of paternalism and patronage that characterised the Unity Movement, notwithstanding the assertion of collective leadership. This seeming incongruity emerged out of the defining features of the AAC and the Unity Movement. The movement, as it emerged in the 1940s and developed in the 1950s, was in some ways marked by a family structure, but in a more significant way took on the features of a school. And just as schools have been spaces of enablement and enlightenment, they have also simultaneously been institutions of discipline and constraint. The contests and challenges over I.B. Tabata's leadership that erupted in the movement in South Africa in the 1950s and in Lusaka in the 1960s emerged out of these ambiguities and contradictions. The accusations of leadership cults and autocratic leadership were simultaneously contests over I.B. Tabata's biography and the terms of its narration.

Significant biographic contests over Tabata's life and the terms of its narration occurred at his funeral in Lesseyton in the Eastern Cape in 1990 and at the unveiling of the headstone of his grave in 1995. Tabata's funeral was meant to be a process of repatriation of a secular political leader, albeit of a political movement whose time had passed. The burial and funeral sought to reconnect Tabata's with the soil of his Eastern Cape birthplace, while the stone unveiling attempted to mark the significance of Tabata's grave. At these events, biographic narrations, which were centred on familial and indigenous Christian elements, and connected to the landscape and a longer rural history, demanded a space of expression alongside the biographic lessons in secular

political leadership. By that time, what remained of the political movement was powerless in the face of this familial and religious appropriation of Tabata's biography.

### *Paternalism and patronage in the family and the school*

The narration of I.B. Tabata's life occurred through definite biographical relations as an integral part of the unfolding of his life. Initially this narration built upon the biographical reticence of adherence to collective leadership, which was claimed as a central feature of the 'New Road' taken by the AAC, Anti-CAD and the Unity Movement during the 1940s and 1950s. We saw this biographic disavowal proclaimed in Tabata's correspondence with Mnguni, the editor of *Inyaniso*, as well as in his use of the pseudonym for his published writing. Nevertheless, we also saw how the seeds of Tabata's individuation and biography were sewn by the acts of writing and authorship, even when this occurred under pseudonyms. Later, when Tabata's biography began to take on an increasingly presidential character, his political activities were more and more immersed in ongoing processes of narrative work. This biographic narration was a form of representation that did not merely occur "after the event", but within life itself, creating an ongoing dynamic between life and narrative.<sup>1</sup> Here, we argue that the shift from the code of collective leadership and selflessness to the politics of presidentialism also emerged out of the lived relations of paternalism and patronage that characterised Tabata's political associations in the building of the political movement.

Paternalism and patronage also characterised Tabata's correspondence with Mnguni and *Inyaniso* in 1946. In the 1940s and 1950s, Tabata built up a network of activists in the movement, particularly of young men, some of his own generation and others who were younger. Most came from the eastern Cape and the Transkei, but there were also some in other parts of the country, such as Johannesburg and Durban. This network constituted his contacts and correspondents in different localities and in a variety of structures such as voter associations, teacher associations, farmers associations, study

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall (ed), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), pp 5-6. See also the discussion of biography and narrative in Chapter One.

clubs, youth societies and vigilance associations, many of which belonged to overarching structures such as the Transkei Organised Bodies (TOB), and which came to be affiliates of the AAC and the Unity Movement.

Tabata maintained constant contact with these cadres, offering his guidance and counsel, keeping up morale, boosting confidence and ensuring that political principles were applied in the work of mobilisation on a federal basis. These were the tasks of internal cadre management in different regions and of ensuring a system of mentorship for younger activists in the movement. Tabata also developed and sustained relations of counsel, guidance and persuasion with a range of younger activists outside the fold of the AAC and the Unity Movement during the 1940s, as more radical possibilities for black political expression began to crystallise. Sometimes these internal and external relations involved either paternalism or patronage on Tabata's part, and sometimes, they incorporated both. While paternalism entailed a relation of tutorship or mentorship across generation, patronage involved a relation across different hierarchies of power, authority and resources.



These relations of paternalism and patronage constituted the lived political associations through which I.B. Tabata constituted and carried out the position of leader. These were also where the constituent elements of his biography were assembled and fashioned: of selfless resistance, commanding oratory, matchless authorial capacity and unquestionable fortitude in the face of repression. The political structures in which these relations were exercised and performed were marked by the simultaneous, contradictory elements of adherence to collective leadership and political principle on the one hand, and the production and observation of individual charisma and forms of loyalty, on the other. Through relations of paternalism and patronage, Tabata exercised political leadership as an individual who was part of a collective. These relations were also biographical and the narrative of Tabata's life came to stand as the model for younger members to emulate. Later, Tabata's biography became part of a system of organisational discipline – a biographic order – which had the consequence of



unleashing different forms of biographic dissent as Tabata's leadership was called into question.

The ambiguities of affinity and authority, of enablement and obedience are characteristics of the institutions of the family and the school, both of which are useful metaphors for understanding the rituals and relations that unfolded in the political organisations that Tabata was associated with. The position of mentor and advisor that Tabata adopted was often like that of the father figure in a social unit that in many ways resembled a family. In some cases these relationships were actual family relations as was the case with Wycliffe Tsotsi and his wife Nozwe or Blanche, who was Tabata's youngest sister.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Tabata was personally and politically close to the Gools.<sup>3</sup> Other relationships for Tabata were almost like family, and recognition was given to this close relationship through the language of address. This was the case, for example, with the AAC General Secretary, Tatius Sondlo, who, during the 1940s, he referred to respectfully as "*KaBawo*".<sup>4</sup> But beyond ties of blood, kin and clan, these relationships were developed as close, dependable and intense, and often bore an emotional resemblance to family relations of closeness and authority. And Tabata exercised authority as if he were a *pater familias*.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Noswe Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 24 January 1948; I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi 14 March 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata referred to members of his family who supported the political cause of the AAC and NEUM as the 'tribe' or the 'clan'.

<sup>3</sup> There are some who have understood the political involvement of Jane, Goolam and Halima Gool (known also as 'Hawa Ahmed', Goolam's wife) and I.B. Tabata (understood as Jane Gool's 'life-long partner') as representing a sort of extended family dynasty that incorporates Cissie Gool (sometime wife of Jane's elder brother, A.H. Gool) and Minnie Gool. Perhaps the most poignant example of this approach is the valuable antiquarian research of Goolam Gool's son, Selim Gool. See Circular Letter from Selim Gool on the project 'Contested Legacies – A Critical Interpretation of the Lives and Politics of the Abdurahman and Gool families of Cape Town in the early and mid-twentieth Century', June 2003. For a convoluted report on this project, which addresses Selim Gool's approaches to family history, see Hilary Benjamin, 'History of a fascinating political family', *Athlone News*, 3 March 2004. Another study that slips into the notions of Gool family gloriana is that by the son of a Gool half-sister, Yousuf S (Joe) Rassool, *District Six-Lest We Forget: Recapturing Subjugated Cultural Histories of Cape Town (1897-1956)* (Cape Town; Faculty of Education, UWC, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> See I.B. Tabata to *KaBawo* (T.I.N. Sondlo), 20 May 1943; 9 August 1943; 17 September 1945; 17 January 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

Family-like relations were almost inherent in the structured relationships of training between youth structures and 'parent' bodies, as in those between the NEF and the Anti-CAD, and SOYA and the AAC. Indeed, generational succession and the emergence of a progressive younger element had been key features of the political argument in favour of the AAC and the federal politics of the 'New Road'. In 1943, Tabata tried to win over Govan Mbeki to the new political direction, and to bring him into the new network of younger activists who argued for building the AAC as the platform for unity on federal lines. For Tabata, Mbeki had represented "a curious mixture of progressiveness and peasant conservatism".<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Tabata encouraged Mbeki "to act now" and "push the people to the utmost" to challenge the roots of the Bunga system and ensure that Transkeian organisations would affiliate to the AAC.<sup>6</sup> In asking Mbeki to consider accepting the secretaryship of the AAC, should Jabavu canvass him, Tabata suggested to him that

We have ... to prove to the older men that we are capable of filling responsible positions. Don't forget that we are still fighting for recognition by them.<sup>7</sup>

A report on the National Anti-CAD conference in 1943 also expressed this conception of a historic generational succession. On the 'New Road', the report suggested, "new weapons of struggle [were] being forged", in which "the power of the written word" was being "demonstrated in the bulletins and pamphlets sent throughout the country very week". Central to the success of these political endeavours was "the strength, courage and leadership of the young men". Indeed, it suggested further, "the old leaders ha[d] been tried and found wanting. They ha[d] betrayed their people".<sup>8</sup> So Tabata's relationships with promising young figures in the movement were important to him, and often they were unmistakably paternal, much like a father grooming his sons for leadership. This was undoubtedly the case with Seymour Papert of the Progressive Forum in Johannesburg in the early 1950s, for whom he expressed real affection amid

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<sup>5</sup> I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 8 August 1943, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>6</sup> I.B. Tabata to Govan Mbeki, 28 February 1943, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>7</sup> I.B. Tabata to Govan Mbeki, 28 February 1943, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. In spite of Jabavu being the President of the AAC, it was Tabata who had begun to take the initiative behind the scenes,

<sup>8</sup> 'Cape Town Letter: The National Anti-CAD Conference', c.1943, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

their political exchanges.<sup>9</sup> Later, in Chicago in 1965, Dora Taylor framed the relationship that she and Tabata had with Neville Alexander as parental, in spite of the political rift that had emerged between him and Tabata: “Neville was always our son”.<sup>10</sup>

These family relations of politics deepened when Tabata and Jane Gool went into exile with Nathaniel Honono in 1964. With the leadership by this time in their mid-to-late fifties and sixties, the family character of political organisations and the duties and obligations that were exercised became more acute and exaggerated. When the leaders and members of the Unity Movement entered a Lusaka studio in 1965 for an official photograph, the assembled group bore more than a passing resemblance to a large family commemorating a family occasion, with the elders seated in front.<sup>11</sup> A critical area where the obligations of movement membership and loyalty were experienced in a family-like way was in the controversial injunction that organisation members who earned a salary hand this over to the central leadership to be deployed in the movement’s interests.<sup>12</sup>

As much as these relations and rituals were familial, they were also educational. Tabata’s correspondence with Mnguni and *Inyaniso* in 1946 also enables us to understand the educational and knowledge-producing character of formations like the AAC and the Unity Movement. A number of scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which the Unity Movement and its associated bodies had been influenced by teachers and teacher organisations.<sup>13</sup> Many of the leadership of the NEUM, AAC, Anti-CAD and

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<sup>9</sup> Tabata expressed this almost parental affection for Papert in letters of political engagement and counsel by ending off with his “love”, and not merely his ‘regards’, ‘greetings’ or ‘best wishes’. See for example I.B. Tabata to Seymour Papert 22 & 23 January 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>10</sup> Transcript of Interview with Dora Taylor (probably conducted by Gwendolen Carter), Northwestern University, 20 November 1965, Carter-Karis Papers, Melville J Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>12</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Alie and Ursula Fataar, Harare, 19 July 1991; Elma Carolissen-Essack to Yousuf Rassool, 31 July 2001. I would like to thank Elma for sending me a copy of this letter.

<sup>13</sup> Linda Chisholm, ‘Education, Politics and Organisation’; Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940-1990* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999), Chapter Two; Crain Soudien, ‘The City, Citizenship and Education’, Inaugural Professorial Lecture, University of Cape Town, 11 September 2002. See also Alan Wieder, ‘They Can’t Take Our Souls:

their affiliates were educators, who were deeply concerned about the effects of Bantu education on their students. As Jonathan Hyslop has argued, the radicalisation of teachers in the 1940s and 1950s saw the rise of wage militancy, teacher political activism and community action, and “the beginning of a period of political combativeness on the part of teachers”.<sup>14</sup> From a base in structures such as the TLSA and CATA, teachers contested education that promoted ethnic identification and class discrimination, and provided a trenchant critique of the system of Bantu education.

Linda Chisholm has suggested, however, that this concentration of teachers and stress on education by “a mainly teacher base” was both the Unity Movement’s “strength and its failing”. The social base of teachers meant the predominance of the petty bourgeois in its structures. Yet, according to Chisholm, this feature also saw “the creation of a disciplined, critical and oppositional culture in schools and cultural life which placed a heavy emphasis on the subversive and liberating capacities of education”.<sup>15</sup> During the 1940s and 1950s, schools were sites for the dissemination of ideas and strategies, in order to politicise other teachers and pupils. Cultural societies were formed at schools as a base for political learning, and teachers insured that all forms of ‘literature’ from weekly Anti-CAD bulletins to newspapers and magazines such as *The Torch* and the *Educational Journal* were widely circulated among students and teachers. It was in schools and in relation to teachers that the political practice was constituted of naming and isolating ‘quislings’ and ‘collaborators’ (terms that had World War II origins).<sup>16</sup> Teachers extended this educational work outside the schools into fellowships and societies such as the NEF, which had been founded to discuss “everything under the sun”.<sup>17</sup> It is here

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Teachers’ League of South Africa Reflections of Apartheid’, *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, Vol 4, No 2, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*, pp 32-33.

<sup>15</sup> Linda Chisholm, ‘Education, Politics and Organisation’, p 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interviews with R.O. Dudley, Cape Town, 11 November 1992; Alie and Ursula Fataar, Harare, 19 July 1991; Irwin Combrinck and Benita Parry, Cape Town, 19 October 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Joe Rassool, ‘Notes on the History of the Non-European Unity Movement in South Africa, and the role of Hosea Jaffe’.

where “fierce debates and discussions ... took place about citizenship, rights and struggle”.<sup>18</sup>

Here, I suggest that the discussion about the Unity Movement and education needs to be extended beyond the influence of teachers, teacher organisations and educational fellowships. Indeed, I suggest that the entire institutional edifice of the AAC and Unity Movement can be understood as a massive initiative in public education, which saw the creation of a body of symbolic expressions, rhetorical strategies, methods of analysis and an entire repertoire of research, knowledge creation and dissemination. I.B. Tabata was centrally involved in an ambitious programme of public education, with its own pedagogy, methods, idiom and canonical texts. And as I suggested in Chapter Six, Tabata’s publications were lessons in history and educational manuals on resistance politics. According to one member of SOYA in the 1950s, Archie Nkonyana, “Tabata and Jane Gool were our mentors and his writings, especially *The Awakening* and ‘The Boycott’ were our textbooks. This ensured our political development”.<sup>19</sup>

For Tabata and his fellow activists, meeting halls were like public classrooms, newspapers, leaflets and bulletins were like worksheets, while political speeches afforded opportunities for history lessons and instruction on building unity. Different kinds of meetings and assembly were conducted, geared towards varied objectives, ranging from planning and co-ordination, mobilisation, confidence building, information and education. They were often structured through a symbolic order of speakers and assembled listeners, as well as the ritual and ceremony of agendas, meeting formalities and procedures, and processes of recording. The rites of their business were marked by rules of uninterrupted address, orderly conduct and attentiveness.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Crain Soudien, ‘The City, Citizenship and Education’, p 10.

<sup>19</sup> This is a verbatim quote from a discussion conducted with Umtata businessman Archie Nkonyana in Umtata on 14 June 2000. Nkonyana had been a member of SOYA in the 1950s.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the pedagogy of Unity Movement political meetings, speeches and publications in the context of the campaign against the 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival, see Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, ‘The Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival’.

Yet, they all created spaces for immersion in the intimate rituals of assembly, speech, argumentation, persuasion and listening, where the possibilities of alternative forms of identification and affinity were proffered. These teachings were premised upon stories, plots and lessons, presented through the codes and representations of language, and were geared towards informing choices and decisions about political conduct. The 'boycott weapon' and the policy of non-collaboration were directed at inculcating the values of self-reliance and unity. The teachings sought to instil an understanding of the 'indivisibility' of the struggle, and that any action that sought anything less than the whole programme of rights was misguided. New and distinguishing forms of individuality and commonality were also generated, and audiences were defined on a local, regional or national basis into a federal system of secular citizenship, and not on the basis of ethnic or religious affiliation. The codes of language in speeches and printed materials ensured the "deferred and displaced transmission" of messages in multiple ways to expansive publics who were "removed from the face-to-face interaction of speaker and hearer".<sup>21</sup>



Drawing on literature on the history of schooling in England, Karen Barber has argued that the process of grading and "principles of uniformity and homogeneity" turned pupils, perhaps for the first time, into a kind of 'public'. This occurred, she argued, as part of the modern concept and structure of the school, in which pupils were "arranged as an audience in front-facing rows where all could see, as well as be seen by the authority figure addressing them".<sup>22</sup> In this study, I suggest that it is possible to argue the converse, namely that in the forum of the political meeting in the 1940s and 1950s, in urban and rural areas, publics were figured as learners in South African history and social studies, in the principles and strategies of political expression, and as students in citizenship and political identity. Political structures were simultaneously sites of social

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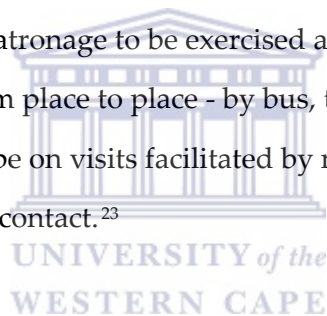
<sup>21</sup> Karen Barber, 'Preliminary Notes on Audiences in Africa', *Africa*, Vol. 67, No 3, 1997, p 347. Political meetings were characterised by a close relationship between oral and written forms of communication, in the distribution of pamphlets and bulletins, and in the hybrid forms of 'writerly speech', oral modes of address strongly influenced by and connected to structured writing.

<sup>22</sup> Karen Barber, 'Preliminary Notes on Audiences in Africa', p 348.



education as well as mechanisms of person formation, where webs of meaning became attached to forms of selfhood and subjectivity which, once held in a personally committed way, were available to be redistributed and retransmitted.

I.B. Tabata was both producer and product in this system of knowledge production. Apart from the political text and the political meeting, the device of the annual political tour of the countryside represented a multifaceted method of nation-building and knowledge production. Tabata's tours of the Transkei and eastern Cape in which he took the ideas of NEUM to the rural areas were a spatial practice of political mediation and knowledge transaction. Tabata was the bringer of political ideas and modernity from Cape Town. Through these tours, which were conducted according to carefully planned itineraries, the 'national' was mapped and landscaped as a relationship between Cape Town and sites and localities in the Eastern Cape. The tours provided an opportunity for relations of patronage to be exercised and spatialised through itineraries in which Tabata travelled from place to place - by bus, train, car and sometimes on horseback - in the Eastern Cape on visits facilitated by networks of local activists with whom Tabata kept in regular contact.<sup>23</sup>



The Eastern Cape was the prime locality of mobilisation into structures affiliated to the AAC, especially around campaigns against betterment and the politics of native representation during the 1940s. Through Tabata's tours the AAC was also given a national presence in the Eastern Cape. Through the itineraries, Tabata's tours served to connect villages and towns together, and his journeys from one local activist to the next

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<sup>23</sup> The I.B. Tabata Collection (BC 925) contains a wealth of material on the strategising, planning, logistics and execution of these 'tours' of the Eastern Cape and other areas, on the webs of activists that sustained them, as well as the follow-up correspondence that was a vital part of sustaining networks of local activists. See for example I.B. Tabata to D.D.T. Jabavu, 17 September 1945; I.B. Tabata to T. Sondlo, 17 September 1945; Tour Itinerary for October-November 1946; Tour Itinerary for August-September 1948; I.B. Tabata to Z.R. Mahabane, 18 August 1948; I.B. Tabata to Mr Novukela (Mount Frere), 8 November 1948; I.B. Tabata to Mr Tutshana (Mount Ayliff), 17 November 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Perhaps one of the most instructive documents on the extent and nature of this network is a list of names from Idutywa, Willowvale, Umtata, Tsolo, Qumbu, Mount Frere, Mount Ayliff, Pondoland East and Kokstad, handed in as 'Exhibit "G"' at Tabata's 1948 trial. See 'Exhibit "G"', Rex v Tabata, 1948, I.B. Tabata Papers, BC 925.

created a topography of channels and networks between local leaders which cemented political loyalties. The rural itinerary was a means of mapping and rerouting the Eastern Cape through patterns of travel, and circuits of public education. Tabata's political tours were acts of paternalism and patronage, offering the political movement's vision of modernity and social order, replete with its categories and subject positions to be filled.

But as much as Tabata brought to the countryside, he also took away. These political excursions were also like fieldtrips in the countryside, in which Tabata engaged in acts of data collection on rural conditions and struggles. In affording the experience of observation and documentation, these journeys were acts of social representation that formed part of the process of modernity and the development of a sense of individuality.<sup>24</sup> This documentation was assembled into the knowledge-producing world of the modernist political movement and placed into an evolutionary, progressist discursive formation. These findings were then presented by Tabata back in Cape Town, in report-back meetings and published reports.<sup>25</sup> The Eastern Cape was made 'knowable' through Tabata's cultural translation and mediation, within a spatial practice of research that was part of an order of knowledge and public education whose main base was in Cape Town. Readers in Cape Town were made to feel as if they were part of a national movement that extended into a space of difference. Tabata mediated a knowledge relationship and a programme of political unity that ironically reproduced the frontier.

These contradictions were part of a process of imagining the nation and building a movement through discourse. This saw the attempt to create a national subject through the unifying categories of 'African' and 'non-European'. The process of "the awakening of the people" involved "the rejection of ... anonymity and a conscious process of self-

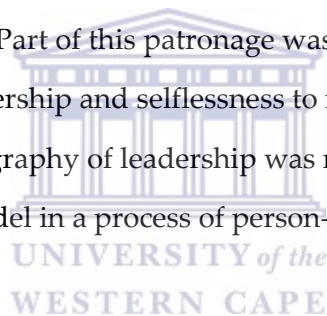
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<sup>24</sup> See Peter D Osborne, *Travelling Light: Photography, Travel and Visual Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p 3.

<sup>25</sup> See for example the materials collected and data documented by Tabata on the struggles of the AmaXesibe in the Mount Ayliff area against rehabilitation. See Statement by AmaXesibe, *The Torch*, 12 April 1948; I.B. Tabata, 'The Story of the AmaXesibe', *The Torch*, 26 April; 3 May & 10 May 1948. Drafts of these materials are in the I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

identification". This identity claim was thus also "a claim to full citizenship" and to "all the rights, privileges, opportunities, duties and a readiness to shoulder responsibilities of the country to which they belong".<sup>26</sup> Embracing these categories of knowing society also entailed an enunciation of selfhood and defining one's self into history. This was thus an entire programme in national identity formation, in which the nation was 'taken to school'.

As the 'new road' was charted, the non-European subject was created, whose identity belonged to the 'indivisible' experience of oppression and the unifying yearnings of a new nation in formation. Black people, figured as 'African' and 'non-European', were invited to become citizens in a supra-organisation, which was also a national programme of instruction and order. I.B. Tabata's position was that of teacher-writer-large, and in this position, he offered the patronage of his political experience and knowledge to other activists. Part of this patronage was biographic. In the shift that occurred from collective leadership and selflessness to individuality and presidentialism, Tabata's biography of leadership was narrated and reproduced as historical lesson, and as a model in a process of person-formation.



This pedagogy of nation building built upon a structure of patronage, and Tabata networked with youth activists across the country and further afield in Southern Africa on the political tasks of mobilisation and unity. After having met up with Tabata in Johannesburg in 1948, S.J. Nhlapo of The United Youth, based in Sophiatown, Newclare and Western Native Township expressed the significance of this encounter for them:

Ours is an organisation of the unfortunate elements of the African Youth who are the products of the South African system of Government based on the colours of the people. We are the so-called Ruffians of the African race who are said to be mainly concerned with dice throwing, dagga smoking and skokiaan drinking. We have been awakened to the forces working for the destruction of the black man. We fully realise that ...we are... easy prey for the blood-sucking fangs of our

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<sup>26</sup> See I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Members (Draft in Dora Taylor's script), September 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

oppressors. We do not intend being engaged in any rough-and-tumble fight with any rival youth organisation. We would like to see a united youth convention speaking in a united youth voice.... As ... your convention aims at uniting all organisations we would be very glad if you can assist us organise all young people to look to the All-African Convention for leadership.<sup>27</sup>

In his correspondence with Charles Mzingeli of Southern Rhodesia, to cite another example, Tabata extended the AAC's call for federal unity and expressed the need to "link up all the Non-European organisations from Cape to Cairo".<sup>28</sup> This wide correspondence that Tabata engaged in was geared towards spreading the message of 'the new road' and encouraging a sense of discipline and consistency in organisational work, and was also a means of circulating his written political materials as educational texts. With all this work of communication and networking, Tabata complained about feeling like a "letter-writing machine".<sup>29</sup>

Through this work, Tabata also sought to identify potential leaders at different levels of responsibility. Tabata encouraged the Voters' Association of Khayamandi in Stellenbosch, for example, to "fight against any tendencies ... towards a self-contained entity" and become "linked up within the general struggle of the African people for liberation" through the AAC.<sup>30</sup> In addition, Tabata encouraged Khayamandi activist, Mr Mangoela to see himself as having the potential to take the responsibility of leadership. "We haven't got sufficient men who have an understanding of politics to guide the people through the difficult times we are living in", Tabata argued. And it was necessary to have "a staff of trained officers", each of whom was "capable of filling the position of any other". In order to address this "handicap" so that the movement would "not depend on one or two individuals", Tabata informed Mangoela that it was decided to start a "political study class to train men and women to satisfy the crying

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<sup>27</sup> S.J. Nhlapo, for The United Youth to The Secretary, The All African Convention, 17 March 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>28</sup> I.B. Tabata to Charles Mzingeli, 20 June 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>29</sup> I.B. Tabata to Cadoc Kobus, 19 July 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>30</sup> I.B. Tabata to Mr Mangoela, Khayamandi (Stellenbosch), 20 June 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

need for leadership". Tabata invited Mangoela to benefit from his patronage and join this programme in leadership training. Tabata also included a copy of a political review that he had written.<sup>31</sup>

The work of mobilisation and political education spread out across the country through the networks of activists cultivated by Tabata in the AAC, and was carried out by regional leaders who fell within Tabata's orbit. For Leo Sihlali in the Eastern Cape, the body of political teachings about principled unity and the federal structure - what he called "the gospel of the New Road" - was "a very deadly weapon even in the hands of the weakest of us". All that had to be done to ensure the affiliation of CATA was "to see to it that the Branches affiliate individually and once they have received the Baptism of Fire, they are not likely to break out again". Nevertheless, the work of political mobilisation and education in the Eastern Cape occurred within what Sihlali saw as "a politically barren environment". For him, Tabata's observations sent from Cape Town were thus "like rain-laden air in a stuffy place".<sup>32</sup> Similarly A.K. Tom, also writing from the Eastern Cape in the late 1950s, lamented the scarcity of literature, and begged Dora Taylor (then Tabata's proxy) for materials: "We miss the intellectual atmosphere of Cape Town.... Supply us with lectures. We need them badly".<sup>33</sup> Ironically, the structure of political unity, premised on particular associations of patronage, tended to reproduce relations of dependence in the Eastern Cape on the political resources and leadership based in Cape Town.

Some activists attempted to address pedagogical questions of learning levels, reading capacities and the effectiveness of written texts in this educational programme in national identity formation. In 1953, shortly after the publication of 'The Boycott', Leo Sihlali presented the case to Tabata "reading [was] not such an easy thing to the people for whom it is intended". Accordingly, he suggested, Tabata's writings like 'The Boycott' and 'The Rehabilitation Scheme' needed "a fore-runner". These writings may not be

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<sup>31</sup> I.B. Tabata to Mr Mangoela, Khayamandi (Stellenbosch), 20 June 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>32</sup> Leo Sihlali to I.B. Tabata, 6 August 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>33</sup> A.K. Tom to Dora Taylor, 4 June 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

“appreciated as they should”, he argued, “unless the readers have a grasp of our policy”. To fulfil this need, Sihlali proposed the writing and distribution of “pamphletettes”, which would be circulated free of charge. He suggested that it be named “‘Incwadana zeAll-African Convention’, (Eyokuqala)” and mentioned that as AAC president, Tsotsi’s approval was needed. Sihlali enclosed a rough, incomplete draft of a sample ‘pamphletette’ and asked for Tabata’s counsel on whether it satisfied the requirement. As it was in Xhosa, he also forwarded a copy to A.C. Jordan for his advice, as Jordan was the AAC’s main translator of political materials for distribution in Xhosa.<sup>34</sup>

Tabata’s response, however, was not encouraging. Both he and Jordan had seen value in Sihlali’s text, and that from the sample he saw, he could gather “the scope of those to follow”. In a supportive vein, Tabata agreed with the principle of “sending out as much literature as possible”, saying that, in general, there certainly was “room for pamphletettes”. However, in his assessment of “the times”, he felt that it would be inadvisable to “follow the course” Sihlali proposed. Tabata expressed his “grave doubts as to the advisability of sending out forerunners” before “we are ready with our big stuff”. In these times, he argued, it was important to ensure that “literature of lasting value” be placed “in the hands of the people”. He urged that “nothing [be done] to jeopardise” the appearance of ‘The Boycott’. On the issues of language level and reading capacity, Tabata urged Sihlali to go back to ‘The Rehabilitation Scheme’ and think about its impact on the minds of the people.<sup>35</sup> He argued to Sihlali that

if you brush aside language for the moment, you will find that the ideas are easily assimilable. In fact they would speak a great deal to the average African, especially in the rural areas. That is the language they know. I personally believe that the peasant will understand these ideas far better than the intellectual and the townsman.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Leo Sihlali to I.B. Tabata, 16 April 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>35</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 2 May 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>36</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 2 May 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.



Likewise, concepts of strategic value that were used in 'The Boycott' such as 'policeman-chief' and 'policeman-intellectual' would have "the effect of not only crystallising in the minds of the people certain aspects in the new development, but also of forearming them". They would enable to people to scrutinise "every action of the intellectual", Tabata suggested.<sup>37</sup>

Another educational dimension of the federal structure of the AAC and the Unity Movement was one precisely concerned with issues of generational transition and throughput, and the preparation of young people for eventual leadership. Educational fellowships and Youth structures served as training grounds to ensure that the long-term leadership needs of the movement were met, and that young people and new recruits were inculcated into the political principles and practices of the movement. This was the core area of work of the NEF when it was formed by underground WPSA activists in 1937, and was also the reason for the formation of SOYA in 1951. By the early 1950s, internal political tensions had started to manifest themselves and Tabata and his colleagues began to see the NEF as inadequate for the needs of political education. NEF member, Joe Rassool, has suggested that SOYA had been formed "secretively without the participation or knowledge of the rest of the movement". Tabata had apparently argued that "the NEF was too advanced for young Africans", and that what was needed was a structure that could facilitate "a more elementary grounding in the ideas of the movement".<sup>38</sup>

In any event, SOYA was formed "on a Union-wide scale" as an affiliate of the AAC, whereas the NEF had been Cape Town-based.<sup>39</sup> Dora Taylor explained in 1965 that SOYA had been formed to cater "for those young ones [who had] to grow in understanding, read the literature, and be drawn into [the] movement". Whereas the formation of the ANCYL had involved "a clash" with the ANC, SOYA had been created

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<sup>37</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 2 May 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>38</sup> Joe Rassool, 'Notes on the History of the Non-European Unity Movement in South Africa, and the role of Hosea Jaffe'. See also Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Joe Rassool, Reading, UK, 1 March 1992.

<sup>39</sup> I.B. Tabata to the President, TLSA, 15 November 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

deliberately as “a training ground for our young”.<sup>40</sup> SOYA was also intended “to counteract the attraction of the ANC Youth League, especially at Fort Hare”.<sup>41</sup> The formation of APDUSA, on the other hand, had addressed an organisational weakness that had become apparent in the early 1960s. The movement had been “top heavy with intellectuals” at a time when it was winning over groups of workers and peasants in Natal and Transkei, and groups were being invigorated in Port Elizabeth and East London. Taylor described the incremental relationship of tutelage and seniority among these structures and the passage of persons through them as almost like an educational system: “You would graduate from SOYA to the Unity Movement and then to APDUSA”.<sup>42</sup>

Jane Gool confirmed that when it was formed, APDUSA was an organisational pinnacle, thought of by Tabata as a “stepping-stone to a party”. In putting forward the interests of the workers and peasants “as a priority”, APDUSA was like a “political study group on a mass scale”.<sup>43</sup> In the absence of an underground party for many years (after the dissolution of the WPSA around 1950) and coming immediately after Tabata had experienced isolation from active leadership, APDUSA provided a means of tighter cohesion and was a device for the consolidation of leadership. Tabata himself accepted the presidency of this new structure. Neville Alexander has suggested that Tabata also initiated an “inner circle”, party-like structure around 1961 (or shortly before) consisting of a number of Tabata’s “hangers on”. This “nerve-centre” had a clear purpose in “training a certain calibre of leadership in what revolution means”. Apparently Alie Fataar was invited to join this group in 1961, although neither he nor Jane Gool admitted to its formation. Alexander himself, who had been a member of SOYA and the CPSU,

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<sup>40</sup> Transcript of Interview with Dora Taylor (probably conducted by Gwendolen Carter), Northwestern University, 20 November 1965, Carter-Karis Papers, Melville J Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University.

<sup>41</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Neville Alexander, Cape Town, 8 December 1992.

<sup>42</sup> Transcript of Interview with Dora Taylor (probably conducted by Gwendolen Carter), Northwestern University, 20 November 1965, Carter-Karis Papers, Melville J Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University.

<sup>43</sup> Jane Gool to Ciraj Rassool, personal communication, 19 July 1991. See also ‘The Birth of the African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA), issued by the Central Executive of APDUSA, General Secretary L Mqotsi, March 1961, Carter-Karis Papers, Melville J Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University.

was also invited to join along with CPSU activists, Kenny Abrahams and Carl Brecker. Being invited to join this 'inner circle' was, for Alexander, an attempt to "bind" people into a way of thinking "under the control ... of the leadership" of APDUSA and the AAC.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in the early 1950s, SOYA had been seen as an initiative of Tabata "to create his own power base" among the youth.<sup>45</sup> As tools of centralisation, SOYA, APDUSA and this 'inner circle' also provided a means of discipline.

### *Order, constraint and person formation*

As much as schools have been forums of enlightenment and enablement, they have also paradoxically been institutions of order and constraint. Similarly, the Unity Movement and its constituent bodies emerged and developed simultaneously as institutions of education and political advancement, as well as of discipline and regulation. For all their efforts at equality, collectiveness and identity, these political movements, like schools, have also been structures of inequality, hierarchy and authority. Hierarchies of knowledge relations and instruction gave rise to intermittent backlashes and expressions of dissent. These became particularly acute as the hierarchies of paternalism and patronage gave way to the consolidation and defence of presidentialism. In Tabata's case, the authority of the teacher-leader increasingly came to resemble that of the autocrat, who exercised power over the political movement and its members. Dissent was met with discipline, and Tabata's exercise of political authority was met with accusations of leadership cults and abuse of power. As Tabata's biography was lived and exercised as a form of authority, and turned into lessons of leadership, so it was also confronted and challenged for the modes of power and sectarianism it represented.

This paradox of education and regulation was reflected in the place of youth bodies in the federal structure, as well as in the rites of passage, and possibilities of ascension and

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<sup>44</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interviews with Neville Alexander, 8 & 28 December 1992.

<sup>45</sup> Joe Rassool, 'Notes on the History of the Non-European Unity Movement in South Africa, and the role of Hosea Jaffe'. In contrast, according to Joe Rassool, the NEF became Hosea Jaffe's "kindergarten". After Ben Kies had stopped attending NEF meetings from about 1953, in order not to have "an inhibiting effect on the youth", Jaffe's views had emerged as "definitive on all questions; his pronouncements became part of Movement lore".

mobility for youth and other recipients and beneficiaries of Tabata's patronage. What were the possibilities and limits of the exercise of political initiative within this system of authority and patronage? Tabata received reports during his banning from Leo Sihlali on the progress of younger members of the movement, and on the development of their "individual qualities and personalities". Enver Hassim was "taking his proper place" and, in spite of being someone who was "still unfolding", was "developing a capacity to absorb punches to the body". In contrast, among the "'Strong Men' of the North", the movement had acquired its own "enfant terrible". Vutela was emerging as someone who could "drive physical fear into his opponent". He had an impressive ability "to maintain his sequence of thought even despite prolonged parentheses and digressions" However, he was also "heartless [and] absolutely ruthless", and his method was "to trample on and destroy an adversary". Sihlali reported that he was forced to take Vutela aside and advise him "to make a distinction between the way of handling an enemy and a comrade".<sup>46</sup>

Faced with the charge from Hosea Jaffe that his connections with youth and "his self-styled 'friends'" were characterised by "self-abasing idolatry",<sup>47</sup> Tabata denied that these relations of patronage were hierarchical and adulatory:

In my association with the youth in particular, my attitude has always been to take into consideration their necessary inexperience, but at all times to regard them as being on a footing of equality, and my task has been to help them to develop into men and women capable of independence of thought. For it is only such youth who can carry a movement forward.<sup>48</sup>

In this exchange, Jaffe had also suggested that Tabata had been "regarded and treated as a father-confessor, sage or seer", and that there was indeed a danger of the "idea of a 'leader'" being embraced, in contrast to that of collective leadership that the movement had "always ... put forward". The movement had done so, Jaffe had argued, "in a

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<sup>46</sup> Leo Sihlali to I.B. Tabata, 6 February 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>47</sup> Statement by Hosea Jaffe, 2 October 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>48</sup> I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Friends, 26 October 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

fundamental and genuine manner and not as mannequins of the post-Stalin fashion parade".<sup>49</sup>

Ironically, in Sihlali's report on the progress of the youth, he admitted that his own relationship with Tabata may have been one based on paternalism and patronage, and that he may have made Tabata his "Father Confessor" or "Sick Comforter".<sup>50</sup> Tabata, however, wanted to hear none of this from a member of the movement's senior leadership, denying that he occupied this position in Sihlali's political life, suggesting instead a relationship of equality and comradeship. He could equally write to Sihlali, he argued, "pouring out" his troubles, and in that case he would hope that Sihlali would not turn him into the "pope of the confessional". For Tabata, the essence of their relationship was that "we can take both the ups and downs together".<sup>51</sup>

In spite of these claims on equality and reciprocity, Sihlali had found it difficult to secure Tabata's approval when he had tried to stake his claim on a position of writer-educator in the AAC in 1953. In having argued against Sihlali's proposal to write and circulate 'pamphletettes' which would have served to introduce and mediate Tabata's major political writings, Tabata had prevented Sihlali from emerging as a movement educator and writer in his own right. This was in spite of Tabata's position as leading author-educator of the movement not being questioned, and of Sihlali having asked for Tabata's approval within the framework of their patronage relationship. Only Tabata's reading of political conditions was permissible and in the process, Sihlali's expression of political initiative was rebuffed. It was as if Tabata would not approve of any mediation of his writings, even by his closest comrades.

Tabata also intervened to set the parameters for making decisions over who would be available for the presidencies of the AAC and NEUM after Wycliffe Tsotsi had been ousted from office in the late 1950s. Nathaniel Honono was elected president of the AAC

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<sup>49</sup> Statement by Hosea Jaffe, 2 October 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>50</sup> Leo Sihlali to I.B. Tabata, 6 February 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>51</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 14 February 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

in 1959. The election of Sihlali as president of the NEUM at the Eighth Unity Conference thereafter led to a dispute when Tsotsi accused the executive of “plotting” against him behind his back.<sup>52</sup> Tsotsi wrote to Tabata that

If my services as President were no longer required, all that was necessary was for any senior member to have asked me to stand down in the interests of the organisation and I would have done so without the slightest hesitation.<sup>53</sup>

Tabata was compelled to step in amid tensions between Sihlali and Tsotsi, and made it clear to Sihlali that he, Tsotsi and Honono, “the obvious candidates for the two presidencies”, should see to it that there was “no competition” among them. If there was “a concerted feeling” against Tsotsi, then he needed to be informed of this directly. “A fellow comrade”, Tabata emphasised, was there “to be spoken to frankly and honestly at all times”.<sup>54</sup> Tabata also expressed the opinion that “the time had come” for Wycliffe Tsotsi to relinquish the AAC presidency in view of his increasing profile as a lawyer of the peasants who were being drawn into Convention in “ever increasing numbers”. Moreover, the organisation deserved “greater consideration” than the “private feelings” of each person. For “the position of president”, Tabata argued, was “a matter not of honour but of duty”. Behind the scenes, thus, Tabata dispensed his patronage even over senior leaders like Tsotsi, Sihlali and Honono in determining their availability, in directing their deployment into formal leadership positions in the movement, in preparing incumbents for these positions, and in deciding when they needed to vacate

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<sup>52</sup> *Ikhwezi Lomso*, February 1960; Wycliffe Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 24 & 29 December 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>53</sup> Wycliffe Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 24 & 29 December 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>54</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 4 December 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Some of these tensions arose when Tsotsi became a member as well as the president of the Fort Hare Union, which some construed as “politically wrong” especially for the AAC and NEUM president. Tabata himself had worried that this may be construed as a willingness “to preside over Verwoerd’s representatives, the architects of Bantu Education and university apartheid”. In the end, Tsotsi agreed that if he had “compromised” the AAC and NEUM, he would “consider whatever suggestions” in order “to save the situation”. By then some members of the AAC executive had already requested that he not stand for the NEUM presidency. If his “political judgment” on this was deemed to be “faulty” then he felt he might no longer be “fit” to head the NEUM or any organisation inside it. See Wycliffe Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 4 December 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.



them. Sihlali's presidentship of the NEUM was thus an expression of his own political capacities as well as of Tabata's authority.<sup>55</sup>

These issues of leadership and succession arose in the wake of intense contests in the movement for the hearts and minds, and allegiance of all activists at different levels, including the youth. Tensions erupted within and between organisations in the movement, and in part, took the form of rival and competing patronage networks, with conflicts between those loyal to Tabata on the one hand, and those loyal to Ben Kies and Hosea Jaffe, on the other. In these exchanges, Hosea Jaffe had claimed that to organise youth was to organise "on a biological basis", and that SOYA had been created "in competition to the NEF". To counter this development, Jaffe was accused of having "aided and abetted" the formation of the Langa Educational Fellowship (LEF) which the banned Tabata saw as a body created "to subvert" SOYA and the AAC committee. The LEF had been created, Tabata suggested, by a "suspended SOYAN and a handful of others who were expelled from the local SOYA".<sup>56</sup>

Elsewhere in the country at that time, other young activists had also become a source of disappointment for Sihlali and Tsotsi, who had to step in to deal with problems of discipline. Sihlali reported on the "very taxing, difficult and emotionally draining" 1957 AAC conference. Some members of the youth came to acquire a "healthy respect for peasants" as a result of the conference. They had to be told not to "talk at or to, but with peasants during the conference", and were reminded that these were rural men who "knew a thing or two that they didn't know". Sihlali had to tell these youth that "the peasants were not children wearing false beards and with flour sprinkled over their heads".<sup>57</sup> Feeling absolutely disconsolate, Sihlali also described other members of the youth as being like "absolute strangers", who had hurled "insult and calumny" at the leadership.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 25 May-1 June 1960, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>56</sup> I.B. Tabata to The President, TLSA, 15 November 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>57</sup> Leo Sihlali to Dora Taylor (then Tabata's proxy), 22 December 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>58</sup> Leo Sihlali to Dora Taylor, 22 December 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

The youth on which we had placed such trust had NEVER belonged to us.... Their arrogance, their crudeness, their studied rudeness, their lying, their very bearing and swagger were things which evoked a mixture of disgust, anger and pity.<sup>59</sup>

Further, Sihlali was moved to compare the political lives of these young renegades with his own process of biographical formation. These youth and their mentors, he suggested, had an “absolute lack of skill in producing anything like a proper and worthy human being”.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, he recalled how central Tabata’s political mentorship and example had been in his own formation in spite of infrequent face-to-face contact:

During the process of ‘making myself’, I had the privilege of meeting men like B only once in 12 months and for only a few days at a time. That was no reason why I should have decided to mutilate myself or turn myself into a caricature of a man as these have done.<sup>61</sup>

It was Tabata’s biography of leadership that had been the beacon of political lessons and that had served as the model for Sihlali’s own political activism and loyalties, leadership capacities and sense of discipline. Relations of patronage were at the same time biographic, with models of political lives produced in the cut and thrust of mentorship contests in the political movement.

In 1958, Leo Sihlali and Wycliffe Tsotsi journeyed to Johannesburg in order to address the “stultifying divisions” that had emerged in SOYA. Some youth had come under the influence of Baruch Hirson, who had just written and circulated a critique of *The Awakening of the People* as advocating abstentionism.<sup>62</sup> Others, on the other hand, had become “neo-Africanists”. While “Hirson’s boys” had been “eloquent” in voicing their criticisms, they had stopped short of “[going] the whole hog of their mentor”. In the case of three of them - Mpehle, Lepolisa and Mathlare - the political differences they

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<sup>59</sup> Leo Sihlali to Dora Taylor, 22 December 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>60</sup> Leo Sihlali to Dora Taylor, 22 December 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>61</sup> Leo Sihlali to Dora Taylor, 22 December 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>62</sup> R Mettler (Pseudonym for Baruch Hirson), ‘It is Time to Awake!’ (mimeo), November 1957, Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 2: DA13:84/9.

expressed had been “essentially honest”. After being convinced by Tsotsi of their errors of interpretation of the tasks of the NEUM as defined by the Ten Point Programme, they “virtually” promised to “mend the errors of their ways”.<sup>63</sup>

In contrast, Tsotsi described three other SOYA members - Vutela, Tukwayo and Madikizela - as “villains”, who had defended the political positions of “Jaffeism” in an open SOYA meeting. The “slimy” Madikizela had been “the most poisonous of the lot”, who used “the demagogue” Vutela “as a battering ram” and Tukwayo “as a cymbal”. “Madikizela is to Vutela as Kies is to Jaffe”, Tsotsi reasoned. Instead of “rid[ing] roughshod” over them, Tsotsi had chosen to interrogate the political character of “Jaffeism”. In so doing, he and Sihlali had chosen to adopt a “more paternal attitude”, and to help them solve their problems as “some of the senior leadership of the movement”. The existence of a “senior leadership” was demonstrated, according to Tsotsi: “It was there in the flesh for them to behold and they would have to learn that humility is the beginning of political wisdom”.<sup>64</sup>

The assertion of a senior movement leadership by Wycliffe Tsotsi in the late 1950s coincided with a recognition by Leo Sihlali that the successful making of a ‘proper and worthy’, committed political activist required a biographic model of political leadership for people to learn from and emulate. If this were not present the result could be ‘mutilation’, ‘caricature’ and an ‘unworthy human being’. In this biographic order of politics, in which Tabata’s biography was increasingly projected as a model to be followed, person formation and political expression were tied into forms of political allegiance and systems of paternalism and patronage. The assertion of authority by leaders was accompanied by the exercise of organisational discipline over activists deemed to have strayed from the fold or to have breached political principle. These violations were also seen as expressions of biographic deviation, as rival political factions led activists astray. Tabata accused Jaffe’s supporters of expressing

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<sup>63</sup> Wycliffe Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 4 June 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>64</sup> Wycliffe Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 4 June 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

certain tendencies ... to see themselves first and then the struggle as something merely attached to them. The movement then becomes a magnifying mirror in front of which their little egos strut their little hour.<sup>65</sup>

### *Dissent, discipline and biographic contestation*

One of the earliest expressions of dissent against Tabata's leadership occurred as early as 1948 after Tabata's arrest. His old WPSA comrade, Cadoc Kobus, had expressed resentment at Tabata for criticising his involvement in an Eisteddfod, and for "shooting [his] mouth saying I am doing no work". Kobus wrote to Tabata: "you do not have to do me down in order to prove to them what a glutton you are for hard work".<sup>66</sup> Tabata denied spending his time "touring the country ... for the sole purpose of ridiculing [Kobus] for [his] singing", but questioned Kobus' capacity to focus on his political work: "Each time I have asked you for a detailed report of political activities in the Transkei (as one who is on the spot), you were not able to tell me because of your inability to move around", Tabata asserted. He followed this up by suggesting that the Eisteddfod was a means "to amuse the children and divert their attention from more serious things".<sup>67</sup> Later, in 1953, when Kobus accused Leo Sihlali of having "muzzle[d]" him at a Convention meeting, and of having treated him "as an opposition", these tensions about Tabata resurfaced, and Kobus expressed a concern that "we are witnessing the incipient stages of a 'Leader' cult".<sup>68</sup> This was the same accusation presented about Tabata in 1956 by Hosea Jaffe, and repeated in 1959 by Kies, Kobus and others in the document 'What Has Happened in the Non-European Unity Movement?'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 25 August 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>66</sup> Cadoc Kobus to I.B. Tabata, 12 November 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Interestingly, when asked about these tensions and disagreements, Kobus denied all knowledge of them in spite of being a key protagonist. He did admit, perhaps tellingly, that while they had been "very close" and had found their "way into liberation politics together", Tabata "progressed faster" because "he had more time". See Cadoc Kobus to Ciraj Rassool, 15 April 1993 (In my possession). See also Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Cadoc Kobus, Qumbu, 19-20 July 1993.

<sup>67</sup> I.B. Tabata to Cadoc Kobus, 20 November 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>68</sup> Cadoc Kobus to Leo Sihlali, 10 April 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>69</sup> Statement by Hosea Jaffe, 2 October 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; R.E. Viljoen, S.A. Jayiya, C.M. Kobus and B.M. Kies, 'What Has Happened in the Non-European Unity Movement?', February 1959, Baruch Hirson Papers.

By the 1950s, increased internal bloodletting took the form of political manoeuvring, suspensions and expulsions, and also saw efforts to retain the allegiance of cadres who showed evidence of deviation. When S.A. Jayiya was accused of having been “wrench[ed] from his moorings” by “the Jaffes” in 1956, he was “stripped ... of all positions” in the Voters’ Association and the AAC Committee (WP) in order to make it “impossible for him to drag his ‘friends’ with their poison into the African sector”.<sup>70</sup> Cadoc Kobus was similarly lost to the ‘Jaffes’ after he had been found wanting as a political organiser and office-bearer. In 1954 Kobus - then AAC General Secretary - was accused of having attempted to sabotage the AAC for failing to call a conference until two weeks before the date of the meeting. And in 1957, it was thought that he might try to organise “car-loads” of supporters to disrupt the AAC conference.<sup>71</sup>

In 1958 these conflicts inside the structures of the NEUM came to a head at the December AAC Conference held at Edendale. The “fraternal delegation representing the National Committee of the National Anti-CAD Movement” withdrew from the Conference after accusing “the AAC leadership” of having turned the Ten Point Programme into “a kind of maximum programme” and of having interpreted Point 7 on the Land Question as meaning “no more than the ‘right to buy and sell land’”.<sup>72</sup> This was the precursor to the 1959 document, ‘What Has Happened in the NEUM’, which was challenged for being “a shameful and treacherous attack on the AAC”, and which was seen accordingly as “subversive of the whole NEUM”. The authors of the document, Jayiya, Kobus, Kies and R.E. Viljoen, who had styled themselves as “Foundation Members” of the NEUM and members of the HUC, were accused by the

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<sup>70</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 25 August 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>71</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 14 February 1957; I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 26 October 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. It is unclear whether the expressions of political dissidence described above came about as a result of Kobus’ influence. Kobus re-emerged as one of the founders of the AAC Vigilance Committee in 1961, which attempted to contest the political leadership of the AAC by Tabata and his colleagues. See *The Torch*, 1 February 1961.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Anti-Coloured Affairs Department Delegation Statement’ (signed by R.O. Dudley and V.W.W. Wessels), *Ikhwezi Lomso*, February 1959. See also Ciraj Rassool, Interview with R.O. Dudley, Cape Town, 11 November 1992, in which he explains the emergence of different interpretations of the ‘land question’ in the movement, and discusses his memories of the 1958 AAC Conference and the ‘tactics of exclusion’ of certain representatives from discussions by proceedings being conducted in Xhosa, without translation into English.

NEUM Acting President, Wycliffe Tsotsi, of constituting “a clique” which had “usurped the authority and functions of the HUC”.<sup>73</sup> At the Eighth Unity Conference held in December 1959, the Joint Secretaries, S.A. Jayiya and Dan Neethling and the Treasurer, R.E. Viljoen, who had refused to hand over the books, minutes and other property of movement, were branded as “renegades” and expelled from the NEUM and all its affiliates.<sup>74</sup>

Sometimes the line of action in the case of alleged deviation took a more sympathetic path. When R.S. Canca showed evidence at the 1953 AAC Executive meeting of having come under the influence of the ‘Jaffes’ for having nominated Kies, Jaffe and Victor Wessels to replace Goolam Gool, Tabata asked Leo Sihlali to investigate the extent of this influence. Canca was described as having an “immature mind” that was “impressed by the show of erudition” on the part of Kies, Jaffe and Wessels. Tabata expressed his disappointment that Canca could “exalt and hold in awe” a “creature like young Wessels”, who was not only “politically younger than he” but who could not “hold a candle to our coming boys such as Guma, Mqotsi, etc”. In asking Sihlali to “find a method of weaning [Canca] away from his idols”, Tabata expressed the importance of these efforts: “We do not want to lose that boy. He is very valuable”.<sup>75</sup>

Members and leaders who refused to conform, or who were deemed to have deviated from political policy were the subject of severe criticism. In February 1960, Tabata expressed his displeasure to Sihlali for J.L. Mkentane having been elected as Vice-President of the AAC and as Treasurer of the reorganised NEUM. Tabata said that it may have been unwise to have elevated “to such eminence” someone who spent “a lot of time” attempting to “save” the young SOYANS from “my evil influences”. “Isn’t it strange”, Tabata suggested to Sihlali, “how many people have found me standing in the

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<sup>73</sup> See ‘Traacherous Attack on AAC’ (Letter from W.M. Tsotsi), in *Ikhwezi Lomso*, May 1959.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Conference Resolutions’, *Ikhwezi Lomso*, February 1960, pp 3; 8.

<sup>75</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 25 August 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. By 1957, it seems that the rift with Canca had been healed. And by December 1959, Canca was elected to the position of AAC General Secretary. See I.B. Tabata to Mlamleli (R.S. Canca), 20 March 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; *Ikhwezi Lomso*, February 1960.



way of their own greatness?"<sup>76</sup> At the 1962 Unity Movement conference, Mkentane was removed from the position of Treasurer and replaced by A. Limbada.<sup>77</sup> In addition to the allocation, deployment and reassignment of leaders, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, suspension and expulsion became a means of regulating political expression and asserting authority in a movement under siege from internal political disagreements. It was as if relations of paternalism and patronage in the movement had given way to the consolidation of power and political control. Tabata's banning by the state, which had removed him from the political arena, and political attacks against him from within the movement had driven him and the AAC leadership to assert more centralised control over the movement.

In 1958, the factional struggles inside the structures of SOYA in Johannesburg led to the suspension of the Witwatersrand branch executive and the eventual expulsion of all branch members from the AAC and affiliated organisation. Office-bearers and members, including Tukwayo, Vutela and Madikizela were expelled for

propagating and disseminating, verbally and in writing, ideas which are foreign to the programme and principles of the NEUM and for making false and malicious allegations against the officials of the All-African Convention and thereby bringing the organisation into contempt and disrepute.<sup>78</sup>

At the Eighth Unity Conference in December 1959, former office bearers of the movement who had conducted a campaign of "slander and vilification of the NEUM" were expelled and branded as "renegades".<sup>79</sup>

In the following year, A.C. Jordan fell out of favour in the movement for his refusal to translate Tabata's pamphlet on the PAC. He was accused of "not obeying the orders of

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<sup>76</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 17 February 1960, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>77</sup> Deirdre Levinson, Personal Notes of Proceedings of the Ninth Unity Conference, Edendale, 3-5 January 1962, Deirdre Levinson Bergson Papers.

<sup>78</sup> *Ikhwezi Lomso*, February 1959.

<sup>79</sup> *Ikhwezi Lomso*, February 1959.

the organisation".<sup>80</sup> Jordan was also criticised for "his association with liberals" at UCT through his participation in a "solemn begowned procession and ceremony" against the imposition of university apartheid.<sup>81</sup> He was also accused of "collaborating" with the Commission on the PAC campaign by giving evidence in its proceedings. The consequence was that in 1961, the Head Unity Committee (HUC) suspended Jordan "on grounds of his acceptance of ideas alien to us" and for having "opened the door to the liberals". In announcing the HUC's action against Jordan at the Ninth Unity Movement Conference, Sihlali argued that the HUC had "acted on behalf of Conference to remove a man dangerous to the movement".<sup>82</sup>

Deirdre Levinson recounted these events in a novel based on her political experiences in South Africa between 1959 and 1963, when she had been a 'fellow-traveller' of the NEUM. While teaching at UCT, Levinson had become personally close to Jordan, who was the inspiration behind the character 'Boris Duma' in her novel. Like Jordan, Boris also refused to translate a pamphlet on the PAC campaign, and participated in the unveiling of a plaque in the UCT library "to the sacred memory of academic freedom", and in the inauguration of an annual academic freedom lecture. Boris had "openly and deliberately ... separated himself" from the movement. The consequence of Boris' transgression of the principle of the "indivisibility of the struggle" was that 'French' (the novel's character based on I.B. Tabata), described as "the single-minded high priest of the revolution", "wanted ... Boris to suffer isolation". As a result, Boris was

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<sup>80</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Phyllis Ntantala Jordan, Cape Town, 4 November 1993. Jordan had been the main translator of movement written works into Xhosa. In 1952, when A.C. Jordan was "too busy", his wife Phyllis translated 'The Boycott' and named it 'uKwayo: isiKrweqe ne Khaka'. See also Phyllis Ntantala, *A Life's Mosaic* (Bellville: Mayibuye Centre, p 149).

<sup>81</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 2 August 1960, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. A.C. Jordan, of course, had been a Fort Hare college-mate and long-time AAC comrade of Tabata, who had taken up the cause of Tabata's political trial arising from his arrest at Mount Ayliff in 1948.

<sup>82</sup> Deirdre Levinson, Personal Notes of Proceedings of the Ninth Unity Conference, Edendale, 3-5 January 1962, Deirdre Levinson Bergson Papers. According to Phyllis Ntantala Jordan, this rift between Jordan and Tabata, former Fort Hare college mates and long-time political comrades, was the start of a "very, very painful period between the two of them". Jordan "died with that pain in his heart and I think Tabby too" (Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Phyllis Ntantala Jordan, Cape Town, 4 November 1993). Surprisingly, this experience was unexplored in the auto/biography of Ntantala's life, *A Life's Mosaic*.

“suspended” from the movement, “with the only abstentions those who demanded expulsion”.<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps the most significant exercise of discipline in the early 1960s for perceived deviation from political policy and for expressing and advocating political dissent against Tabata and the movement leadership was the suspension of the young Neville Alexander from SOYA. Alexander had been a member of SOYA from the mid-to-late 1950s, and had been the driving force behind the Cape Peninsula Students Union (CPSU), which had emerged in the struggles against university apartheid, and which SOYA members had “[taken] the lead” in forming. Immediately after his return from doctoral studies in Germany, where he had been from 1958 to 1961, Alexander gave Tabata a verbal report of discussions he had held with the leadership of the Fourth International (FI) who had asked him to deliver a message to the Unity Movement. In the message, the FI had indicated that they were willing to locate financial and logistical support if the Unity Movement “wished to raise a guerrilla army”. This was the first time that Tabata got any inkling that Alexander had made contact with the FI. Alexander also expressed his own conviction to Tabata that the movement investigate the option of guerrilla warfare “as a long-term strategy”.<sup>84</sup>

In response, Tabata warned Alexander that it was best if he did not talk about this “amongst the youth”. It was a matter, he said, that could potentially “endanger the movement”. Alexander agreed, thinking it proper that “the initiative” on this matter had to “come from the leadership”. In the meantime, Alexander was invited to join the newly formed party-like “inner circle” of the Unity Movement and was immediately excited at the prospect of discussing this important matter in a secret forum of disciplined members, and at the first meeting he attended, left the matter for Tabata to raise, as agreed. At this meeting, Tabata made a presentation on “the meaning of revolution”, while Fataar gave a talk on the “national situation”. Careful not to raise the

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<sup>83</sup> Deirdre Levinson, *Five Years: An Experience of South Africa* (London: Andre Deutch, 1966), pp 49; 86-97; 127.

<sup>84</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interviews with Neville Alexander, 8 & 28 December 1992.

issue of armed struggle directly, Alexander took the opportunity to ask whether a “change of policy” on the Unity Movement’s part should not be considered, especially in the light of the “peasant revolt” in the Transkei. Tabata himself failed to raise the matter of guerrilla warfare. And before Alexander had a chance to elaborate, Jane Gool took him to task for daring to question policy. In “browbeat[ing]” Alexander, Gool had used her position in the movement of being “an elder person”, when it had become part of the movement’s “decorum” not to question elders in formal meetings.<sup>85</sup>

Feeling that he had been “gagged”, even “trapped”, Alexander resolved not to attend any further meetings of the ‘inner circle’. It was this retreat on his part, Alexander thought, that had “alienated” Tabata from him. Tabata had realised that Alexander had “slipped from under his control”, and that the leadership was not “able to control” him. Independently, Alexander had come under the influence of debates in the FI about guerrilla warfare, and had been persuaded by Michel Pablo’s argument that “the centre of gravity of world revolution” had “shifted to the colonies”. Alexander had become convinced, especially after Sharpeville, that guerrilla warfare was necessary to overthrow the apartheid state. It rankled that Alexander had made independent contact with the FI. In Alexander’s reading, Tabata worried that people might identify him (Alexander) with having advocated a switch to armed struggle, and about the power that this may have brought him. Tabata made a point of attending SOYA meetings, and attacked Alexander whenever he “raised any question”, saying that “Neville knows where he should come if he has problems”. By that time, Alexander had become hostile in the face of the reluctance of Tabata and the Unity Movement leadership to discuss “issues of practical revolution”.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interviews with Neville Alexander, 8 & 28 December 1992.

<sup>86</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interviews with Neville Alexander, 8 & 28 December 1992. Tensions had already emerged while Alexander was still away when Tabata and the leadership compelled the formal affiliation of the CPSU to the AAC. The CPSU had been formed as “deliberately non-aligned”, as a strategy of winning young people over to an AAC position. Of course the weight that Alexander gave to this ‘break’ with Tabata in the narration of his auto/biographic trajectory is itself interesting. It may be a case of a narrative of leadership formation that required an Oedipal break with the father figure.

Thereafter, Alexander and his comrades set out deliberately to cause a “split” in APDUSA. Alexander’s “appearance on the scene” was seemingly a catalyst for “general discontent” inside APDUSA. Deirdre Levinson also recreated Alexander’s conflict with Tabata in her novel *Five Years*. Her character ‘Malcolm’, clearly based on Alexander, who she had befriended, also had a confrontation with ‘French’ (the Tabata character). Malcolm “articulated a suppressed but powerful discontent in the ranks of the Organisation”. He wanted to counter “the old-fashioned hierarchy, the tendency to dictatorship, the inbredness [and] the airlessness” in the movement. In this clash, Malcolm had “talked about opening up new channels in the Organisation, new methods, combative action, organising the peasants directly for revolution [and] resisting the dead hand of the leadership”. The consequence was “a wave of desertion” which was “poignant” because this loss “was amongst the youth”.<sup>87</sup>

At the beginning of 1962, at a SOYA Conference held in Edendale a day before the Ninth Unity Conference, Alexander and his colleague Kenny Abrahams were suspended for a period of one year.<sup>88</sup> At the Unity Conference, this suspension was confirmed and it seems it also applied to APDUSA and other structures of the NEUM.<sup>89</sup> Later, Fikile Bam articulated the reasons for Alexander’s suspension from APDUSA, albeit within the restrictive setting of their trial on charges of sabotage. Alexander and his group had been accused of introducing “foreign ideas into APDUSA”. They were deemed to have been “irresponsible” in having “accused the leadership of bureaucracy”, and in having “aired their criticisms publicly, in open meetings”.<sup>90</sup> At the Unity conference that

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<sup>87</sup> Deirdre Levinson, *Five Years: An Experience of South Africa* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1966), pp 140-141; 149.

<sup>88</sup> Deirdre Levinson, Short Notes of the SOYA Conference, Edendale, 2 January 1962, Deirdre Levinson Bergson Papers. At this conference, Elma Carolissen’s suspension was withdrawn.

<sup>89</sup> Certainly, at Neville Alexander’s trial in 1964, evidence given by co-accused, Fikile Bam, was that Alexander and Abrahams had been suspended from APDUSA at the beginning of 1962. Transcript of trial, State v N Alexander and Others, Cape Provincial Division, 1964, in South African Institute of Race Relations’ Record of Political Trials, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 1901. APDUSA certainly was only formally admitted as an organisation of the NEUM at the 1962 Ninth Unity Conference.

<sup>90</sup> Transcript of trial, State v N Alexander and Others, Cape Provincial Division, 1964, South African Institute of Race Relations Political Trials, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 1901. Fikile Bam was one of Alexander’s co-trialists. At the trial, evidence was presented that it was this suspension as well as the “atmosphere” of the turn away from non-violence that led directly to the

followed, the president Leo Sihlali came out strongly against guerrilla warfare. He expressed his “strong opposition to terrorism as a substitute for political education and organisation of the people”. This opposition to “terrorism” was not “based on tactical reasons but [was] one of principle”.<sup>91</sup>

Sihlali also explained that suspension from the movement “amount[ed] to being gagged” and that the movement “recoil[ed] from this” as it caused “great frustration on the part of the suspended”. Suspension, he suggested, was different from expulsion, because it implied that the “accused” did not “hold ideas hostile to the organisation”. Organisations in the Unity Movement should only take this step “with the greatest reluctance”, Sihlali argued.<sup>92</sup> Addressing Alexander and other suspended persons directly, Sihlali reiterated that “if ... you regard yourself as innocent, you must remember that one way or another, you gave your organisation reason to distrust you”.<sup>93</sup> In asserting the necessity of suspension, I.B. Tabata added: “we are strengthened in guarding the gates of the NEUM against infiltrators”. Referring to Alexander directly, Tabata emphasised that the liberatory movement had “great hopes for the youth”, and “we have had and still have great hopes for him”. This was “a test to him ... to put the organisation before himself, [and] this will be proved by his willingness to subject himself to the discipline of the organisation”.<sup>94</sup>

During 1962, while Tabata was away on his secret trip abroad, “domestic trouble” in APDUSA, arising out of Alexander’s suspension, continued unabated, with conflicts

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formation of the secret study group, the Yu Chi Chan Club by Alexander and his colleagues in April 1962, and to the National Liberation Front shortly thereafter. This latter body was intended to become a revolutionary national organisation that would embark upon armed struggle. After these structures were infiltrated and documents intercepted, Alexander and 10 others were arrested, tried, and convicted, inter alia, of trying to overthrow the government “by means of a violent revolution, guerrilla warfare and sabotage”. This occurred despite no evidence being led that any acts of violence had been committed.

<sup>91</sup> *Ilizwi LeSizwe*, February 1962, p 6.

<sup>92</sup> Deirdre Levinson, Personal Notes of Proceedings of the Ninth Unity Conference, Edendale, 3-5 January 1962, Deirdre Levinson Bergson Papers.

<sup>93</sup> Deirdre Levinson, Personal Notes of Proceedings of the Ninth Unity Conference, Edendale, 3-5 January 1962, Deirdre Levinson Bergson Papers.

<sup>94</sup> Deirdre Levinson, Personal Notes of Proceedings of the Ninth Unity Conference, Edendale, 3-5 January 1962, Deirdre Levinson Bergson Papers.



“mounting to a climax”. Jane Gool reported to him on further developments. Ali Fataar, who had expressed his “dissatisfaction” with Alexander’s suspension, had taken him “under his wing”, “carting him about on a tour”, and “lending [him] his prestige”. This led, in Jane Gool’s account, “to the formation of a clique”, with the “avowed purpose” to “wreck” APDUSA. A “plot” had been “carefully worked out and planned” by Alexander “and his supporters”, who in all likelihood were “known to” Fataar, and “perhaps secretly abetted by him”. After the appearance of the Alexander faction at a few general members meetings and a failed vote of no confidence in the chair, Fataar was confronted at an Executive Meeting, asked whether he knew about the Alexander faction’s formation, and whether he was aware that he “had acted in a manner which could be regarded as disloyal”. After half of the Executive voted for expulsion, Fataar pleaded to be allowed to meet with the group to discuss their grievances. The outcome of this process, however, was that in practice, Neville Alexander and his supporters were expelled from APDUSA and the other affiliates of the Unity Movement.<sup>95</sup>

Ironically, following on Tabata’s report on his 1962 secret journey to investigate the possibilities of outside assistance, the NEUM executive decided to explore armed resistance in January 1963. This time it was Tabata and not Alexander who was the bringer of the message and the catalyst for a policy change. In Alexander’s understanding, the Unity Movement had hereby “adopted” what *they* had “set out to do”. However, this decision came “a year too late”. The movement “had been split, and others had taken initiative.... The space had been captured already”.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, in Alexander’s view, Tabata and the Unity Movement leadership had “acted ... *mala fides*” by giving the impression that requests for assistance from the FI “was simply a

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<sup>95</sup> Jane Gool to Dora Taylor, 15 September 1962, I.B. Tabata Papers, BC 925. This is one of very few letters in the collection written by Jane Gool. It was addressed to Taylor, but really sent to Tabata. In my interviews with Alexander, he referred to his departure from the Unity Movement as an “expulsion”. See Ciraj Rassool, Interviews with Neville Alexander, 8 & 28 December 1992. Ali Fataar has reflected on his support for Alexander’s “right to hold his views *within* the Unity Movement”, and on divisions among the leadership on suspension and expulsion as a way of dealing with Alexander. See Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Ali and Ursula Fataar, Harare, 19 July 1991 (my emphasis).

<sup>96</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interviews with Neville Alexander, 8 & 28 December 1992; a criticism along these lines of the ‘new line’ of the Unity Movement was articulated by Alexander and his colleagues a few months after this about-turn in their policy. See National Liberation Front, ‘The New Line in the NEUM’, *Liberation*, Vol. 1, No. 2, April 1963 (author’s possession).

continuation”, and by not indicating that they had expelled him and his comrades. Initially the FI thought that Tabata was pursuing something that Alexander had initiated.<sup>97</sup>

In a second irony two years later, after Alexander Defense Committees had been created in Europe and North America, I.B. Tabata claimed Alexander as a Unity Movement martyr as he toured the United States in Alexander’s name. During the 1965 tour of the United States, Dora Taylor selectively recalled her and Tabata’s relationship with Alexander. In describing Alexander’s “eagerness to be active and [to] train more than the others”, Taylor suggested that when he came back to South Africa in 1961 he was “not fully aware, not fully acclimatised to the intensification of Fascism”. However, she added: “Neville was always our son”. And this was why Tabata had “given his time to the defence of the Alexander group, and of course extending it to the defense of other members”.<sup>98</sup>

Herewith, the rupture between Tabata and Alexander was downplayed and almost opportunistically, Alexander’s expulsion from APDUSA and the Unity Movement was swept under the carpet. Alexander was reclaimed as ultimately ‘one of their own’ by the Unity Movement, and as generationally subject to Tabata’s leadership. In the process as well, Taylor placed herself alongside Tabata as the co-parent of a member of the youth, the movement’s martyr, who had paid the price for his naiveté and ‘eagerness’. The Alexander Defense Committee became a vehicle for the promotion of the Unity Movement in exile and for projecting Tabata’s irrefutable leadership. The funds and resources generated in Alexander’s name became available for the sustenance of members of the movement, deemed to be eligible as victims of apartheid’s persecution.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interviews with Neville Alexander, 8 & 28 December 1992.

<sup>98</sup> Transcript of Interview with Dora Taylor (probably conducted by Gwendolen Carter), Northwestern University, 20 November 1965, Carter-Karis Papers, Melville J Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University.

<sup>99</sup> See ‘Memorandum Concerning the Work of the Alexander Defense Committee in Aiding the Victims of South African Persecution’, Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University; Berta Green to I.B. Tabata, 11 November 1966, Unity Movement of South Africa Papers (by courtesy, Jane Gool), Harare (1991). In this letter Green wrote

From around 1960, leaders of the Unity Movement found themselves at the head of a regulatory and punitive formation which had begun to close ranks, to 'guard its gates' and to lay more emphasis on discipline. Relations of paternalism and patronage gave way to the exercise of authority, with little room for internal disagreement and dissent. Suspensions and expulsions were the chief mechanisms of creating political order, as leaders and members were kept in line. The transition from collectivity and anonymity to individuation and presidentialism was thus accompanied by the consolidation of bureaucratic power in the movement, in which political initiatives and policy shifts came decidedly from above. I.B. Tabata was the central figure in this power matrix, and leaders like Sihlali exercised their presidential tasks in Tabata's shadow. A key element in these tensions was biographic. Just as I.B. Tabata's life had become a biographic project of the formation of heroic leadership and political wisdom, so the terms of its narration began to be contested as younger activists attempted to make their mark outside the boundaries of patronage and authority. In this biographic critique, the trajectory of Tabata's political life was deemed to have taken an autocratic turn, and Tabata was depicted as a dictatorial leader who demanded loyalty and obedience.



After 1963, as the politics of presidentialism were acted out by Tabata in the exile conditions of projecting the political movement and seeking political and financial support, continued tensions and ruptures inside the movement could not be contained by bureaucratic procedures. This time, Lusaka was the seat of a sustained, internal biographic onslaught, with Tabata accused of being at the head of a clique that had usurped power in the movement. The seemingly ordered image that had been projected in the Lusaka studio photograph of an exiled leadership and family-like structure that had gathered in the city in 1965 (Figure 10) belied the internal tensions that had begun to erupt. The key figure who unleashed a biographic attack on Tabata was Livingstone Mqotsi, an activist described in 1953 as one of the movement's 'coming boys' who had

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clearly that "ADC funds should be used for anyone who is being persecuted for their activities in the liberation movement and for their families. This, of course, includes organisers and others in the Unity Movement".

emerged with a sense of discipline and loyalty.<sup>100</sup> In the 1950s and early 1960s, Mqotsi had demonstrated his commitment to the movement in his analyses of Bantu education, in his political journalism and publishing work, and in making himself available for senior administrative work in the movement as one of the elected Joint Secretaries and as General Secretary of APDUSA.<sup>101</sup>

In the first months of exile, Tabata had set himself the task of reconceptualising the political movement under conditions of exile and internal repression. He wrote to Dora Taylor from Swaziland that the idea was “to build a pyramidal structure with the nation as the base and the leadership as the apex”. The people would “learn to come out of their various localities [and] seek out the leadership wherever it is. There they should “put their problems and get advice”. This, according to Tabata, was the way to “establish a central command”. In his attempts to put this conception of a viable political structure in place, Tabata wrote to Taylor: “I feel like an architect who sees his dream structure rising from the foundations”.<sup>102</sup>

There were a number of hurdles to solve, including the problem of internal factionalism. He was “not going to allow a situation to develop that would lead to the formation of a junta within the organisation”.<sup>103</sup> Taylor heard from Tabata how he had addressed the problem of factionalism:

I have them a long lecture and gave them political lessons. It is strange. Plain speaking accompanied by clarity of thought and superiority of knowledge gathered them all together behind me. It's the first time I ever used my superior experience against them and they appreciated it.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 25 August 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>101</sup> *Ikhwezi Lomso*, February 1960; *Ilizwi LeSizwe*, May/June 1962. It was Livingstone Mqotsi who took public responsibility for all political comment in *Ilizwi LeSizwe* in the early 1960s. He was elected General Secretary of APDUSA, Assistant Secretary of the AAC and one of the Joint Secretaries of the Unity Movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

<sup>102</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 17 June 1963; 9 May 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>103</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 5 January 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>104</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 5 January 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

The movement's 'architect' also recommended that African states be approached "from a position of strength". As writing had been the movement's "forte", he impressed upon the "fellows" how important it was to keep writing for the purpose of publication and distribution.<sup>105</sup>

This was a challenge that Livingstone Mqotsi accepted keenly soon after his arrival in Lusaka. When he arrived in about October 1964, he moved in with Tabata and Jane Gool. Tabata described him as "not an easy man", who had "lived alone all his life" and "acquired the habit of silence so that you do not know what he is thinking". However, Tabata added that Mqotsi "was melting a bit".<sup>106</sup> A few months later, Tabata was moved to confront Mqotsi, who had given him "cause to worry".<sup>107</sup> In his account of this emerging tension, Tabata reported that it had dissipated and that Mqotsi had succumbed in the face of the 'superiority' of his leadership:

I told him he is now a grown up man. He must behave like one. I gave him a long lecture. Afterwards I was shocked at myself for talking in this fashion to another man. Believe it or not. The effect was terrific. He changed visibly. That same night he was bustling next to me and participating in discussions, supporting me and underscoring the important points I had made. He is now happy at my side.<sup>108</sup>

It was in this relationship that Mqotsi agreed to draft an article on the birth of the AAC and the Unity Movement as part of the movement's programme of writing as politics. As soon as he had presented the article, however, Tabata rejected it. "After a full discussion", Mqotsi agreed to rewrite the piece. "It is strange how young he is", Tabata wrote to Taylor. "Fortunately he is very pleasant and willing to learn".<sup>109</sup> Shortly after his arrival into the thick of exile politics of southern African liberation movements in the setting of the Liberation Centre in Lusaka, Mqotsi threw himself into anti-imperialist activism and writing. He was one of the key persons behind the establishment of a

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<sup>105</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 9 May 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>106</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 21 October 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>107</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 5 January 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>108</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 5 January 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

<sup>109</sup> I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 9 May 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

Lusaka branch of APDUSA in December 1964, which raised funds, assisted Movement refugees, held study groups, reproduced and distributed Movement literature, and produced a monthly bulletin, *APDUSA Newsletter*. The newsletter had achieved successes in its first few months, “receiving favourable comment” and “provoking spirited discussion”. It was also “quoted ... plagiarised and imitated in many quarters”, and enabled “the voice” of the AAC and Unity Movement to be “heard” not only in Africa but in the UK, Europe, Asia, and the Americas.<sup>110</sup>

In the first few months of 1966, Mqotsi prepared a paper for a conference of African liberation movements, which presented a case for building a “United Democratic Movement of Africa”. The paper argued the case for the principled unity of African liberation movements, a continental version of the Unity Movement that would have its own Ten Point Programme, adhere to “a policy of non-collaboration with imperialism and its agents” and be federal in structure. It is not clear whether this conference took place, but the article was published in the April 1966 *APDUSA Newsletter* that Mqotsi edited.<sup>111</sup> Immediately thereafter, Tabata and Jane Gool, “his personal representative” in Lusaka caused the “immediate stoppage” of production and circulation of the newsletter after five issues and “instigat[ed] the banning” of the Lusaka APDUSA branch.<sup>112</sup>

According to Mqotsi, “the prospect of such continental unity” as proposed by the newsletter, “must have frightened the bureaucrats out of their heads”. With such unity, the Unity Movement may have found itself “in danger of being called upon to unite

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<sup>110</sup> The Chairman of the Branch of APDUSA in Zambia – since disestablished to All Members of the National Executive of the African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa, May 1966, Livingstone Mqotsi Papers. I would like to thank Livingstone Mqotsi for giving me access to copies of this and other papers dealing with these conflicts in the Unity Movement in Lusaka.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Towards a United Democratic Movement of Africa’, *APDUSA Newsletter*, Vol II, No 4, April 1966. Mqotsi was careful to point out on the back cover that this article was not issued by the APDUSA National Executive. I would like to thank Livingstone Mqotsi for giving me copies of this newsletter and its successors between April 1966 and January-February 1968.

<sup>112</sup> The Chairman of the Branch of APDUSA in Zambia – since disestablished to All Members of the National Executive of the African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa, May 1966; ‘An Indictment of I.B. Tabata and his Clique’ (Framed and endorsed by members of the Unity Movement in Lusaka), Lusaka, 19 September 1966, Livingstone Mqotsi Papers.



with the other liberation movements in a truly revolutionary struggle for liberation". The "inner core" of the Tabata "clique and faction" had "never been happy about this publication". As a result, "the bureaucracy killed it". To close down the APDUSA Lusaka Branch, "the master strategist in these matters" used the argument that other executive members had not been informed about its existence. The branch also needed to be disbanded, it was argued, "for security reasons". A third reason proffered was that some Branch members were not South African. During its existence, the Branch was "never ... popular with the leaders", who had felt that "it was not properly under their control". Indeed, Tabata and Jane Gool "refused" to call it an APDUSA Branch, referring to it instead as "a Club", thus denying its members any organisational status. When Branch members expressed their dissatisfaction over their treatment by the leadership, they were accused of "rebellion" and labelled "undisciplined", with "no respect for their leaders".<sup>113</sup>

During this struggle, Mqotsi drafted and circulated key documents that sought to explain various aspects of these internal conflicts and to present "an indictment of I.B. Tabata and his clique".<sup>114</sup> Here, Mqotsi explained that the closure of the branch and the newsletter had been precipitated by his criticism of Tabata's "bureaucratic tendencies and practices". Differences had emerged between them over who took decisions on behalf of the Unity Movement outside South Africa. Tabata had contended that as "the only constitutional authority", he alone as President could "make decisions in the absence of legal machinery created by the HUC properly constituted at home". In contrast, Mqotsi had argued that members of the movement, especially the executive, had "the political right to make decisions" on behalf of the organisation that would be subject to later review by the HUC or representative movement conference. After a suggestion had been made to separate the office of the President at Headquarters from the Office of the Representative, Tabata then "unilaterally and bureaucratically" appointed Jane Gool as the movement's political representative in its Lusaka office "in

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<sup>113</sup> L Mqotsi, General Secretary, African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa to All Members of the Unity Movement, the All-African Convention, the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa and other affiliated organisations and bodies, May 1966, Livingstone Mqotsi Papers.

<sup>114</sup> An Indictment of I.B. Tabata and his Clique', Lusaka, 19 September 1966, Livingstone Mqotsi Papers.

spite of the express disapproval of the majority". Tabata also "rewarded his brother-in-law", Wycliffe Tsotsi, with the position of movement Vice-President, "a completely new position in that organisation".<sup>115</sup>

The political challenge to I.B. Tabata's political practice which was presented by Livingstone Mqotsi in Lusaka was also a vigorous biographical critique and reassessment by a younger movement leader, who had refused to acquiesce in a system of political patronage that had taken a bureaucratic turn. Mqotsi argued that in seeking to introduce the concept of the "leader cult and the personality cult", Tabata had sought "despotic and arbitrary powers, including the power to expel", if members had "incurred the displeasure of the leader". Tabata also allegedly sought "to place himself above the membership of the organisation", and as a "further incursion into the principle of internal democracy", he wanted "to derogate from the supremacy of conference itself". In Mqotsi's biographical reappraisal, the claims on leadership by Tabata were no longer the consequence of duty and service, but emerged out of bureaucratic control, political dishonesty and authoritarian practices.<sup>116</sup>

This transition was apparent, Mqotsi argued, in the ousting of Leo Sihlali and in the opportunistic use of Neville Alexander's name. In "worming himself" into the presidency of the Unity Movement, with Wycliffe Tsotsi's assistance, Tabata had committed "political assassination" by seeking "to discredit and depose" Leo Sihlali, the "duly elected" president. Sihlali had been "manoeuvred" out of the Unity Movement presidency while he was under house arrest and police surveillance. Tabata "usurped presidential powers" and sought "publicity in his own interests". After having "engineered" Neville Alexander's "virtual expulsion" from the Unity Movement in 1961 "without any good and sufficient reasons", Tabata had "unilaterally" readmitted Alexander into the organisation, as a means of attaining "personal glory and publicity".

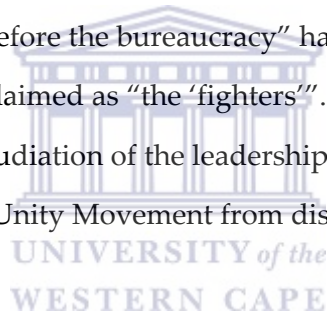
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<sup>115</sup> L Mqotsi, General Secretary, African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa to All Members of the Unity Movement, the All-African Convention, the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa and other affiliated organisations and bodies, May 1966, Livingstone Mqotsi Papers; An Indictment of I.B. Tabata and his Clique', Lusaka, 19 September 1966, Livingstone Mqotsi Papers.

<sup>116</sup> An Indictment of I.B. Tabata and his Clique', Lusaka, 19 September 1966, Livingstone Mqotsi Papers.

The ADC was a means of Tabata “riding” on his “glory” and “exploit[ing]” Alexander’s “international repute”. Tabata had made the Unity Movement “appear as his private property run by himself and his private secretaries and personal representatives”.<sup>117</sup>

In embarking on the road of “personality cults and narrow nationalisms”, Tabata and other leaders had “become preoccupied with hobnobbing with Governments, diplomats and Heads of State” instead of forging ties with and winning allies among other liberation movements. Even Nathaniel Honono had been taught “faithfully to repeat the catechism: ‘My President’”. This was “not the first time” that these “patterns of behaviour” and “tendencies” had played “havoc” with the organisation, Mqotsi argued. “Only now they [had] become gross”. They had driven “a section of our most promising young men” to Robben Island. “The iron fist of bureaucracy” had “rudely shocked” the “youthful ebullience” of some and had driven others “into despondency and despair”. Those who “refused to bow before the bureaucracy” had their characters “assassinated”, while “the acolytes” were acclaimed as “the ‘fighters’”. Mqotsi concluded by arguing that “nothing short of the repudiation of the leadership of Mr I.B. Tabata and his clique and faction [would] save the Unity Movement from disaster”.<sup>118</sup>



These internal battles in Lusaka culminated in Mqotsi’s expulsion from the Unity Movement in October 1966, along with Mtutuzeli Mpehle. Mqotsi was accused inter alia of “undermining and damaging the movement”, of being “consistently guilty of insubordination”, of “flaunting” it and of refusing “to recognise the authority of the officials of the organisation”. Mqotsi was also accused of “attempting to hive off APDUSA from the Unity Movement” and to “run an office on his own”, separate from

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<sup>117</sup> An Indictment of I.B. Tabata and his Clique’, Lusaka, 19 September 1966; L Mqotsi, General Secretary, African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa to All Members of the Unity Movement, the All-African Convention, the African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa and other affiliated organisations and bodies, May 1966, Livingstone Mqotsi Papers. See also Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Livingstone Mqotsi, London, 3 March 1992.

<sup>118</sup> An Indictment of I.B. Tabata and his Clique’, Lusaka, 19 September 1966; L Mqotsi, General Secretary, African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa to All Members of the Unity Movement, the All-African Convention, the African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa and other affiliated organisations and bodies, May 1966, Livingstone Mqotsi Papers.

that of the movement.<sup>119</sup> After his exclusion, Mqotsi continued to work politically in Lusaka until the early 1970s. He persisted in writing and publishing a bulletin, which he renamed *Unity Newsletter*. *Unity Newsletter* was published monthly at least until January/February 1968, and was widely read in the southern African liberation movements.<sup>120</sup> While Mqotsi fought to vindicate himself and get his expulsion rescinded, he continued to have close relationships with members of the MPLA and Frelimo as well as with radicals in the PAC and the ANC, with whom he and Mpehle had enormous influence. This included close, informal connections with Chris Hani who at the time was critical of the ANC leadership.

Someone who observed these events in Lusaka in 1965-66 suggested that Mqotsi had been “charismatic”, “charming, humble and sociable” while being serious in his political engagements. Mqotsi and Mpehle “had contacts at all levels” of Zambian society. In contrast, Tabata and Jane Gool were “two inappropriate figures” who “tried to contain and control everything”, and whose manner of engagement was often “undisciplined and arrogant”. They were “two elderly intellectuals” who “cut no ice” with the Zambian government, and whose approach had been “to quote the past” in ways that often seemed “simplistic and inept”. In expelling Mqotsi and Mpehle, the Unity Movement lost two people who could have been valuable in their quest for recognition and support, and through whom they could have won allies among southern African liberation movements at a time in Lusaka when there were enormous possibilities for this.<sup>121</sup>

During the 1960s, it seems that the only way it was possible to be a loyal member of an affiliate of the Unity Movement in exile was to submit yourself faithfully and unquestioningly to Tabata’s leadership. In challenging I.B. Tabata and accusing him of

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<sup>119</sup> AAC and UMSA, Resolution on the Expulsion of Mr Livingstone Mqotsi and Mr Mtutuzeli Mpehle (signed by I.B. Tabata), 7 October 1966, Unity Movement of South Africa Papers (c/o, Jane Gool), Harare (1991).

<sup>120</sup> *Unity Newsletter*, Vol. 1, No 1, October 1966 – Vol. 3, No 1, January-February 1968; Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Livingstone Mqotsi, London, 3 March 1992.

<sup>121</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with X, Cape Town, 1 January 1992. X, who had just returned from exile, agreed to be interviewed without a tape recorder, on condition of anonymity.

bureaucratic abuse and of trying to make the movement his personal fiefdom, Livingstone Mqotsi had turned his back on a leadership that had become entrenched and that had placed itself beyond challenge by closing down possibilities for discussion of differences. It had become impossible to exercise political initiative in the interests of the movement if the leadership did not first sanction this. Mqotsi's critique of Tabata's politics represented a significant attempt to break from a relationship of political patronage that had altered in nature and become despotic. Just as in the case of Neville Alexander, this challenge was also biographic in that it questioned key elements of Tabata's official biography that had become a feature of the movement's political engagements. In this critical narrative, the rise of Tabata's leadership was deemed to have culminated in moral decline and bureaucratic deviation, with Tabata having usurped the presidency of the movement and utilised it for his own personal gain.

Ironically, the effect of this biographic challenge in UMSA was the consolidation of presidentialism and greater attention to the upkeep and defence of Tabata's biography. During the late 1960s and 1970s, Tabata continued to consolidate his leadership of UMSA in exile and his position of liberation movement president in spite of the movement's deep decline. This came even after APDUSA's political structures inside South Africa were virtually destroyed by repression. The movement's efforts at mobilisation for military training abroad had largely ended in failure, especially with the arrest of dozens of its cadres in 1970-1971.<sup>122</sup> Little was left other than ageing, exiled leaders, surrounded by a small group, who faithfully kept up a programme of publishing and republishing Tabata's speeches and writings, and arranging more fundraising tours of the United States.<sup>123</sup> A politics of presidentialism was maintained in

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<sup>122</sup> In 1971, members of APDUSA in South Africa, such as Kader Hassim, J.B. Vusani, Kwezi Tshangana, Bobby Wilcox, Frank Anthony and Sonny Venkatrathnam tried to leave South Africa for military training and were arrested, charged under the Terrorism Act and imprisoned on Robben Island (See Transcript of trial, State v K Hassim and 13 Others, Natal Provincial Division, 1972, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 1898). These arrests formed part of a larger crackdown on the movement in different parts of the country, with arrests of over 200 activists. This is the estimate presented in *APDUSA Views*, April 1989.

<sup>123</sup> See Circular Letter from W.M. Tsotsi, 9 February 1971, Deirdre Levinson Bergson Collection. This letter, to which was appended a special note to Deirdre and Allen Bergson (of New York), made reference to a "successful tour" just completed by "Our President", Tabata and the AAC president,

spite of UMSA's tenuous existence. This time, it was no longer directed at projecting the movement, but was geared, almost tragically, towards defending the fragile façade that was left.

In 1975, UMSA was made to marshal its biographic defences when accusations against Tabata resurfaced outside the political movement in 1975 in a review of Southern African liberation movements published in *The Guardian*. Based on information given to them by former UMSA member Scrape Ntshona who had been expelled three years before "for security reasons", *The Guardian* reported that Tabata had been "suspended from office" in 1974 for "suspected maladministration of funds and general failure", and suggested that his reputation had become "distinctly tarnished". After "a protracted period", *The Guardian* agreed to offer an apology to Tabata, which they published in their paper in 1985. In their statement of apology, *The Guardian* affirmed that Tabata had been Unity Movement president "continuously since 1964", and that he was "a major and respected figure in the resistance movement", who had "devoted a lifetime" to freeing South Africans "from white domination and exploitation".<sup>124</sup> Once again it was the narrative of Tabata's political biography that was the main issue in dispute, and the resources of the declining movement were marshalled in the defence of the President's integrity and in the maintenance of his political biography. Indeed, it may be that Tabata's promise to forward 'a few documents' to UCT to correct 'political distortions' were part of this 'biographic maintenance'.

In the mid-1980s, amid renewed efforts at political mobilisation and the building of political movements inside South Africa, new political structures emerged on the political scene claiming to build on a Unity Movement legacy. In 1983, one of the organisations that participated in the forums of the Cape Action League was APDUSA, represented by released Robben Islanders, Frank Anthony and Bobby Wilcox. This

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Honono. It also announced a decision that Tabata would "repeat his tour during the upcoming spring", and that what was required was "not just thousands but millions of dollars".

<sup>124</sup> *The Guardian*, 18 February 1975; Norman Traub to Ciraj Rassool, 8 November 1995 (author's possession); 'Mr I.B. Tabata', Statement by *The Guardian*, 5 February 1985 (author's possession). I would like to thank Norman Traub for forwarding me a copy of this document and information on this matter.



reconstituted APDUSA represented an attempt on the part of activists loyal to I.B. Tabata to rebuild political structures in South Africa.<sup>125</sup> Part of this initiative in rebuilding a movement also saw the launch a few years later of the APDUSA Youth Movement (APDYM). Younger activists also availed themselves of the opportunity to meet with the leadership in exile, and visits were arranged to Harare to visit the Tabata-Gool home, which was also the movement headquarters. Harare was where the ageing Tabata and Jane Gool had moved shortly after Zimbabwean independence, where they were accorded a place of honour as esteemed veterans of the anti-apartheid struggle.<sup>126</sup> And there, the APDUSA activists from South Africa heard about the trials and tribulations of Tabata's political life.

In April 1985, a new political organisation that claimed a connection with "the traditions of the Unity Movement" was launched. This was the New Unity Movement, which emerged after two years of "intensive negotiations" among organisations, and "a searching re-examination of the liberatory struggle". According to an official account, this "revival" brought together "all those persons and organisations" which had "adhered unwaveringly" to the NEUM's programme and policy. The Ten Point Programme was "sharpened and extended to take account of the giant strides made in the liberatory struggle" and the policy of Non-Collaboration was "given new emphasis". A "Declaration to the People of South Africa" was issued, signalling a reference to another 'Declaration' made by the NEUM 30 years previously. R.O. Dudley, who had been one of the Anti-CAD delegates to the 1958 AAC conference, at which internal

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<sup>125</sup> It seems, though, that APDUSA was only formally re-established as "a fully fledged national organisation" in July 1990 with the relaxation of repressive controls, and I.B. Tabata was once again elected as its president. See Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA), 'I.B. Tabata', Memorial Pamphlet, Issued by the Unity Movement of South Africa, Eikefontein, October 1990.

<sup>126</sup> No doubt, the fact that ZANU (PF)'s historic alliance had been with the PAC and not the ANC helped. Tabata and Gool developed close connections with Victoria Chitepo and Amina Hughes, who held positions in the Zimbabwe government. In addition, as veterans and 'comrades', their opinions were regularly sought in Zimbabwean political forums, such as those convened by the SAPES Trust (a radical forum of research and publishing in Southern African political economy) and they were also sought out by international figures, such as PLO ambassador, Ali Halimeh. From that time, Jane Gool began to be referred to as Mrs Tabata.

conflicts had come to a head, was elected President of the New Unity Movement, which was seen as the NEUM's "successor".<sup>127</sup>

One of the founding organisations of the New Unity Movement (NUM) was the Natal Branch of APDUSA under the leadership of ex-Robben Islander, Kader Hassim, who had been Accused No. 1 in the political trial of Frank Anthony and Bobby Wilcox. Nathaniel Honono reported that Tabata had been "astounded" to hear that Hassim had been "busy forming a new Unity Movement not long after being discharged from Robben Island". It also rankled that Hassim had been working with "the remnants of the old-Kies-Dudley syndrome in the TLSA and Anti-CAD". Among those who had "initiated" the NUM was Leo Sihlali, who - some have argued - had been 'deposed' as Unity Movement president in favour of Tabata in 1964. Sihlali, having turned his back on Tabata, was said to have taken "a keen interest in the progress and development of the New Unity Movement".<sup>128</sup> In Harare, Alie Fataar, who lived near the Tabata-Gool home, gave his support for the New Unity Movement's formation.

At first, Sonny Venkatrathnam, another ex-Robben Islander, had been sent to Zimbabwe "to propagate the idea" of a new Unity Movement. He was dismissed as a proponent of "Gandhism" when he "disavowed violence" and "refuted" the movement's decision to "train cadres" in a "revolutionary armed uprising".<sup>129</sup> A few months after the launch of the New Unity Movement, Hassim and other "senior members" of APDUSA (Natal) travelled to Harare to try and secure the support of I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool for the

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<sup>127</sup> 'A Declaration to the People of South Africa', April 1985 (Issued by the New Unity Movement); 'The Ten-Point Programme of the New Unity Movement', January 1987 (Issued by the New Unity Movement); R.O. Dudley, 'The Ten-Point Programme of the Unity Movement: A Historical Note', published as an introduction to 'The Ten-Point Programme of the New Unity Movement', January 1987 (Issued by the New Unity Movement); *APDUSA Views*, April 1989, p 5; 'The New Unity Movement: What it Stands for' (NUM Information sheet, 16 May 1990).

<sup>128</sup> Nathaniel 'Tshutsha' Honono to Deirdre Levinson Bergson, 24 June 1986, Deirdre Levinson Bergson Papers (I thank Deirdre for showing me this letter); *APDUSA Views*, April 1989 (Special Issue: A Tribute to Leo Sihlali); Jane Gool, 'Letter from Abroad', 29 November 1990 (author's possession). Kader Hassim's disloyalty was especially galling since he was the husband of Jane Gool's niece, Nina Frederichs (the daughter of Minnie Gool).

<sup>129</sup> Nathaniel 'Tshutsha' Honono to Deirdre Levinson Bergson, 24 June 1986, Deirdre Levinson Bergson Papers.

NUM. They found instead a hostility that had seen in its formation an attempt to “isolate” and “discredit” the exiled leadership, and “smear their names so as to prevent them from defending themselves against these attacks”. The creation of the New Unity Movement, they suggested, was an attempt “to hijack the Unity Movement”.<sup>130</sup>

It was as if the need ‘to guard the gates’ of the movement had become an obsession with holding on to the status of leadership in a very marginal movement that had almost become like private property, and with demanding that members be unquestioningly loyal to the legendary leader. And in some senses there were property issues at stake, especially around questions of intellectual property, and issues of history and narrative. And here the NUM and its affiliates incorporated the symbolic works and names that UMSA would have laid claim to. The New Unity Movement Youth Wing called its journal *Ikhwezi*, in a clear historic reference to *Ikhwezi Lomso*.<sup>131</sup> Kader Hassim held on to the name APDUSA to describe the Natal branch that in effect had broken with a putative, remaining exiled and reconstituted national organisation by that name that traced its history to its 1961 formation under Tabata’s presidency. And APDUSA (Natal) quickly acquired a public presence as the printing and publishing arm of the NUM, bringing out the ‘Declaration to the People of South Africa’ and the ‘Ten Point Programme’, and initiating a journal in APDUSA’s name.

A key element in this claim on intellectual property was historical, and the formation of the New Unity Movement saw the creation of new narratives of the history of the NEUM and its affiliates. The creation of the NUM was framed as a ‘revival’ of the NEUM. While the NEUM’s “policy, programme and traditions were continued by various organisations in various ways”, this narration suggested that it “did not function

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<sup>130</sup> Jane Gool, ‘Letter from Abroad’, 29 November 1990 (author’s possession). Jane Gool also suggested that Kader Hassim’s “bitter rejection” of the exiled leadership was bound up with holding them “responsible for him being sent to Robben Island”. See Jane Gool, ‘Critique on *The Journey* by Frank Anthony’, 24 April 1991 (author’s possession).

<sup>131</sup> See for example *Ikhwezi* (Journal of the New Unity Movement Youth Wing), Vol. 2, No 1, March-April 1989.

as a public organisation" from 1960 to 1985.<sup>132</sup> In an explanatory pamphlet released by APDUSA (Natal) on the nature of the organisation, APDUSA was also given a very particular history, which suggested that APDUSA had been "forced to end its activities" by late 1963. In the early 1970s, there had been an attempt "to revive the organisation" which had "failed" due to multiple arrests and detentions.<sup>133</sup> APDUSA (Natal) also started a publishing programme, and sought to republish key historical texts that had emanated from the Unity Movement fold. In 1986, it brought out a new edition of Nosipho Majeke's *The Rôle of the Missionaries in Conquest*, accompanied by a short biographical article about Dora Taylor, and her use of the pen name. This was published as part of a deliberate publishing programme called the "Unity Movement History Series".<sup>134</sup>

There was a definite biographical element in this conception of the history of the Unity Movement, one that sought an inclusive, reassembled approach to its ancestry and legacy of leaders, and that ensured that no individual leader or elder would be singled out for special veneration. This was biography as lesson, and not as a project of presidentialism and political authority. Tabata, Goolam Gool, Kies, Jane Gool, Fataar, Jayiya, Honono and Dudley were listed together in a reconciliatory approach as "political giants of the liberatory movement" and as "members of the star-studded leadership of the Unity Movement".<sup>135</sup> I.B. Tabata was not accorded any special status, nor was any presidential position recognised. Instead, he was accorded a place alongside other leaders of different factions, and was thus reincorporated into a legendary collective leadership. In addition, the youth journal *Ikhwezi* explored the

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<sup>132</sup> 'The New Unity Movement: What it Stands for' (NUM Information sheet, 16 May 1990).

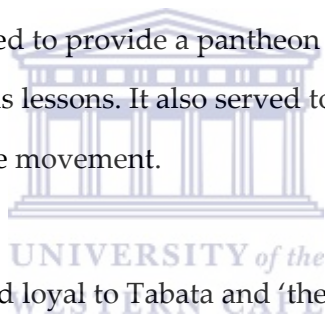
<sup>133</sup> African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (Natal), 'What is APDUSA?' (n.d.).

<sup>134</sup> Nosipho Majeke (Dora Taylor), *The Rôle of the Missionaries in Conquest*, Cumberwood: APDUSA (Natal), 1986.

<sup>135</sup> *APDUSA Views*, April 1989 (Special Issue: A Tribute to Leo Sihlali), p 11. This increased attention to biography is also apparent in the special anniversary bulletin issued in 1993 to commemorate the "50<sup>th</sup> year of struggle". See *Anniversary Bulletin: Unity Movement, 1943-1993 – 50<sup>th</sup> Year of Struggle* (Cape Town 1993).

significance of deceased 'heroes', such as Goolam Gool, as part of the effort to understand the "strong foundations" of the movement.<sup>136</sup>

The emergence of the NUM more than forty years after the formation of the NEUM meant that the new movement would also become an institution of commemoration of political lives, as ageing, veteran activists passed away. The inclusive production of memorial tributes to deceased comrades ensured that biography became a key element of the NUM's organisational practice from its inception. Issues of the New Unity Movement's *Bulletin* carried biographic obituaries to Cameron Madikizela, Nathaniel Honono and Leo Sihlali, while Sihlali was also singled out for more extended biographic attention in a special issue of *APDUSA Views*.<sup>137</sup> The leadership and supporters of the New Unity Movement also arranged and participated in memorial meetings that reviewed the political work and commitments of deceased activists. This work of biographic memorialism served to provide a pantheon of heroes and ancestors and a proud body of political lives as lessons. It also served to proclaim a lineage of political leadership and support for the movement.



The small group that remained loyal to Tabata and 'the external leaders', who tried to build APDUSA and other structures of UMSA inside South Africa now had to contend with another organisation projecting itself on a political platform of non-collaboration in the name of the Unity Movement. As if that was not enough, one of its senior leaders in South Africa, Frank Anthony, who had gone to prison for six years for his loyalty to APDUSA, left Cape Town in the late 1980s and headed for Zimbabwe to meet the man of legend, his hero Tabata. His experience there resulted in severe despair and disillusionment, and contributed to him turning his back on his movement and his leader. Anthony published a fictionalised account of this journey to Harare, the

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<sup>136</sup> 'Dr G.H. Gool: Portrait of a Revolutionary', *Ikhwezi* (Journal of the New Unity Movement Youth Wing), Vol. 2, No 1, March-April 1989, pp 18-19.

<sup>137</sup> 'Obituary: Cameron Mbulelo Ganuza Madikizela'; Alie Fataar, 'A Tribute to Nathaniel Impey Honono', *New Unity Movement Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No 2, August-September 1987; 'A Tribute to Leo Sihlali', *New Unity Movement Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No 2, July 1989; *APDUSA Views*, April 1989 (Special Issue: A Tribute to Leo Sihlali).

'Headquarters' of APDUSA and UMSA, and of his meeting with Tabata ("Comrade Chair" in the text) and Jane Gool (the "grande dame"). Anthony's book also examined the subsequent disillusionment that had engulfed him after he had crossed the border illegally to face not only a number of obstacles, but to find an ineffectual, severely weakened, decaying organisation, which sustained itself through a corrupt leadership.<sup>138</sup>

This novel was an account of Anthony's (Comrade B's) loyalty to his organisation, of long held political relationships either sustained (such as with Bobby Wilcox, or "Comrade R") or soured (such as with Kader Hassim, or "Moonsami"). But mostly it was a tale of his reverence for Tabata, and the fate of this reverence as he made his way to encounter Tabata in the flesh. In joining the New Unity Movement, Moonsami had chosen to break out of the orbit of his one-time patron, Comrade Chair. Moonsami had been widely considered at one stage to be "the heir-apparent", and had even modelled "his bearing, his presentation, even his voice" on Comrade Chair. Yet after his release from Robben Island, Moonsami depicted him as "an unmitigated dictator" who had "destroyed all its notable leaders". All Comrade Chair had left around him were "four or five lackeys who do his bidding". Comrade B's immediate response to this representation was anger at Moonsami, an "ambitious impostor" and "shrewd crook", who had "dared to speak in pejorative terms about one of the bravest and most steadfast living revolutionaries".<sup>139</sup>

Comrade B had "never met a revolutionary approaching the skill, the single-mindedness of purpose, the tenacity and the durability" as Comrade Chair. Comrade Chair was a man "born of the conditions of our country and drenched in it". He was a "revolutionist without equal". He epitomised a "concretisation of revolutionary consciousness" and was the "dialectical synthesis of the universal and the idiosyncratic".<sup>140</sup> In Comrade B's memory of a political meeting in the City Hall, Comrade Chair was

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<sup>138</sup> Frank Anthony, *The Journey: The Revolutionary Anguish of Comrade B* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1991).

<sup>139</sup> Frank Anthony, *The Journey*, pp 33-34, 40-44.

<sup>140</sup> Frank Anthony, *The Journey*, p 150.



A man ... surrounded by a sea of people, so many that they overflowed out into the streets, hungry and oppressed people, mesmerised for three hours by the man on the stage, proud, authentic, revolutionary.... He stood there, imperial, never once looking at the script of his prepared speech, expounding a profound political analysis, as if it were a fairy-tale told by a master story-teller. Such was the majesty of the man.<sup>141</sup>

And yet, while still in Cape Town at the end of the 1980s, Comrade B received reports on Comrade Chair's "disintegrating consciousness" from an activist courier. This was a tragic account of physical decline and intellectual and mental deterioration of an aged, frail activist in exile who clung to the leadership of his organisation. His waking hours, Comrade B heard, had been preoccupied with "his essentially non-political past", with "rustic stories about the horses he had broken in". Tabata had spent time recounting "the odyssey of his escape from the country and the thousand and one little trivia he had encountered on that mammoth journey". Comrade B arrived in Harare, having crossed the border "without permission", in "an act of liberation" which had created in him "a new dimension of self-awareness". The purpose of the journey was "to test our logistical preparedness for launching our liberation drive".<sup>142</sup>

In Harare, he encountered in Comrade Chair not a colossus, but someone who "had become reduced to the crustaceous remains of his once pregnant voice". Death was making its appearance on the horizon, especially the "spectre of the death of an era". Comrade B's towering respect had begun to turn into "censure". "The rot", he found, "was in the very air of exile".<sup>143</sup>

Nowhere had I found even the rudiments of organisation. Of an infrastructure there was not a sign. Armed struggle! This was ... a tragic-comedy, a macabre joke.... From this great distance the sick game of leadership was played. And we little fools back home played along in a deadly and futile

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<sup>141</sup> Frank Anthony, *The Journey*, p 198.

<sup>142</sup> Frank Anthony, *The Journey*, pp 77, 112-4, 194.

<sup>143</sup> Frank Anthony, *The Journey*, pp 170-184.

game. That was what it amounted to. The massive pretence!"<sup>144</sup>

At headquarters in Harare, in the presence of his revolutionary hero, Comrade B found instead the "tranquil existence" of people who had "learned to live peacefully with failure". "The dynamism which had been his hallmark, the glitter of his personality, were gone".<sup>145</sup>

In their encounter, Comrade Chair had held forth "for an eternity about his personal heroics, some quarter of a century past". The past "was something special to him", and after Comrade B had related what had happened to him, Comrade Chair "broke straight into a story of his own". Comrade B heard "the expansiveness of his gesture and listened to the grandeur of his delivery". There seemed "something prepared about it all", he thought. Comrade Chair's story "had happened more than two decades before, yet he recalled with great facility the minutest detail". This was "not reminiscence, it was oral autobiography". There was "no future in what he told". It was "all past, solidified and final". Writing later, Jane Gool's reaction to Anthony's "strange and disturbing" book was that it was "an exorcism of a mind plagued and tormented by a host of sick visions".<sup>146</sup> However, Anthony's biographic rejection of Tabata represented the most intense dismissal of the encrusted legend of a leader, a painful realisation of the extent of mythology's hollowness and delusion, and of the fact that the emperor indeed had no clothes.

### *Burying, mourning and remembering Tabata*

When Anthony's book was published, I.B. Tabata was already dead. He had died in Harare on 13 October 1990 after a long illness. The cause of his death was listed as "cardio-respiratory failure".<sup>147</sup> In his last few days, his illness had become quite acute,

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<sup>144</sup> Frank Anthony, *The Journey*, p 184.

<sup>145</sup> Frank Anthony, *The Journey*, p 189.

<sup>146</sup> Frank Anthony, *The Journey*, pp 188-189; Jane Gool, 'Critique on *The Journey* by Frank Anthony, 24 April 1991.

<sup>147</sup> Notice of Death of Isaac Bangani Tabata (in terms of the Births and Deaths Registration Act, Zimbabwe), 15 October 1990 (author's possession). I am indebted to Magdalene Tabata, I.B. Tabata's late

and Alie and Ursula Fataar had assisted Gool in transporting him to hospital for medical attention.<sup>148</sup> Struggles immediately ensued over Tabata's body and the quest to have him buried at his birthplace in South Africa. Amina Hughes, Zimbabwe's Deputy Minister of Transport and close friend of Tabata and Gool, stepped in to liaise with the South African Department of National Health and Population Development, which eventually gave permission for Tabata's remains to be transported to East London airport via Johannesburg for burial at Lesseyton, near his birthplace at Bailey. A condition was stipulated that the body had to be "embalmed and placed in a hermetically sealed metal container, all enclosed in a wooden coffin". The mortal remains also had to be pronounced "free of any contagious diseases" and a Health Clearance Certificate obtained from the South African Trade Mission.<sup>149</sup>

Tabata's youngest brother Max made his way to Harare to accompany the body back to the Eastern Cape. However, its transfer to South Africa and funeral arrangements were delayed while Jane Gool and other exiled UMSA members battled to secure indemnity from the South African state in order to enter the country to bury their president. The denial of indemnity would have meant that Tabata would be laid to rest in Harare.<sup>150</sup> Ten days after Tabata's death, a memorial meeting was convened in the garden of the Tabata-Gool home as his body lay in state inside. In spite of having become the New Unity Movement spokesperson in Harare, Alie Fataar officiated as obituary speeches were made inter alia by Norman Traub, Leonard Nikane, and Max Tabata on behalf of

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sister-in-law for providing me with copies of medical and legal documents in respect of Tabata's death and the transfer to South Africa of his body.

<sup>148</sup> Even though Fataar had left the organisation and become the Harare spokesperson for the New Unity Movement, he and Ursula, who lived nearby, didn't break a personal connection with Tabata and Gool (Alie Fataar, Address to the Memorial Meeting for Jane Gool in Cape Town, 18 May 1996, notes in author's possession). Jane Gool died in Cape Town on 6 May 1996.

<sup>149</sup> Fax from Amina Hughes (Deputy Minister of Transport, Zimbabwe) to Mrs Bekker, Department of National Health and Population Development, South Africa, 19 October 1990; Fax from G van der Wateren, Department of National Health and Population Development to Amina Hughes, 19 October 1990; Ronald C Petzer (Embalmer and Manager, Funeral and Cremation Services), Certification of Embalming and Placement in Coffin: I.B. Tabata, 22 October 1990 (all author's possession, courtesy Sarah Magdalene Tabata); Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Sarah Magdalene Tabata, Lesseyton, 12 July 1995, assisted by Ayanda Bashe. Sarah Magdalene Tabata was the widow of an elder Tabata brother, Puller.

<sup>150</sup> Musa Ndwandwe, 'Tabata's widow in bid to bury husband at home, *South*, 18-24 October 1990; Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Sarah Magdalene Tabata, Lesseyton, 12 July 1995, assisted by Ayanda Bashe.

the movement and the family, by T.M. Ntantala on behalf of the PAC, as well as by radical intellectuals in Harare.<sup>151</sup> The event seemed to have a strange hybrid quality of ceremony and modesty, borne out of a mix of partial presidential protocols and an exiled liberation movement structure in deep decline. Soon after all bureaucratic impediments had been cleared, Max Tabata flew to East London with his brother's body and arrangements began for I.B. Tabata's funeral.

I.B. Tabata's funeral took place in Lesseyton, near Queenstown on Saturday 27 October 1990. Having been granted indemnity, Jane Gool arrived from Harare, while UMSA executive members, Norman Traub, Ronnie Britten and Leonard Nikane came from Britain and Sweden. Former Vice President, Wycliffe Tsotsi came from Maseru with his wife Blanche to speak on behalf of the Tabata family. Michael Muskett, Dora Taylor's son in law, came from England. Officials and members of UMSA, APDUSA and APDYM made their way from Cape Town and other places by car and in a specially hired bus. Many wore T-shirts exclaiming APDUSA's slogans: "We build a nation" and "Land and Liberty". An old, bright yellow and red marquee with a makeshift podium was put up a short distance away from Sarah Magdalene Tabata's home as the site of the funeral proceedings. A procession of about 300 mourners walked the short distance of dirt road through the impoverished village behind the pallbearers and coffin to the marquee to begin the funeral ceremony underneath the hills of Lesseyton. It was a hot afternoon, and those who could not fit under the marquee shielded themselves with umbrellas.<sup>152</sup>

The funeral programme (Figure 11) set out the proceedings of the ceremony, which included tributes and speeches by Nikane (Vice President, UMSA), Tsotsi (for the family); A.K. Tom (Vice President, APDUSA), Bobby Wilcox, Norman Traub and Ronnie

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<sup>151</sup> I am indebted to Jane Gool for giving me copies of a few photographs of the Harare Memorial Meeting for I.B. Tabata. One of the Zimbabwean intellectuals who spoke at the meeting was Ibbo Mandaza, then director of the SAPES Trust, a radical forum of research and publishing in Southern African political economy.

<sup>152</sup> I am grateful to Jane Gool for letting me have copies of a series of photographs of I.B. Tabata's funeral, which had been taken by UMSA photographer, Roger Galant. I have drawn upon these photographs to describe the unfolding rituals of the funeral ceremony.



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Britten (UMSA executive members) and F Julie for APDYM. Before the word of thanks and the funeral procession down to the graveside, songs associated with socialist activism and memorialism would be sung. The lyrics of 'The Red Flag' and 'The Internationale' were circulated, as were the words of a lament that would be sung to music of the New World Symphony. Indeed, the funeral programme looked much like an open-air, secular political meeting, which was an appropriate commemorative form for a socialist political leader. The printed programme also had a suitable photograph on its front cover, which was the same as the image that had been used on the biographic back cover of his last book. Tabata's presidential portrait had become a memorial image.<sup>153</sup>

On the podium, after emphasising that it was his remains that would be buried and "not his spirit, not his example", Leonard Nikane linked the trajectory of Tabata's political development in Cape Town to a history of his and his comrades' efforts "to put the struggle of the oppressed on its proper course". Tabata had left a "tradition" and "example" of "a revolutionary road which he carved out" for South Africa's people. Wycliffe Tsotsi began with his earliest impressions of Tabata as a student at Lovedale and Fort Hare, and went on to discuss Tabata's political work in AAC and the Unity Movement after he had come into contact with Goolam and Jane Gool in Cape Town. Tsotsi also related his memories of Tabata's eloquence in his public addresses, and referred to his use of metaphor to explain political relations. Tabata had referred, for example, to domesticated dogs, which had been called upon to shake off their 'slave mentality' and "return to the forest to live in peace". He had also described the AAC as "a big blanket which covered ... the oppressed of South Africa". Tabata had been "a master of the art of talking to the people". He had left "a rich legacy in terms of liberatory ideas". In mourning his death, Tsotsi also expressed the Tabata family's pride

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<sup>153</sup> Funeral Programme: Isaac Bangani Tabata, 27 October 1990 (flyer), author's possession. The same photographic image was used on the back cover of *Apartheid: Cosmetics Exposed*, a selection of Tabata's speeches and writings which Norman Traub put together.



in “his contribution” to the liberation movement. We will miss “his warm handshake and even the whiplash of his tongue”.<sup>154</sup>

From the funeral podium, Nikane and other speakers devoted a substantial amount of energy to denouncing the New Unity Movement, who represented those who “fell by the way side [and] left the organisation”. Nikane argued that while they “pretended not to have left”, there was “only one Unity Movement”, UMSA of which Tabata had been founder and president. This was the only Unity Movement, “founded by the original people of whom Jane Gool ... [was] one”. Those who had formed the New Unity Movement were “renegades” who had “departed from the history of this organisation”.<sup>155</sup> The setting of Tabata’s funeral ceremony became a political meeting at which attempts were made to reassert weakening organisational bonds through Tabata’s biography and through attacks on the New Unity Movement, whose creation had threatened UMSA’s very existence. It was important for UMSA to attempt to assert some authority over the process of defining Tabata’s passage into memory. And the New Unity Movement’s formation and existence was seen as a disrespectful affront to Tabata’s legacy and memory. A few weeks later, the fragile structures of UMSA held a follow-up public memorial meeting in a Cape Town township, at which criticisms of the New Unity Movement were reasserted.<sup>156</sup>

These attacks did not stop the New Unity Movement affiliate, APDUSA Natal, from holding a Tabata memorial meeting of their own, and from attempting a new appraisal of Tabata’s career as an activist and author. This meeting took place in a Durban township a year after Tabata’s death, and marked an attempt to claim Tabata’s memory as part of the political foundations of the New Unity Movement. The David Landau Centre in Asherville where the meeting took place was bedecked with large portraits of

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<sup>154</sup> Recording and Transcript of part of the funeral ceremony of I.B. Tabata, Lesseyton, 27 October 1990 (one cassette), author’s possession. This recording was made by Selim Gool. I am grateful to him for letting me have a copy.

<sup>155</sup> Recording and Transcript of part of the funeral ceremony of I.B. Tabata, Lesseyton, 27 October 1990 (one cassette), author’s possession.

<sup>156</sup> Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA) issued a memorial pamphlet at the meeting, ‘I.B. Tabata’, (Eikefontein, October 1990). The memorial meeting itself took place in Bishop Lavis.

Tabata and “magnified front covers of his more important works”. The meeting took the form of a public lecture by L Rajah, which sought to pay Tabata a “high tribute” as “an expression of ... appreciation and gratitude for [his] tremendous influence”. The biographic lecture was immediately published by APDUSA (Natal) as the New Unity Movement’s special tribute to Tabata.<sup>157</sup>

Rajah had undertaken the “difficult task” of rereading Tabata’s “major works”,<sup>158</sup> from which he

extract[ed] passages which ... dazzled with their clarity and depth of thought, crispness of formulation, total absence of ambiguity, vastness of breadth and vision and ... great relevance to ... current political events....<sup>159</sup>

Those in the New Unity Movement, Rajah argued, stood tall “precisely because [they stood] on the shoulders of political giants of the calibre and stature of I.B. Tabata”. In claiming him as a political ancestor of the New Unity Movement, Rajah asserted that “at no stage did Tabata ever present his ideas as his personal property – patented and copyright”. “Such an approach” was “anathema to him”.<sup>160</sup> At the meeting, “the atmosphere” had been “one of triumph rather than dejection or mourning”. While Tabata’s funeral had been “abused by his epigones” and “official followers”, who “chose to level attacks” on the New Unity Movement, Rajah’s tribute had been “prepared with due dignity and decorum”, “paid in humility and admiration for a great revolutionary, leader and teacher”.<sup>161</sup> It was the NUM, this suggested, who were more deserving of Tabata as an ancestor.

This political dispute between UMSA and the NUM over the political legacy of I.B. Tabata was not the only biographic contest that reared its head in the wake of his death.

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<sup>157</sup> *APDUSA Views*, October 1991 (Special Issue: A Tribute to I.B. Tabata), Foreword. I would like to thank R.O. Dudley for giving me a copy of this publication.

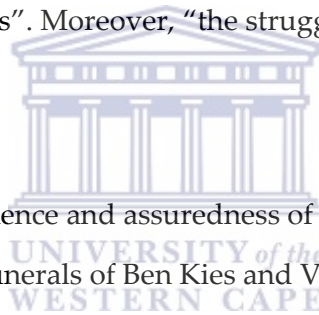
<sup>158</sup> *APDUSA Views*, October 1991 (Special Issue: A Tribute to I.B. Tabata), Foreword.

<sup>159</sup> *APDUSA Views*, October 1991 (Special Issue: A Tribute to I.B. Tabata), Foreword.

<sup>160</sup> *APDUSA Views*, October 1991 (Special Issue: A Tribute to I.B. Tabata), p 17.

<sup>161</sup> *APDUSA Views*, October 1991 (Special Issue: A Tribute to I.B. Tabata), Foreword.

Almost unexpectedly, at his funeral in October 1990, a Christian, religious element made itself felt alongside the socialist and the secular political. After clergy in the Queenstown area had expressed their reluctance to officiate due to Tabata's political profile, two ministers came in from Port Elizabeth. While Tabata's body was with the Queenstown undertakers, services and prayers had been held every evening for the whole week leading up to the funeral. It was the ministers who opened the funeral proceedings with a prayer, after which hymns were sung. Then "the political side" started with speeches and songs. Most of the mourners were local Lesseyton members of the church. "When all that was finished, the religion took over". When the time had come for the procession to the cemetery, the proceedings were conducted through religious ritual. For Sarah Magdalene Tabata, there was no contradiction in this. Her late brother-in-law had been brought up in a religious home. He may have declared as a young person that he was "going forth to fight for [his] people". But it was very important that the home "support[ed] him with prayers". Moreover, "the struggle ha[d] a lot to do with religion".<sup>162</sup>



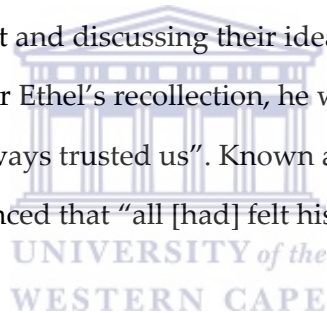
But in some ways, the prominence and assuredness of the religious at I.B. Tabata's funeral was surprising. The funerals of Ben Kies and Victor Wessels in Cape Town in the 1970s had been strictly secular and political, in keeping with the atheism of the deceased. The same had been the case with Leo Sihlali whose funeral took place in the Mount Frere Municipal Hall, since no church was available and a local priest had refused to officiate. It was suggested that this absence of religious funerary mediation was appropriate for Sihlali, who had been "an unrepentant Marxist and an uncompromising revolutionary". Also, Tabata's entry into the socialist movement in the 1930s in Cape Town had been expressly bound up with a turn away from religion and the concept of God. Both Cadoc Kobus, who had also joined the WPSA, and Ernest Mancoba, who had spent time with Tabata in Cape Town in the 1930s, and who had sold copies of the

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<sup>162</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Sarah Magdalene Tabata, Lesseyton, 12 July 1995, assisted by Ayanda Bashe.

WPSA's newspaper, *The Spark*, spoke of the philosophical centrality of Tabata's shift away from Christianity and God in his early political life.<sup>163</sup>

In other ways, however, the assertion of the religious was not inappropriate because it enabled a reconnection with an early period in Tabata's life, when he had come under the guidance and patronage of an Anglican priest, Bishop W.E. Smyth. Smyth had been the warden of the Anglican Hostel at Fort Hare Native College, where Tabata was in the matriculation class from 1930 to 1932. Smyth's two sisters had come to live with him, and one had died while he was still warden. At Fort Hare, the key idea behind the Anglican Hostel had been of the warden "being in much closer touch with the students". Smyth had "shared the life of his students as a father with his family" in what was little more than a rented bungalow. He slept and worked in the same room with them. Smyth took his students such as Tabata, Kobus, Mancoba and A.C. Jordan for long walks over weekends, "drawing them out and discussing their ideas", and also asked students to join him for meals. In his sister Ethel's recollection, he was "always accessible to any man at any minute and he always trusted us". Known as 'Bawo' or 'Father' to his students, his sister was convinced that "all [had] felt his fatherhood".<sup>164</sup>



All students were obliged to attend Hostel prayers on weekday evenings, and a Sunday bible class, in addition to their Sunday morning service. The Anglican Hostel also had a choir and an American organ, and there were regular music and choir practices conducted with the assistance of Miss E Robertson from Alice. In c.1930, Tabata was photographed in altar robes along with other altar servers, Smyth and Robertson by

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<sup>163</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Cadoc Kobus, Qumbu, 19-20 July 1993; Interview with Ernest Mancoba, Cape Town, 25 April 1995, assisted by Wonga Mancoba. See also Chapter Seven, footnote 45. Tabata, Kobus and Mancoba lived together in the Anglican Hostel at Fort Hare in 1932.

<sup>164</sup> Lists of Students in the Anglican Hostel, 1930-1932, Cory Library For Historical Research, PR 3295; 'First Report of the Native Church Hostel at Fort Hare, South Africa and the Fellowship of Prayer and Alms', Cory Library For Historical Research, PR 3364; Rev. F.H. Brabant, D.D., 'Beda Hall, 1920-1952'; Bishop Ferguson-Davie, 'Fort Hare: Early Days of the Anglican Hostel', Cory Library, Rhodes University, PR 3025; Ethel Smyth to Archdeacon Rolfe, 12 September 1948, Cory Library, Rhodes University, PR 3145/A. It is quite likely that this is where Tabata encountered Marxist and radical literature for the first time. On Bishop Smyth and Fort Hare more generally, see Z.K. Matthews, *Freedom for My People* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1981), Chapter Four.



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Alice photographer, Harry Bennett (Figure 12). Smyth was also a great collector of books and had an account at Heffers in Cambridge. Before he left Fort Hare in 1932, he had assembled a library of some 4000 books, which he left for the use of the Hostel.

To his wards, Smyth had imparted a spirit of social service. “If you want a thing done, start doing it yourself” was a principle by which he lived.<sup>165</sup> In his oration given at Dora Taylor’s funeral, Tabata had cited Smyth as the first significant influence on his life, as his first mentor and patron. Indeed, it seems that Tabata’s models for paternalism and patronage, mentorship and person formation may have come from the domain of religion. Smyth had been for him “an example of what a man should be and how a human being should live”. From Smyth he had learnt how important it was to “live according to your own ideas”. All other things did not matter “provided you [made] a contribution to mankind”.<sup>166</sup> If the Christianity that made itself felt at his own funeral had been like that of Bishop Smyth’s standpoint of social service, then it is likely that this did not sit oddly with Tabata’s own history of person formation. It is also possible to argue that we need not make too sharp a distinction between the secular and the religious. The secular teachings of the Unity Movement about the ‘new road’ had an ironic religiosity about them, of conversion and commitment, of truth and morality, and of assembly and order. Indeed, the ‘new road’ was even referred to as a ‘gospel’ that was able to capture people’s imagination, and give rise to a ‘baptism of fire’.<sup>167</sup>

The point must also be made that the Christianity that made itself felt at Tabata’s funeral was not just any kind. It was a very specific indigenous expression in the form of the Order of Ethiopia, whose origins lay in anti-colonial assertions of Africanness and a turn away from the missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century. The mourning rituals of the Order of Ethiopia were the symbolic language by which the Tabata family and the

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<sup>165</sup> Letter from the Director, Heffer & Sons Ltd to Bishop Ferguson Davie, Anglican Hostel, Fort Hare, c. 1934, Cory Library, Rhodes University, PR 3145; Rev. F.H. Brabant, D.D., ‘Beda Hall, 1920-1952’; Bishop Ferguson-Davie, ‘Fort Hare: Early Days of the Anglican Hostel’, Cory Library, Rhodes University, PR 3025; ‘First Report of the Native Church Hostel at Fort Hare, South Africa and the Fellowship of Prayer and Alms’, Cory Library For Historical Research, PR 3364.

<sup>166</sup> I.B. Tabata, Oration at Dora Taylor’s Memorial Service, c.1976 (copy in the author’s possession).

<sup>167</sup> Leo Sihlali to I.B. Tabata, 6 August 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925



community of Lesseyton interred one of their own into the soil on their own terms. The Tabata family had been among the earliest families in the Order at its formation in 1900 along with the Makambis, the Matsolos and the Malotanas. The Order had insisted on the creation of “a pure African church”, and Tabata’s father, Stephen, provided support for the St Lukes Mission Church on the Toisekraal farm at Bailey, where the Order congregated. Indeed, Tabata had been born into a religious family, and was educated at the St Lukes Mission School before he left for Lovedale in 1923.<sup>168</sup>

The Tabata family’s prominence in the emergence and religious life of the Order of Ethiopia was one element of their long presence in the Bailey area of the Eastern Cape. This presence went back to Stephen’s grandfather, Xuma, who had been “given land by a Tembu chief ... before the missionaries came”. The farm, which became known as ‘Xuma’, got subdivided and a portion had been given to Xuma’s son, Bangani, after whom his grandson, Isaac Bangani, was named. Tabata’s father, Stephen inherited the land from his father Bangani, and ran it as a prosperous sheep farm, with horses and cattle and some wheat and maize. The family lived in the farmhouse in the shadows of a row of pepper trees at the top of the hill, and were cared for by Tabata’s mother Amy, who had trained as a “lady teacher” and who was a very religious woman. After Stephen’s death in 1929, the farm had been taken over by Tabata’s eldest brother, George, who seemingly got into serious financial difficulty through overcapitalisation, when he had acquired an expensive truck. The farm was eventually taken over by the Native Land Trust in about 1960, and the Tabata family “were transferred” to nearby Lesseyton, a village-township whose origins lay in a settlement established in the nineteenth century for demobilised African soldiers loyal to the British.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Sarah Magdalene Tabata, Lesseyton, 12 July 1995, assisted by Ayanda Bashe; Lovedale Missionary Institute Enrolment List, 1841-1928, Cory Library, Rhodes University, MS 16299. For a discussion of the history of the Order of Ethiopia, see Bengt G.M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp 13-42.

<sup>169</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Sarah Magdalene Tabata, Lesseyton, 12 July 1995, assisted by Ayanda Bashe; Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Stanley Breetzke, Bailey, 11 July 1995, assisted by Ayanda Bashe. Breetzke was Tabata’s contemporary and grew up on the neighbouring farm.

After the residents of Lesseyton had fought against incorporation into the Transkei Bantustan in the 1980s, what was left of the Tabata farm, the remains of 'Xuma' had become completely run down by the 1990s. The farmhouse had been reduced to rubble and little more than the ruins of its foundations were visible, amid a desperately poor informal settlement. In spite of the declining Bailey fortunes of the Tabata family and its gradual dispersal, their long presence in the Bailey-Lesseyton area was attested to by the fact that the local river was officially known as the Tabata River and that the area itself had become known colloquially as 'KwaTabata'. The Tabata family graveyard at the foot of Lesseyton village where Tabata was laid to rest was part of this landscape marked by the Tabata family's past and an agricultural history of prosperity and decline, and of removal and rural impoverishment. The family's membership of the Order of Ethiopia was part of this history.

The tensions that emerged at the funeral between the political and the religious did not take the form of open struggles. Instead, it can be argued that the Order's prominence in the Tabata funeral proceedings and the entry of Christian codes as a means of remembering Tabata and marking his life and death were a measure of the extent of UMSA's organisational weakness. At the funeral, UMSA did not have the strength to contain the narrative boundaries of Tabata's biography. In 1995, Tabata's grave was given a monumental gravestone after a ceremony that had been marked by the same ambiguities - of secularism and religiosity, and politics and Christianity - as the funeral itself. The gravestone proclaimed to the public that Tabata had been "a great politician, president of the Unity Movement of South Africa and a great man". But this was no heroes' acre. No matter how strongly the gravestone tried to declare and fix a representation of I.B. Tabata's public greatness, his remains ultimately lay in an unassuming family cemetery alongside the graves of his brothers and sisters and parents on what may have been an old road to nowhere.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> For a discussion of cemeteries as sites of public history and private mourning, see Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge, MS: MIT Press, 1995), pp 141-142.

The final entry of Tabata's body into the topography of the Eastern Cape signalled the fragility of presidentialist narrations of his biography and raised questions about the terms upon which Tabata's biography was to be understood. This fragility was reproduced as marginality in the APDUSA office in Salt River in 2002. At the same time, these questions were addressed in archives and museums as I.B. Tabata entered the realm of memory. The collection that passed into the archives of UCT and Fort Hare represented a final effort on the part of Tabata's supporters to ensure his entry into the official institutions of history and heritage. Ironically that very collection was not able to contain the histories of its own creation and mediation, and the extent to which it has been possible to understand the politics and relations of knowledge in the production of Isaac Bangani Tabata.

Dora Taylor may have sacrificed her own literary work in the service of Tabata's political biography. However, her mediations ensured that the Tabata collection represented a biography of *their* relationship of politics, culture and intimacy, and that it was not possible to understand Tabata's life adequately without considering their long relationship. In placing Tabata's image alongside Taylor's, the District Six Museum has chosen to reflect upon I.B. Tabata's life history in ways that seek to transcend linear, masculinist conventions of narration and realist frameworks of recovery. It has shown through a focus on biographical relations that political lives can indeed be understood as productions.

## POSTSCRIPT

### BIOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION AND HISTORICAL PRACTICE

In the first ten years of democracy in South Africa, for a number of scholars, the terrain of historical practice has undergone a number of important shifts. While some historians have held on to firm ideas of knowledge hierarchies between the domains of history and heritage, and notions of heritage as inferior,<sup>1</sup> significant processes of historical production and contestation have occurred in various sites and institutions outside the academy. In spite of the unwillingness of some historians to enter the domain of heritage, with its “tainting atmosphere”,<sup>2</sup> a number of scholars have embraced these transformations and have sought to extend their historical practice into a range of sites and institutions as the field of public history became more layered and multifarious. In some cases, this took place on the basis of historians’ academic and disciplinary ‘expertise’ as researchers and educators. But in many instances, academics who had entered the domain of public history found that they had to relinquish any notion of academics as experts, as museums and heritage bodies cultivated spaces of critical public scholarship and research excellence in their own terms.<sup>3</sup>

I myself was drawn into a range of exciting and challenging institutions of public history in a number of ways: as expert, policy maker, advisor and public scholar. I was appointed by the Cabinet of the South African government to the Council of SAHRA when it came into existence in 2000 as the official national heritage body which developed policies and standards for conserving the ‘national estate’, comprising

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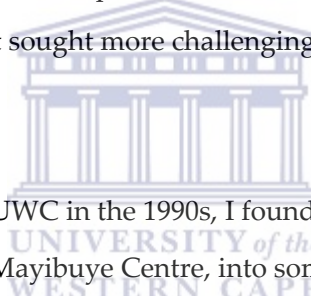
<sup>1</sup> See for example Jane Carruthers, ‘Heritage and History’.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Witz and Ciraj Rassool, ‘The Dog, the Rabbit and the Reluctant Historians’, *South African Historical Journal*, No. 27, November 1992.

<sup>3</sup> See my discussion of these relations and tensions in ‘Community museums, memory politics and social transformation’.

heritage sites and collections. I was also invited to serve on the board of an independent archival NGO, the South African History Archive, which had its roots in an independent liberation archive in Zimbabwe in the 1980s. I also became a member of the Board of SAHO, which sought to develop online heritage resources in the history of liberation and in political biography, including a wall of remembrance.

Most significantly, in 1995, I was invited to become a trustee of the District Six Museum, which developed as an independent site of public scholarship, a hybrid space of research, representation and pedagogy, through which relations of knowledge and varied kinds of intellectual and cultural practice were brokered and mediated between different sites, institutions and sociological domains. As an instance of such knowledge transactions, in 1999 and 2000, I participated in a team of curators, artists and researchers that created the new permanent exhibition, *Digging Deeper*, a much more reflexive exhibition that sought more challenging ways of representing District Six's pasts.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape is centered in the background of the text. It features a classical building facade with six columns and a pediment, rendered in a light blue color. Below the building, the text "UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE" is written in a serif font, with "UNIVERSITY of the" in a smaller size above "WESTERN CAPE".

In addition, as a historian at UWC in the 1990s, I found myself drawn into various projects and activities of the Mayibuye Centre, into some of the discussions and strategies in the mid-1990s that led to the formulation of the proposal to turn Robben Island into a national museum, and into the policy discussions that led to the granting of the collections of the Mayibuye Centre to the Robben Island Museum on long loan. In the later 1990s and early 2000s, I was also drawn into some of the formal operations of the Robben Island Museum, as a member of the Working Committee comprising RIM and UWC staff that managed operational aspects and project work of the renamed UWC RIM Mayibuye Archive. I also acted as occasional advisor to its Heritage and Education Departments, and worked with RIM staff in an educational partnership that UWC had developed with them and UCT on a programme in Museum and Heritage Studies.

Beyond these specific instances, more generally my historical practice as an academic and public intellectual has found expression through a range of publications, and conference and workshop presentations in a range of forums,<sup>4</sup> and in ongoing networking that has occurred across a range of academic and public institutions in the pursuit of the construction of an enabling, critical public sphere. These forums have drawn academics, museum and heritage professionals and an emerging layer of heritage activists into ongoing discussions and debates on a range of issues, from the cultural politics of national heritage, the possibilities and limits of museum transformation, the enabling and limiting consequences of heritage transformation through the efforts of consultants, and the prospects and challenges of building community museums.<sup>5</sup>

Since the 1990s, I found myself as a participant in the policy making, heritage producing and aesthetic work of a range of heritage institutions and museums that enabled me to have a special vantage point in the interstitial spaces between the academy and the public domain, from which to view a range of transformations and knowledge transactions in public culture. The opportunities to work in these public history spaces constituted a significant influence on the theoretical and methodological shape of this dissertation. One aspect of this work involved thinking about the cultural politics of the resistance biography and life history work that had emerged in the public domain. Indeed, as will be seen, far from being merely a researcher who has

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<sup>4</sup> I have presented papers either individually or jointly with my colleagues in workshops, forums and conferences convened by the Mayibuye Centre, the South African Museums Association, the South African Museum the McGregor Museum, BLAC as well as through initiatives in heritage networking and training such as the South African National Cultural Heritage Training Programme convened under the auspices of Michigan State University. A special forum on memory, convened in Cape Town by Bogumil Jewsiewicki of Université Laval (Quebec) in 2000 enabled South African academics and public scholars to engage with each other and with scholars from elsewhere in Africa and other parts of the world. I have cited a sample of these papers in the bibliography of this dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> The networks that have emerged from these engagements have not been insignificant, and in the early 2000s, were most productively forged around a collaborative exchange programme in the Institutions of Public Culture, facilitated by the Center for the Study of Public Scholarship at Emory University.



discovered heritage constructions of life histories after their production, I have at times and to varying degrees participated in the processes of their construction and initial reception.

This occurred in at least four ways. At Robben Island, discussions I held with the curators of the *Cell Stories* exhibition at the end of 1999 led to me being asked to write a strategic review of the exhibition for publication. At the Nelson Mandela Museum in 2000, I was asked to intervene as a SAHRA Councillor on aspects of the management of the site of Nelson Mandela's birth at Mvezo, which had been a cause for concern. At UCT, I was asked to assist with the guest list for a special ceremony to name a university square after black woman resistance leader, Cissie Gool. Finally at the District Six Museum, I took part in discussions that influenced some of the depictions of political biography in *Digging Deeper* through portraiture and the design of exhibition panels.

At Robben Island in 1999, as *Cell Stories* was being prepared, I had the opportunity to hold discussions with curators Ashwell Adriaan and Roger Meintjes about the ideas that informed their research and exhibitionary strategies. In a fruitful exchange it had emerged that strong calls had been made inside RIM and among ex-political prisoners for a broader focus on political imprisonment, and not merely on the prison experience of political leadership in B Section. RIM had initiated a research project which was also a collecting project of prisoner artifacts and life histories. In a review article commissioned by the curators, which was published in the *Mail and Guardian*, I wrote about the exhibition and project as a whole, arguing that it represented a significant intervention in the cultural economy of Robben Island, marking a departure from hegemonic heritage interpretations and posing challenges for the narratives of political imprisonment which the Museum constructed. I have restated these arguments about *Cell Stories* in Chapter Four.

Soon after this was published, Noel Solani, then a researcher at RIM who worked on the prison memory project, took issue with my analysis at a Cape Town conference, with good reason. According to Solani, I had overstated the significance of *Cell Stories* and the extent to which it represented an interpretive departure. Solani's argument was that in spite of its imaginative and challenging nature, *Cell Stories* remained firmly located within "a national project of reconciliation". "Visually and textually", the exhibition displayed "people's achievements while they were in prison without really problematising the contradictions and difficulties in which people achieved these". It celebrated those "who succeeded while silencing the memory of hundreds [who did not]". Indeed, Solani suggested, *Cell Stories* was no departure from the hegemonic narrative of the 'triumph of the human spirit over adversity'.<sup>6</sup> Solani's concerns had previously been expressed to me by former political prisoner, Vusi Nkumane, who had complained that heritage interpretation at Robben Island contained no 'blood'.

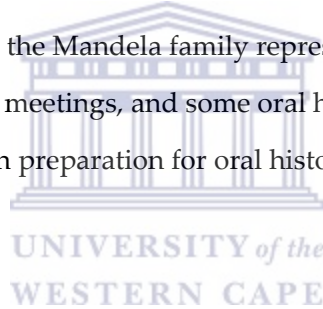
In the conference exchange that followed, and in subsequent discussions, I have expressed my agreement with Solani's argument, but argued that in the context of RIM, where the Mandela experience had been so prominent, *Cell Stories* needed strategic support in order to contribute to opening up wider possibilities for critical debate over the meanings of political imprisonment. The work of the prison memories project more generally took some focus away from the tours department, whose work of site interpretation with former political prisoners, seemed to place emphasis on B Section and the lime quarry, associated with the prison experience of political leaders. The contestation over the meaning of political imprisonment also opened up space for questioning national heritage frameworks that had turned Mandela's biography into the national story. This exchange with my erstwhile student, who had gone on to be a museum researcher and public scholar in a national museum, showed how it was possible to stimulate critical debate and spaces of engagement in institutions of

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<sup>6</sup> Noel Solani, 'Representation of ex-prisoner memories at Robben Island Museum', paper presented to the international conference, Memory and History: Remembering, Forgetting and Forgiving in the life of the Nation and the Community, Cape Town, 9-11 August 2000.

national heritage, even when those exchanges expressed criticism of dominant heritage interpretations.

On a three or four occasions in 2000, soon after I had been appointed to SAHRA's Council, I found myself summoned to the Umtata and Mvezo sites of the Nelson Mandela Museum along with Mandela biographic researcher and my fellow councillor, Luli Callinicos, in order to prevent the seeming destruction of part of the material remains of the homestead where Mandela had been born. The museum was in its initial stages of development, an exhibition had just been installed by a curatorial consultancy at the Bhunga building in Umtata, and the Mandela gifts had been put on display. In this start-up phase, considerable emphasis was being placed by the project manager and DACST on infrastructural development that needed to be completed within rigid budget cycles. The Museum Council had begun to meet and to acquaint itself with its responsibilities, the Mandela family representatives on the Council had not been able to attend many meetings, and some oral history training was happening with volunteers from Qunu in preparation for oral history research on Mandela's childhood in Qunu.<sup>7</sup>



In this uncertain setting, plans began to be executed to create a raised walkway across the centre of the Mvezo homestead, and in the process, the project manager had authorised holes to be dug through the homestead in preparation for building the

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<sup>7</sup> As was our practice, Luli Callinicos and I used the opportunity to talk about the progress of the various heritage projects we were working with. These discussions followed on from the exchanges we once had on national television about biographies of leaders and history from below (see Chapter Three). Some of our discussions were about Nelson Mandela's visits to District Six in the late 1940s, and more generally about the progress of her manuscript on the Mandela trail, as well as her study of Oliver Tambo's life. Among the issues we discussed was her research on the decision by Oliver Tambo and the ANC in the mid-1960s to 'build up' Mandela as a figurehead to galvanise anti-apartheid solidarity work. It also seemed that in the preparation of her Mandela manuscript for publication, some material needed to be cut, and that her valuable section on Mandela's "growing reputation" was being considered as a sacrificial possibility. I would like to think that the urgings I made on the importance of this section contributed in some small measure to its retention in the book (See Luli Callinicos, *The World that Made Mandela*). Later, the book had its Cape Town launch in the District Six Museum, at which I was asked to be the host on behalf of the Museum to introduce Albie Sachs, who was the main speaker.

raised walkway that was planned to traverse the cultural landscape of Mandela's birth. This was deemed to have constituted a serious and unauthorised physical intrusion Mandela's Mvezo birth site. As the project manager attempted to defend the excavations, Callinicos and I gave our support to the SAHRA CEO to put a stop to the walkway construction, and to hold meetings with the Museum council on alternative plans for infrastructure development at Mvezo.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, just as I had been conducting research on how Mandela's biography was being translated into the domain of national heritage, I found myself called upon to participate in resolving a dispute over an aspect of the management of a site associated with his biography.

Meanwhile, in Cape Town, I was asked by an administrator from the UCT "Naming of Buildings Committee" to assist in drawing up a guest list for a ceremony and luncheon to celebrate the naming of a square as the Cissie Gool Plaza after the Cape Town political leader and Communist Party member from the 1930s and 1940s, who had become known as Cape Town's 'Joan of Arc'. Gool's connection with the university was outlined in the invitation as "the first black South African woman to receive a Masters degree in psychology from a South African university" and as having gone on to acquire a UCT law degree before entering legal practice as "the only ... woman advocate in South Africa at that time".<sup>9</sup> Cissie Gool had been a focus of memory recovery at the university as graduate students conducted recovery research on her political career.<sup>10</sup>

I had been approached, I thought, because of my District Six Museum connections and because I was known to have done research on Cape Town's resistance history. In supplying the administrator with the requested guest list, I also chose to provide

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<sup>8</sup> This was where I met and briefly interviewed Nelson Mandela Museum Council Member, and one time Council Chair, Archie Nkonyana, who had been a member of SOYA in the 1950s, and whose political development had been strongly influenced at one time by I.B. Tabata.

<sup>9</sup> Invitation to attend naming ceremony of Cissie Gool Plaza, UCT 3 July 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Patricia van der Spuy wrote a doctoral dissertation, 'Not only "Dr Abdurahman's younger daughter"' from this research in 2002 and Gairoonisa Paleker produced a 52 minute documentary, *Cissie Gool*, as part of her Masters studies.

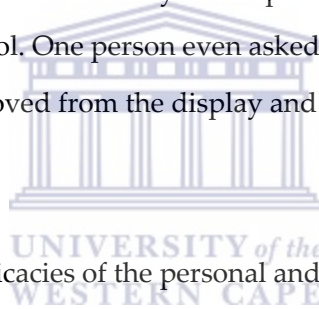
relevant information from my research. In my interviews with Cissie's sister-in-law, Jane Gool about her student years at the Native College of Fort Hare, she had explained that she and her sister Beida had insisted on going to Fort Hare after Cissie had complained of discrimination at UCT. I enquired whether there was any possibility that the planned plaza plaque might be able to explain this difficult past of Cissie Gool's connection with the university. In the end, it was the statistical fact of UCT's connection to a previously unacknowledged black woman leader that was the cause of heritage inscription and not any difficult past that the university may have wanted to turn its back on. In the end an opportunity for critical engagement with the possibilities for biographic inscription were passed over in favour of heritage celebration.

Finally, in my participation in the curatorial and research committee that created the *Digging Deeper* exhibition that opened in the District Six Museum in 2000, I contributed some of my research findings about I.B. Tabata's political career in Cape Town, while he had lived in the Stakesby Lewis Hostel, whose site was located two blocks away from the Museum's main building. I had donated copies of some of the photographs I had collected to the Museum, including the 1941 Anne Fischer image given to me by Jane Gool in the makeshift frame she had kept it in (Figure 6). While there was a methodological accord between the curatorial intent of the portrait gallery and my own emphases on more complex representation of life history, my research on the relationship between I.B. Tabata and Dora Taylor directly influenced one element of the design of a panel on resistance and cultural expression.

In working closely with one of the curators, Jos Thorne, I had explained my understanding of what their relationship had been, and how formative Taylor had been in Tabata's biographic formation. I also mentioned that it seemed there had been a deep, personal and emotional relationship that accompanied their political connection. Drawing on my research, here was an opportunity, it seemed, to depict lives and personages in more intricate ways, with attention to the intersections of their

political and personal lives and to processes of prior biographic mediation. There had to be possibilities in exhibitions of depicting lives as productions.

The curatorial consequence was that the Fischer image of Tabata that hung on transparent trevira cloth as part of a reconceptualised gallery of “translucent” portrait images, found its way on to the Resistance panel.<sup>11</sup> This time, the image was depicted in the makeshift frame in which the museum had acquired it to indicate that it was based on a photograph that had a biography. More critically, the image of Tabata had been deliberately placed adjacent to an image of Dora Taylor, as a means of indicating a biographic relationship. It was not long after the opening of *Digging Deeper* that this display was the cause of some controversy as some Museum visitors expressed their objection to this display positioning, and to the implication that Taylor had been Tabata’s ‘girlfriend’. Others wondered why this depiction seemed to coincide with the seeming omission of Jane Gool. One person even asked that the exhibition be changed, and that Dora Taylor be removed from the display and perhaps replaced by Jane Gool.<sup>12</sup>



In choosing to depict the intricacies of the personal and the political and to focus on biographical production in the case of Tabata and Taylor, the Museum had gone beyond mere celebration and documentation as the heritage impulse. Nevertheless, for some the Museum was seen as a hall of achievement for the recognition and celebration of political contributions, and not as a space of complex, difficult and even controversial representation. It was this approach to representation that enabled the Museum to move beyond the safe narratives of political and social history. There is no doubt that this display has caused hurt for some, and has even been seen as

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<sup>11</sup> See Jos Thorne’s discussion of the curatorial process of *Digging Deeper* in her M.Phil Thesis, ‘The Choreography of Display: Experiential Exhibitions in the Context of Museum Practice and Theory’, UCT, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Some of these objections, for example from Elma Carolissen, were addressed to me (Letter from Elma Carolissen-Essack to Ciraj Rassool, 31 July 2001). My aunt, Minnie Gool, Jane Gool’s sister, expressed her suspicions that I had been behind the depiction. Others who expressed their objections included former SOYA member, Gwen Wilcox.



disrespectful. And the fact that the evidence of Tabata and Taylor's relationship was to be found in the Tabata Collection did not make this past any less painful for some. There is no doubt that Tabata and Jane Gool had a long-term relationship, even if it was not a monogamous one. It also may be the case that one of the elements of Taylor's mediation of the Tabata archive was an occlusion of Jane Gool, to reduce her significance in his biographical narrative. Notwithstanding these possibilities, it seemed incontrovertible that it was Tabata's relationship with Taylor that was the most formative in his development. It seemed that it was not necessary to change the displays of I.B. Tabata in the District Six Museum.

As knowledge has circulated in the domains of public history that I been researching about biography and theory, and that I had been developing a biography of I.B. Tabata, a number of requests came my way. At the end of 2002, I was delighted to receive a phonecall from Thembeke Mufamadi, whom I had known in Cape Town in the early 1990s, and who had written biographical celebrations of the life of Raymond Mhlaba, the former Rivonia trialist and Robben Island prisoner. She informed me that she had been seconded by the HSRC to the Nelson Mandela Foundation to do research and assist Mandela in the writing of his 'presidential memoirs'. She asked for my assistance in locating theoretical writings on biography and life history.

I was also approached separately by Lesley Townsend of SAHRA and Luvuyo Dondolo, my former student who had become an independent heritage consultant, to consider working with them to map sites associated with the life of I.B. Tabata. Townsend had been spending considerable time in the Eastern Cape preparing conservation management plans for sites of significance "associated with the legacy of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela and the surrounding community".<sup>13</sup> She had also provided assistance to Luli Callinicos with the Mandela heritage trail project, and was familiar

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<sup>13</sup> See for example, 'Community-based conservation management plan for places of cultural significance within the Thembu region of the Transkei/Eastern Cape, which are associated with the legacy of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela and the surrounding community' (Prepared by Lesley Freedman Townsend for SAHRA, c.2003). Townsend's work also laid emphasis on the conservation of earth building.

with heritage trails and cultural landscapes as types of heritage resources. Dondolo on the other hand, had done some work in the District Six Museum in the late 1990s, and had written a critical study of the cultural politics of township tours in South Africa as part of his graduate work.<sup>14</sup> He was therefore quite familiar with the terrain of heritage routes and site identification. Significantly, Dondolo was from the Queenstown area of the Eastern Cape, and had even done some of his schooling in Lesseyton with Mr Mciteka, one of Tabata's followers. The Dondolo family had once been neighbouring farmers of the Tabatas in more prosperous times. It seemed appropriate that Dondolo be given the opportunity to find ways of attaching Tabata's life history to the landscape of the Eastern Cape.

Early in 2004, I received an email request from Omar Badsha, the director of South African History Online to discuss with him the possibility of utilising my Tabata research for use on the SAHO website. My study of Tabata would be incorporated into a "comprehensive ... people-driven process of rewriting our history". Not much had been written on "the influence of the Trotskyist movement on ... [the] liberation struggle" for a "popular audience". If I were to assist, "key information" about Tabata's life would be presented in popular form through a chronology, which would be utilised to "create links to key events, personalities, photographs, documents [and] extracts from his published work". The request ended with a plea to work together "to popularize the debates within the liberation movements".<sup>15</sup>

Far from Tabata's limited presence in the sites and institutions of memory that I had described in Chapter Five, it seemed as if there was a significant call for Tabata's political past and the narrative of his biography to be further institutionalised into the domain of heritage. Moreover, I was being asked to contribute my research to potential Tabata heritage initiatives. However, this dissertation is a study of Tabata that is not driven by documentary demands of recovery and chronological narrative. Instead,

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<sup>14</sup> Luvuyo Dondolo, 'The Construction of Public History and Tourist Destinations in Cape Town's Townships: A Study of Routes, Sites and Heritage', M.A. Mini-Thesis, UWC, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Email from Omar Badsha to Ciraj Rassool, 10 March 2004.

what I offer here is more than a study of Tabata's life. It presents an approach to biographic research and heritage work that poses questions about the conditions and relations through which biographic narratives came to be produced. Hopefully, it has opened up analytical spaces in the academy and institutions of public history for furthering biographic representation beyond modernism.



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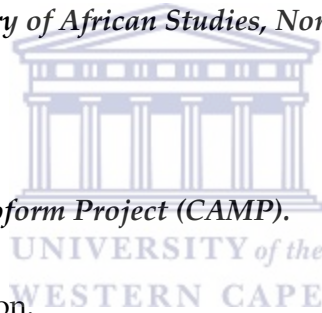
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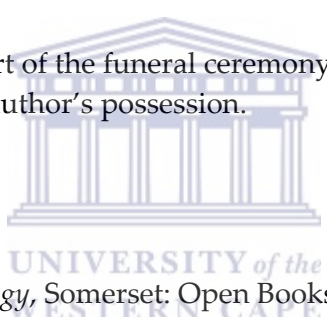
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## **11. DISSERTATIONS, THESES, SEMINAR AND CONFERENCE PAPERS, LECTURES, CONSERVATION PLANS, UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS AND NOTES**

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