

DIALECTIC OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE COLONISED:

THE CASE OF NON-WHITE UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA.

The institution of education in any society lends itself to a twofold function: a conservative and a progressive one. On the one hand, it can be viewed as a custodian of societal values, with the main aim of transmitting traditional values. As such, education constitutes a means through which ruling political goals and objectives are induced and a generation socialized into accepting dominant societal values. On the other hand, education also constitutes a threat to the traditional social order. The mere fact of literacy itself opens new vistas and hence alternatives to the existent order. People reflect on their situation and begin to look through the natural spell of their fate and realize that this is one created by their dominators. It can have the effect of challenging and questioning generally accepted values and lead to contemplation of alternatives and the means to achieve them.

Viewed against this background, a society such as South Africa's which is not legitimated by the majority of its population, and which relies on coercion rather than on consensus, appears all the more contradictory in extending higher education to its politically excluded majority. The past few years have indicated a definite acceleration in this programme. By the introduction of the Extension of University Education Act, 1959, the Government proposed to replace attendance of non-whites at "open" universities with ethnic-group institutions. The aim in doing this was gradually to prohibit white universities from accepting non-white students. The University College at Durban was established for Indians, the University of the Western Cape for Coloureds, the former University College of Fort Hare for Xhosa-speaking Africans, the University College of Zululand at Nqoye for the Zulu- and Swazi-speaking, and the University College of the North at Turfloop for the Sotho- Venda and Tsonga-speaking Africans. This involved considerable expenditure, especially since the explicit aim was to provide facilities equal in all respects to white institutions. (2) In 1960, the State spent £137 per white student.(3)

Ambiguity in the function of education and the possibility of being self-defeating for the system raises the question how the provision of such services can be reconciled with its long term political objectives. Is this extension of African university education, for example, on the part of a system often described as repressive, purely gratuitous? In addressing itself to this central question, this chapter will focus on the following related questions:

Why provide non-europeans Higher education at all?

How can this be reconciled with the system's interests?

To what extent is this successful?

And, finally, is there a dialectic of education in so far as inherent contradictions' necessity could bring about the very opposite of the intended consequences?

It would seem necessary to look first of all at the background of higher education facilities for non-whites, prior to Nationalist control of education. The four African-language universities had never accepted non-white students, while the English-speaking universities, such as Cape Town, Witwatersrand, and Natal, had. Until 1959, there was a certain amount of social segregation at the so-called open universities with regard to extra-curricular activities. At the University of Cape Town no university residences were available for non-whites. Segregation with regard to sporting activities was maintained either as a matter of definite university policy or at any rate in actual practice. At the open universities, meals were served in communal restaurants, but on the other hand non-whites were not admitted to university dances or to any other social occasions.

In 1948, after the National Party came into power, Malan, the then Prime Minister, made the following statement:

An intolerable state of affairs has arisen here in the past few years in our university institutions, a state of affairs which gives rise to friction, to an unpleasant relationship between European and Blacks we do not want to withhold higher education from the Blacks and we will take every possible step to give both the Africans and the coloured peoples university training as soon as we can, but in their own sphere - in other words in separate institutions.(4)

These indications were concretized in the Extension of University Act. If this was meant to be merely a way of further implementing Apartheid, then to all intents and purposes the "open" universities were already doing this.

The University of Natal, for instance, already had a Black section with separate student organisations, and virtually all activities were, in fact, separate. Furthermore this would be an inadequate explanation for the need to take over already segregated institutions such as Fort Hare. The existing facilities for Blacks could easily have been expanded, even under Apartheid conditions, at lesser costs than it involved to establish four new colleges,

What appeared then to be a progressive programme to extend Black Higher education and, above all, make the university colleges more accessible geographically, in fact, turned to the contrary, if the new ethnic admission policy is taken into consideration.

As has been pointed out by the former principal of Fort Hare, Prof. Z.K. Matthews:

"If a black university college is established in the Northern Transvaal, why should a Zulu student, resident within reach of that University College be refused admission to it? Or why should a Xhosa student resident on the FEEF be compelled, even with the aid of a bursary, to go to the so called Xhosa University College rather than to the one one which is nearer to him?(5)"

While in terms of a acquiring intellectual and academic expertise ethnic grouping is an irrelevant category, it was obviously an important aspect of the government's tribal fragmentation scheme. However, the real reason for the reorganisation of black higher education was stated by the Minister of Education in a parliamentary debate:

"Control by the Government was needed as it was necessary to prevent undesirable ideological development such as had disturbed the Black institutions not directly under the charge of the government and as the "Bantu Authorities" had not developed to take over this control."(6)

It becomes increasingly apparent then, that to provide black university education would seem the only way to ensure that its establishment, maintenance, management, and control lie in the right hands. Faced with already existing black education, the government was in no position to abandon the extension of higher educational opportunities, nor could it allow its continuation uncontrolled under the liberal influence of the "Open" English speaking universities. The best way out of his totalitarian dilemma was to take control of education and justify this by extending its scope, especially since African Education under these conditions would hardly seem to pose the threat that it had done previously. Furthermore, the provision buildings equipment, and sports facilities never before afforded blacks served important propaganda functions by demonstrating the government apparently sincere intentions both within South African and to the rest of the world. The large and constant flow of foreign visitors who are shown around university colleges as the embodiment of the government's sincerity indicate this, as do numerous publications on the subject by the South African information service.

In spite of the initial rejection of University apartheid by major sections of the black public, the recognition of their powerlessness through the non viability of realistic alternatives led to a tendency to resign themselves to viewing ethnic education as a force which would nevertheless lead to increased political opportunities, and, ultimately, liberation. Loe Kuper, in a perceptive satire on the newly-initiated idea of "tribal" universities, articulates this view point in a conversation between two students at such an imagined college:

"But there is no where else Zulus can get a university education. And now we must try to get educated as well as we can. We'll be of far more use educated, than as ignorant non-co-operators on a ten points programme.

You won't get education here, can you understand? The Herrenvolk has been sitting on our necks and they are not going to get off them now because Mr. "Scuse-me" can speak a literal latin. This college is not give education, is to take away education.(7)

The essential argument lies in the definition of education. From the Nationalist perspectives for education to serve the purpose of domination, the institutions must necessarily follow the model of the larger society. In this sense, the university is nothing more than a microscopic representation of Nationalist aspirations, ideals, values. Accordingly there is a hierarchical arrangement of teaching staff, mirror-social designations. The quality of education, especially methods of instruction, reflects as well as cements the surrounding racial structure.

After a decade of black colleges in existence, there are some discernible trends. In order to make black education compatible with Nationalist aspirations, it was inevitable that this had to be a special kind of education, most central theme of which is adjustment. Hence education is viewed essentially as part of a process of political socialization, encouraging adjustment of one's group's given position in the society. This theme of adjustment and the attempt to narrow the gap between expectations and reality has been expressed by the then Prime Minister, Verwoed, in the following statement:

My department's policy (that is, the Department of Native Affairs) is that education should stand with both feet in the reserves and have its roots in the spirit and being of Bantu society The basis of the provision and organisation of education in the Bantu community should, where possible, be the tribal organisation.

And in referring to African education in general:

There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour Until now, he had been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society, in which he was not allowed to graze (8)

Inevitably, not all aspects of various ethnic-group heritages were acceptable and reconcilable with Nationalist ideology; in fact, considerable selection is implicitly involved. (For example, in the University for Indians the concept of caste receives particular attention, in an attempt to show the supposed affinity between Indian and Afrikaner thought.) Public lectures viewing Kautilya as having preached obedience to the State above all else have been accorded high praise and held up as exemplary.)

The intended goal is thus secured through institutional restrictions and isolation, rather than through crude indoctrination, while the rules are essentially aimed at preventing the student from exposure to the "outside agitator". At the African Colleges, for example, there are rules to the effect that no student or group of student and no person or persons not under the jurisdiction of the university college, may be upon the college ground as visitors, or visit any hostel or any other building of the institution, without permission of the Rector or his duly authorised representative and then only under such condition as may be determined. All students are accordingly prohibited from becoming members of the National Union of Students. Within this context, student politics and political involvement, for instance the formation of a Student's Representative Council, has become so ferocious, due to restrictions and lack of autonomy, that students have decided to forgo any such opportunities for student organisation. At Fort Hare, for instance, for the eighth year in succession, students decided against having an S.R.C. for fear that members of such body would be forced to become government "stooges" or would be labelled as such. They feared victimization and police interrogation if students spoke out freely. (9)

Yet another instance of non-participation of students for political reasons occurred with the Debating Society of the University College for Indians. The Debating Society decided to disband "on principle" after it had been denied permission to invite Alan Paton, Den Ngubane, and Peter Bahr to address students. The comment made by the acting Rector, in support of the decision, was, "At this stage we don't feel it is appropriate for students to be subjected to these influences. (10) ... It is the policy of the College not to allow people who take an active part in politics to address students on the campus. (11)

The notion of discipline is highly stressed. Students are under constant pressure to dress "respectably"; that is, for men, jackets and ties must be worn at all times on the campus, regardless of the season or day's temperature. Lecturing staff have instructed to dismiss from classes students who appear in a lecture room without either of these items of dress. Although the lecturing staff seldom enforce these rules, it is always the white administration staff who take it upon themselves to harass students into conformity. The administration, being made up largely of ex-civil servant Afrikaners unable to clothe their prejudices as successfully as their counterparts in the academic sector, is often a source of embarrassment to those committed to making the black colleges workable in terms of Nationalist interests. In addition, a certain deference is required of students towards their teachers and of black lecturers towards their white counterparts, and there is a high premium attached to "knowing one's place" in the race hierarchy. Such discipline renders the student body more manageable and is functional for the system. (12)

By enforcing a senseless ritual, considerable control of its objects is secured.

An important feature of the African university colleges is their geographical isolation. They are all situated away from large cities in remote peaceful settings. In Turfloop and Nguye, their location in the middle of no where was chosen with great care, particularly with the Utopian aim of developing the academic location in a booming centre of the prospective homelands. The white lecturers proudly explain to the visitor the pseudo-tribal architecture of the university buildings, while the students in those places have no access even to a shop where they can buy a local newspaper. Location and intended perspectives would appear to be in harmony with each other. (This implicitly embodies the commonly held Nationalist belief that the African is a noble being in the rural context and that the city is a contaminating evil influence.) Hence inaccessibility constitutes a further limitation on the students' awareness through experience of what is going on in other parts of the country, and the falsely idyllic nature of black college contrast all the more sharply with the lot of Africans in the non university world. In fact, the filtering of certain kinds of information and exposure to limited exterior is regarded as being one of the strengths of the black colleges. J.A.G. Here, the sophisticated Rector of the Zulu college, in outlining the advantages of these colleges for an inter-racial jury, among other reasons as pointed out that 'there are no expensive bioscopes and theatres in the vicinity, whilst good quality bioscope shows are provided on campus at least once a week, at a nominal entrance fee to help cover expenses'. Through these means, motivated paternalism and guardianship permeates the whole process of deciding what knowledge is valuable.

Furthermore the university colleges, in an attempt to extend control over the action of students, exploit traditional bonds between students and their parents, especially as it occur in the African and Indian community. Selected parents from the traditional elite are frequently called upon to serve in a consultative capacity and although these are usually highly placed individuals in the community, never having had the opportunity of higher education themselves, they frequently hold antiquated notions concerning it. They by and large tend to consider the present generation of the youth highly fortunate in the opportunities afforded them, and tend to be less critical of the establishment than individuals who have had some exposure to higher education. The following statement by the acting Rector of the University College, Durban, serves to illustrate this point:

"I can tell you candidly that many parents have expressed their presure that we look after the academic interests of students and do not allow them to get involved in politics" (14)

An implicit anti-intellectual trend rejects theoretical exploration and social critic in favour of guided efforts "to do something for the community" in the way of practice projects and social work. While one cannot underestimate the value of such work, it also tends to produce a greater number of 'do-gooders' than 'critical thinkers'.

Though these are by no means mutually exclusive, by putting the focus on micro level projects, important and immediate though they may be, more pertinent questions relating to fundamental conditions of existence are side stepped.

The presentation of black colleges to the respective groups is not unlike a missionary invitation for people to be 'true believers' not so much in the belief itself as in the sincerity of those offering it. In doing this, however, the proponents of Apartheid attempt to lend a scientific and experimental aura to the whole idea of separate development. S.P. Olivier, the Rector of the University of Durban-Westville, for example frequently repeats the following statement, especially in the presence of foreign visitors to the College:

"We are all grappling with the problem - on what basis must we proceed, being made up of a number of heterogeneous groups - we are seeking a solution." In line with this pseudo scientific and searching role is the highly questionable suggestion that blacks always have the freedom to express disagreement with the attempted "solutions" of the establishment. Several quiet dismissals of teaching staff who have been known to question rules, and who by their very bearing challenge the assumptions of Apartheid at least within the context of the black colleges, would seem to make these 'liberties' doubtful. Similar sentiments have been expressed regarding students: "There is no suppression here: if a student wishes to make a hot hooded speech, he does so".

On the other hand the desire to display their qualified liberalism through separate development enhances the value of such outspoken critics of government policy as Adam Small, the Coloured poet on the staff of the University College of the Western Cape.

To some extent, there is method in this madness, in that the cooperation of such critics, provided that they are of no direct threat in terms of actually mobilising student opposition, serves to authenticate the real intentions latent in governmental actions. The important effect of such soothing concessions is that in including conflict producing elements, dissent and protest are bureaucratized. They are integrated and trivialised and so made to serve the interests of the system they are supposed to be attacking, by showing that free speech is allowed. Mungler alludes to

speaking for Africans over whom they have control" and points to the factor of leading whites having to ask the advice of prominent Africans, and this neither as Uncle Toms nor condescendingly:

It is sometimes thought that the Africans of new university colleges are spinelessly subservient to their white principals. However, those white principals who are not genuinely sympathetic to some African aspirations and prepared to battle for them, and who do not rely heavily upon the advice and wisdom of their African staff have experienced nothing but trouble.(16)

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4. Ibid 36
5. MAYER

Although this viewpoint is commendable for pointing to the humanity of white college principals, which should not be denied, it tends to overlook that in order to function well in this administrative capacity, co-operation from 'subject peoples' is of considerable assistance in easing what would otherwise be an extremely difficult task. Since the stability of any social system is dependent on the degree to which the value system of the ruling class is accepted as 'truth' by the underprivileged, white principals of the black colleges are under strong pressure to make these institutions palatable to the various ethnic groups. Co-operation with black teaching staff is, therefore, strategically valuable and helps to mirror the structure of their subjected groups.

Education is a functional necessity for the continuation of the system, and its perpetuation requires trained manpower. Since a society such as South Africa cannot be wholly administered by whites, it becomes necessary to train blacks to work on their behalf. Even though skilled blacks then have the appearance of being independent, they have, in fact, been 'given' this position by whites. Furthermore, the South African economy cannot expand progressively unless education policies are overhauled with considerable expansion of black educational facilities. This applies especially to technical and vocational training. If blacks are excluded from certain occupations or if the expansion of black education is allowed to lag, greater demands for skill, will be made on the white population than it is capable of meeting, and one of the chief sufferers as a result will be the white. For the long-term survival of the whites as a cultural entity, nothing could be more disastrous.¹⁷ This argument is to a large extent recognized by the South African Government, especially in so far as the needs of supposedly self-governing groups are concerned. In terms of the long-term political objectives of the ruling group, it is necessary to maintain some kind of equilibrium; that is, co-operation on the part of the ruled. Conflagratory situations involving direct humiliating contact between oppressor and suppressed must in the interests of the system and its perpetuation be avoided. This is all the more so when the distinction is clearly visible in terms of 'colour'. The training of people in each group to act in administrative capacities minimizes this direct naked contact and does not present a clear line between ruler and ruled. In this way, trained people within each group function for the rulers. Viewed from this perspective, education in its capacity as a vital lever for domination is by no means a concession but a necessity.

To the extent that the Nationalist Government established, defines, and provides black education, as well as manages to obtain compliance from blacks impeded through a lack of realistic alternatives, it could be argued that a measure of success has been achieved in reconciling non-white university education with the aims of the regime. The structure of the educational institutions in themselves is an educational factor which determines to a large extent the content of education; while the provision of more financial aid in bursaries, scholarships, and the like, together with the interlocking governmental network in providing employment, ensures that political conformity is maintained. Even scholarships for study abroad granted by foreign governments require the approval of the respective government departments for each group. The powerlessness of the student within an institutional setting, in which one false move could end prospects of any higher education as well as chances of employment in the future, is an increasing source of intimidation. Consequently, education tends to be viewed as a means to an end, and the process itself is rejected as not intrinsically valuable. Fear of the consequences of critical comments, not only in terms of examination results, but also with regard to future political implications, has a castrating effect on critical thinking.

Moreover, in terms of sheer numbers the relatively small percentage of blacks attending universities, even making allowances for a gradual increase, is highly unlikely to pose any threat to ruling interests. While the total African primary school population in 1966 was 1,270,000, in 1967 only 127 Africans received university degrees and 113 received diplomas.¹⁸ The comparative figures for white/black university enrolments further reaffirm this.

Even if students acquire a developed political consciousness, the means to communicate this are limited. There are numerous restrictions affecting organization, there is no access to the media, and there is the ever-present fear of intimidation, all of which militate against any organized articulation of critical awareness.

Quite apart from this stifling influence on education and freedom of thought, it is becoming openly apparent that even the stated aims of separate development are not being met. Contrary to the initial assurance that the colleges would eventually be staffed by blacks trends thus far evidence that the colleges in fact provide a channel for launching, not blacks, but Afrikaner graduates into the academic realm. A sizeable number of these appointments are regarded as promotions for Afrikaners previously employed in the civil service. At the three African colleges, compared with 202 posts occupied by white professors and lecturers, there are only 39 Africans occupying similar positions. 19 At the Indian college, teaching staff consisted of 115 whites as against 33 Indians 20 while the Coloured college indicated a staff of 66 whites and 2 Coloureds. 21 These figures become all the more astounding when one recognizes that the black colleges have been in existence for close to a decade now; hence this gross imbalance in no way reflects a shortage of qualified non-whites to fill the positions. Furthermore, the university colleges, despite their often repeated dedication to the service of different black groups and their close contact with faculty members of those groups, present only a facade of 'community'; when it comes to such issues as salaries and decision-making, they revert to official differentiation based on racial criteria. Even the few black professors who have been appointed are as yet not entitled to full participation in decision-making. Since no integrated bodies are allowed, there are separate 'senates' and 'councils' for whites and blacks the latter serving merely in an advisory capacity.

Gradually the fears of the opponents of Apartheid education are being realized. Whereas formerly, due to the supervision of the University of South Africa, it was difficult to point to a difference in terms of formal standards apart from the more obvious inequities of separate education per se, the recent granting of autonomy to the various colleges and their elevation to university status, although they have overtones of freedom for the colleges, are further steps in enhancing the disadvantages of racial isolation. What this means, in effect, even though such 'autonomy' is still subject to ministerial approval, is that each college will be completely at the mercy of white decision-making groups, instead of as previously under an at least academically reputable University of South Africa. Such 'autonomy' is, therefore, not in the interests of the various blacks concerned, but renders white college administrators freer to pursue their individual 'visions' for black education.

In summary, therefore, there are very real areas of potential conflict inherent in the provision of separate education, based ultimately on the difference of goals on the part of the white administrators on the one hand, and those of the various ethnic communities on the other. For the most part, the administrators see these institutions as places for schooling people to accept their positions in the society, to learn orderly procedures of requesting changes through the correct channels with the right demeanour, to learn the power of 'positive thinking', and, above all, to be patient in waiting for such gradual changes as may be yielded from time to time. A further implicit assumption is that egalitarian demands arise only out of situations providing opportunities for cultural integration; and hence, from this viewpoint, separate institutions would appear to forestall such demands.

On the other hand, the various black groups see higher education as a source of liberation and alleviation for their situation. They view such institutions for what they consider their practical value; that is, for their potential in equipping blacks to face the life-struggle ahead. Consequently, their expectations are high, and the better the buildings and the greater the propaganda, all the more is expected to come out of them. At present, these expectations seem destined not to be realized; and all the power in the dialectic would appear to be on the side of the white administration. Yet this is not entirely so, however, for what this reasoning overlooks is that organisation of education along ethnic lines, instead of being a divisive force among non-whites as a whole, may possibly provide a basis for the unification of these groups by virtue of the confrontation with, and rejection of, white structures, as well

as an increased sense of moral dignity in being black.) This could ultimately have a more assertive influence in terms of demands for equality than the previous token integration in supposedly 'open' universities, and hence have an effect contrary to that desired by the policy-makers.

In spite of the repressive conditions described above, it is not too far fetched to speculate that education could become a disintegrative agent for the present South African system, displaying as it does such caste-like features and lacking any integrative principle in the community of shared societal values. Black students, exposed to 'universal concepts' and thought processes, regardless of the extent to which these are clothed in pro-Apartheid categories, could be expected to reiterate these universal demands; and, through education, to develop a heightened consciousness enabling them clearly to perceive the discrepancy between their own lot and that of more privileged sectors of society, and to become motivated by it. In support of this thesis, students have often expressed the feeling that their political consciousness and dissatisfaction with Apartheid have deepened during their period of study at black colleges. For example, one anonymous student reported in a newspaper:

When I went to Fort Hare, I wasn't politically conscious. My political awareness grew as my education at the college progressed and with it my resentment of the administration as a symbol of separate development. ²²

Student political protest becomes all the more remarkable within the context of repression described above, and indicates clearly that black students in no uncertain terms reject separate development and all its implications for education. They are caught between the contradictions of a system that stimulates questioning and yet renders the articulation of these questions dangerous. These tensions are reflected in the comments of the same student:

We are treated like school children by the administration. The lecturers teach you to question things, but then you find that if you start questioning some things like police presence on campus, you are immediately victimized by the administration. ²³

Hope finally arises from the prospect that despite the divergent cultural lines on which segregated education is being conducted, a newer convergence will emerge among people who have shared a common exposure to this colonial-type educational experience and, more fundamentally, share in its rejection.

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1. The University College of Fort Hare had been founded in 1916 with funds provided mainly by the Churches and was the only existing institution which was specifically established for the higher education of the African community. Roughly one-third of the non white students were trained at Fort Hare. It represented a special place where many black leaders had been educated.
2. The Deputy Minister of Bantu Development gave the following figures relating to expenditures of the state up to March 1966 on the black colleges since their establishment in 1959:
Fort Hare - R4,178,697; University College of the North - R4,150,381; Zululand - R3,335,012; Muriel Horrell (ed.), A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1966, 270. The Indian College involved expenditure on premises alone of R10 million: S.A. Digest 20 December, 1968, 4.
3. Apartheid - Its Effects on Education, Science, Culture and Information, UNESCO, Paris, 1967, 92. For further expenditure figures see Survey of Race Relations, loc. cit.
4. House of Assembly Debates, Hansard, 64, 1948, co. 219.
5. Matthews, Z.K. 'Ethnic Universities', Africa South, July-Sept. 1957, 45.
6. Minister of Education, House of Assembly Debates, Hansard, 27-9 May 1957, as quoted in Apartheid, op. cit., 87.

7. Kuper, Leo, The College Brew, Universal Printing Works, Durban 1960 , 21-2.
8. Ibid.
9. Horrell, Muriel (ed.) Survey of Race Relations, 1968,266.
10. 'Student Leaders Resign", The Leader, 13 June 1969.
11. Ibid., 9
12. This is well reflected in a statement by the Rector of Fort Hare in relation to student strikes: 'They have a democratic right to form their own opinions but this must be done with discipline. I disagreed with the recent strike because it went beyond the bounds of discipline.' Rand Daily Mail, 29 Sept. 1968,11.
13. Mare, J.A.G. "The University Colleges", unpublished manuscript, 1966.
14. The Leader, 13 June, 1969.
15. Mare, op. cit.
16. Munger, Edwin S. in William A. Hance (ed.) Southern African and the United States, Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1968, 36.
17. Education and the South African Economy 2nd report of the 1961 Education Panel, Witwatersrand University Press Johannesburg, 1963.
18. The Star, Johannesburg, 21 December, 1968 11. Also quoted in the article is the differential expenditure on white and black primary and secondary education. Whereas the State spends R11.50 per child per year on African primary education and R52 on African secondary education, the corresponding figures per white child are R250 and R300 per year.
19. Horrell (ed.) Survey of Race Relations, 1969, 216
20. Ibid. 215
21. Ibid
22. Rand Daily Mail, 28 Sept. 1968, 11
23. Ibid.