

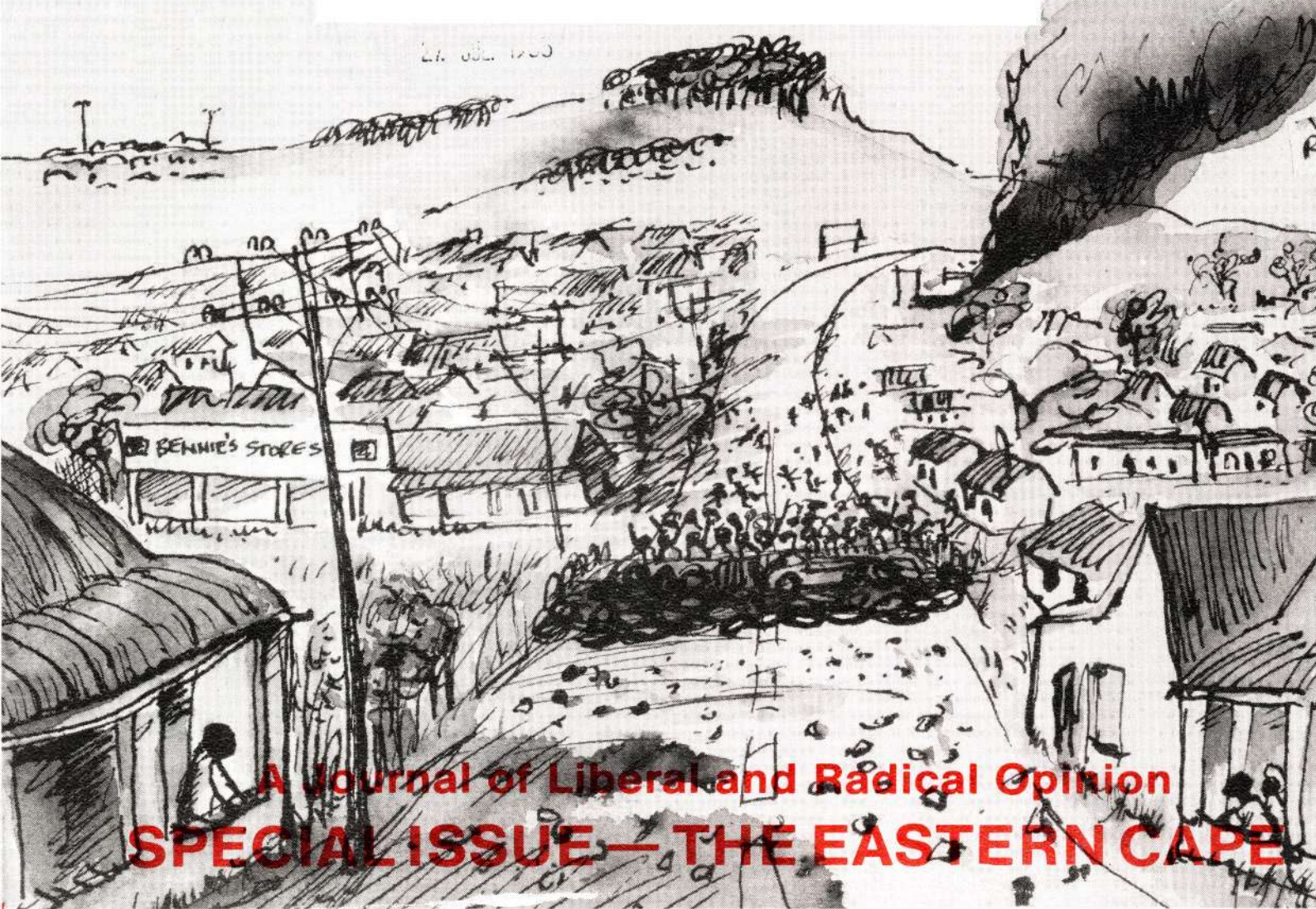
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A Journal of Liberal and Radical Opinion

SPECIAL ISSUE — THE EASTERN CAPE

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EDITORIAL

THE LIBERTY TREE

The original Liberty Tree was an elm which flourished on Boston Common, fertilised no doubt by the leaves which remained after the celebrated tea party in the nearby harbour. Jefferson, as Margot Beard reminds us in this edition of *Reality*, saw the blood of tyrants and patriots as its natural manure – clearly with his own country's revolution in mind.

The image crossed the Atlantic with ease, for E.P. Thompson entitles the first part of his classic work **The Making of the English Working Class** "The Liberty Tree", whose planting takes place against a background of repression and violence.

The same image recurs today in the funeral speeches which punctuate the continuing "unrest" and so often, tragically, sow the seeds for their own reproduction. The millenarian vision is that freedom lies on the yonder side of suffering and bloodshed.

The elm is, perhaps, peculiarly suitable for the role of Liberty Tree. It grows quickly in congenial, well watered

soil and is soon a magnificent sight. But apart from its susceptibility to the Dutch Elm disease, it is also inclined to shed substantial branches on the unwary who think that they can shelter from the wind beneath it.

How often have such hopes of liberty been betrayed. The French revolution consumed its own architects and spawned Napoleon; the Russian revolution brought in Stalin who far out-Tsarred the Tsars; Kenyatta led Kenya through freedom to corruption, to die unmourned by a generation whose hopes he once personified; and Jefferson's own democracy took a generation longer to achieve emancipation for the slaves than did that of "Old Corruption" at Westminster.

South Africa is entering a revolutionary phase in its development, characterised by violence, polarisation, idealism and millenarianism – the features observed in most revolutions. With a longer history of revolutions and decolonisation from which to learn, we, and the contending forces, have a greater opportunity to avoid the repetition of past follies, but little time. □

QUOTES FROM KANNEMEYER

(The Kannemeyer Commission Report on the police action which resulted in 20 deaths at Langa, Uitenhage, on March 21st, was published too late to allow for a comprehensive assessment of it in this issue of Reality. We hope to carry such an assessment in our next issue. In the meantime we publish here some quotes from the Report.)

1. "20 people were killed by police fire in the incident. Of those killed 5 were females and 15 were males. Their ages vary from 11 years to 50 years. Nine of the deceased were 16 years old or younger." (p. 80)¹.
2. "35 of the total of 47 dead and injured were shot from the rear. Of these, 5 also had wounds to the front of their arms, shoulders and chests and 1 had an injury to the sole of his foot." (p. 89)
3. "During the period 8 March to 10 March, twenty three incidents of arson and eighteen of stone throwing occurred in the Black townships of Uitenhage and Despatch Six Blacks were killed as a result of action taken by the police against rioters during this period." (p 12)
4. Capt. Goosen of the Security Branch had obtained magistrates' orders prohibiting funerals on Saturdays, Sundays, Public Holidays and March 18th (on 14th March) and at all times other than 0800 to 1400 on Sundays (on 20th March) — in effect, prohibiting funerals, as the first order was not rescinded by the second. "It would seem that Capt Goosen used section 46 of the [Internal Security] Act for a devious purpose." (p 161).
5. Despite the law that "firearms or other weapons likely to cause serious bodily injury or death shall not . . . be used to disperse a gathering until weapons less likely to cause such injury or death have been used and the gathering has not been dispersed" (Section 49 of the Internal Security Act), "One can only conclude that this [failure to issue birdshot and the substitution of S.S.G. — a lethal buckshot] was the result of a policy deliberately adopted." (p 165)
6. "The remarks attributed to the police at Maduna Square [where the people assembled to go to the funeral] are, if the evidence is accepted, particularly disturbing because they were provocative and would have been likely to incite the crowd to retaliation and violence. They are the very type of remarks which the members of a patrol whose duty it was to maintain law and order should refrain from making and show a serious lack of discipline." (p 138) "It must be accepted that these remarks were made at the square." (p 139)
7. "While it must be accepted that some, probably only a few, members of the crowd had improvised weapons of sorts with them the [police] evidence suggesting that the majority were armed must be rejected as exaggeration." (p 38)
8. "The Commission, . . . is of the view that his [Capt Fouché's] decision to make a stand where he did and his subsequent order to open fire were understandable and that he cannot be criticised therefor." (p 156)
9. "Pentz's description of the weapons he saw people carrying when he was at Maduna Square would seem to be exaggerated" (p 31)
10. "Asked if he (Sgt Lekuba) had seen weapons he replied that he saw none and that if they had been carrying weapons as described by Pentz, he would have seen them." (p 33)
11. The Commission "is forced to the conclusion that the police evidence — except for that of Lekuba — is exaggerated in regard to the weapons carried." (p 37)
12. Bucwa (the boy on the bicycle who was in the front of the procession on his way, he claimed, to work) was "at or near the head of the procession when he was shot . . . and . . . the police evidence explaining the presence of the bicycle on the scene after the shooting must be rejected." (p 69) "This immediately leads to the question why the police do not admit this. One can only assume that if the warning shot had had what appeared to be fatal effects, it may well be understandable for an attempt to be made to conceal this fact." (p 70)
13. "Fouché says that those behind the front ranks came on even after those in front had been shot down." "The conclusion must be reached that the majority of the shots fired by the crews of the two Casspirs, were fired after the crowd had begun to disperse and run away." (p 90)
14. "The inevitable conclusion is that the stone attack as described by Fouché and his men was fabricated in order, in part, to justify the shooting. Fouché eventually admitted that the shooting was not caused by this stoning." (p 119)

Notes

1. All page references are to "Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Incident which Occurred on 21 March 1985 at Uitenhage" RP74-1985, commonly known as the Kannemeyer Commission, since Judge D.D.V. Kannemeyer was the Chairman and sole member of the Commission. □

THE DEATH AND REBIRTH OF HOPE

The Black Sash ladies, M.P.Cs and M.Ps who collected the affidavits and pursued the cases described in this edition of Reality would prefer them not to be true. Like other farmers, estate agents and mothers with growing children, they would far rather believe that a handful of ambitious revolutionaries, inspired and financed from Moscow, are fomenting unrest, and that the security forces are engaged in rooting them out according to the rule of law and civilised policing practices. Like the rest of us, they would like to believe that the proper separation of functions between the police and the courts is being maintained and that the police do not judge and execute those whom they think may be offenders. Like the rest of us they would far rather believe that the mass of residents in the Eastern Cape townships appreciate the protection of the police, welcome the shifts in government policy and recognise that the alternative to the present regime would bring greater poverty and political anarchy. **But the evidence contradicts the beliefs of the hopeful and the wilfully blind.**

Trapped

The mass of the people are trapped, and feel trapped, in a situation which offers them nothing but terror and increasing poverty. Wherever they turn they see only their own helplessness.

Do they seek work – let them tread the streets for days and in their thousands, accepting that ten years of education has qualified them to operate a pick and shovel if they are lucky, and still they will return home without a job.

Employment.

Unemployment figures for the Eastern Cape are all more or less wild estimates – a popular guess is that for every three working there is another in search of a non-existent job. What is certain is that thousands of youths have not been offered jobs in the two years or more since they left school, and that with the cyclical contraction of the motor industry and the impending departure of much of Ford's assembly business to the reef, thousands of jobs are being lost.

Outside the metropolitan areas of Port Elizabeth and East London, the operation of the Urban Areas Act of 1945, as amended many times, still blocks the free flow of people in search of economic opportunities.

Do they try to make a living for themselves by producing and selling, recycling scrap, utilising skills acquired from trained relatives or from the jobs they held in better times – let them try to find a way through the jungle of licencing laws, health ordinances (pollution is unhealthy, starvation is not) and the violent harassment they face if they dare to do business outside "their own" Group Area.

Free Markets.

The Free Market Foundation has a list of about five hundred laws and bye-laws which inhibit the free market economy. They range from the limited number of hawkers licences issued by local councils (which are often dominated by traders) to health regulations, zoning restrictions, urban land tenure rights for blacks, the Group Areas Act, the rules governing the membership of professional associations which monopolise certain services and the powers of statutory marketing boards. Some can be justified as protecting consumers, some are not racially discriminatory, nearly all protect the **status quo** and monopoly interests from economic penetration by those currently disadvantaged.

Is there an election or referendum called by the local or homeland government – let them know, or believe – which is much the same in practice – that their actions are noted and that if they did **not** vote or voted **against** the winners, then their access to licences, housing and other items of government patronage essential for their comfort if not their survival, will be put at risk. And if they **do** go to vote – let them know that their actions will be noted by other shadowy forces which have called for boycotts and solidarity and which, at war with the prevailing structures of society, do not feel bound by any of its laws.

Free Elections.

Schlemmer (**Quail Report Feb 8, 1980** Conference Associates, 1980) found that "only a minority of Ciskei Xhosa anywhere, even in the Ciskei itself, support the idea of independence under circumstances prevailing at the present time." (p 189) A year later Lennox Sebe gained overwhelming support

in a referendum in favour of independence. One voter told me that her pass was marked to show that she had voted, a "teacher" in the polling station had showed her how to vote, and that she feared losing her house in the Ciskei if she voted "No". She had no clear explanation of why she feared for her home and no enthusiasm for independence. She just played safe.

How many "boycotters" in subsequent elections for Community Councils have done the same? When the vote means virtually nothing anyway, there is no purpose in risking anything to exercise it.

Q Is there a school boycott and protest march called – let them know that their children will not be allowed to study that day (or month, or year) and that they must march when the organisers call or risk assault and burned homes. And let them know that as a result a year's school expenses may be lost and that their children may return home injured by birdshot, or dead – or they may not return at all.

Student Protests (1)

"I am a pupil who passed St. 6 in 1984, and am aged 16. On 11.1.85 all the schools in Uitenhage were boycotted. I was at home and heard the students singing in the street. I left my house and walked towards the singing. Two hippos came up M Street behind the group of students who were walking in the direction of the school. Tear gas canisters were thrown from the hippos in the direction of the group of students. I ran into a nearby house. I then decided to go back home. I found my ten year old sister in the crowd, took her by the hand and started to return home. There is a square in M Street where vendors sell vegetables. When I saw the hippo I took my sister and we ducked down behind one of the vendor's tables. Sis V.G. came past the table carrying a loaf of bread. There were still shots coming from the hippo truck which I thought were gas canisters. But then I saw Sis V.G. fall. When I saw her face and neck spattered with blood and her face suddenly swell up I knew that she must have been shot. There was terrible confusion. A car stopped and we got into it with Sis V.G. We drove to the day hospital where some staff came to attend to us straight away.

We heard later the same day that she had died. (On the way home from the day hospital) I saw a hippo coming up M Street and ran to the corner house. I saw students in the street running. (A bus was burning not far away). I also saw M.M. who I knew to be mentally retarded. He did not run like the other students, but when they called loudly to him to run, he turned and jumped. Suddenly I saw his body covered with blood and he collapsed. The hippo passed by with the policemen carrying on shooting from the top of the vehicle. M.M's body was full of pellets. I accompanied him to a private doctor (by taxi). His parents arrived at the surgery and took him home. They were afraid to go to the hospital because the police were reported to be there.

I heard later that M.M. died on Mon. 14/1/85.

I went to M.M's house with other students. We had taken a financial contribution to the family. The

house was surrounded by police vans. Policemen shouted that if any of the students ran, they would be shot. Many policemen emerged from the vans and converged on the students. I was the first to be hit with a pick handle on my head. Then I remember being picked up by the left arm and thrown into the van. As we were taken from the van to the police station we were beaten.

I was questioned about the names in an exercise book that the police had found on me. I explained about the money but they said I was lying and that we were attending an illegal gathering. I was continually beaten during the questions.

The police then asked me to be an informer. It was more of a demand than a request. I was told to bring the police information. I was then taken home."

Q Is there a stay away from work called – then let them know that if they go to work (even cross the backyard of their employer's home from their living-in quarters to answer the telephone) they may be noted as "scabs" and their lives or homes be at risk. And let them know that if they stay at home they may lose their jobs (or at least their pay for the day) and run the risk of a visit from a police unit which will break in, terrorise everyone and continue on its way "in search of troublemakers."

Stay Away.

From "Concerned" to the **Eastern Province Herald**. The recent wave of unrest in the townships is proving to be a golden opportunity for spiteful and jealous persons to intimidate others.

A case in point. My maid stayed away from work during the stayaway. While she was away there was a phone call for her. Not wishing to admit that I was all alone in the house, I told the caller she had gone out for a short while.

Now rumours are being spread that she was at work and she is terrified that her house will be burnt down. What should she do? (7th May 1985)

In Grahamstown, when a stayaway was organised for the 9th Nov. 1984, some workers in government jobs were warned that they would be dismissed if they did not come to work, and over fifty were fired. "I told them (employers), they do not know how serious this thing is. But I won't see myself being butchered by the youth for nothing. If they do not give me leave from work, I simply will not come to work. He (employer) did not give me a reply. I do not know what to do." (Fingo villager on the eve of the stayaway).

Q Is there a funeral for somebody killed in a futile exchange of bottles and stones for gas and bullets with the police (or simply killed by a random rubber bullet in his eye or buckshot in his back) – then let them know that if they fail to "show respect" for the dead, they could lose their homes, and if they march with the crowd they could be shot, detained or beaten up.

One Man's Langa Massacre. (2)

On 21st March 1984 I came to 24th Square in order to go to the funeral in Kwanobuhle. I did not know that the funeral had been postponed. There were police in the square, both black and white. They were telling the people not to get into the buses. They did not tell us why. People in the crowd were saying, "Let us go on foot to the funeral." There were at that stage about two hundred people who started walking, but others were coming and joining from behind. I did not see any of them carrying sticks, spears or petrol bombs, but I do not know what a petrol bomb looks like. I saw no bottles. People were talking to each other. There was no singing or shouting. We got to a dip in the road with a rise ahead. A hippo truck was parked across the road with police inside with guns. Two police, one white, one black, were on top. At this time I saw we were being followed down the road by another hippo. There was thus one hippo behind us and one in front of us. The police did not speak to us with loudspeakers. While we were walking a youth, maybe sixteen years, was riding his bicycle ahead of us. All of a sudden a shot rang out and the youth fell off his bicycle, he fell and did not rise again. The police then opened fire on the crowd. The people turned and started to run away. The shooting did not stop. I kept running and did not stop until I got home.

What then are the ordinary people to do?

Millenarian Vision

A classical solution to the problem of "damned if you do, damned if you don't" is to seek recourse in ritual or in millenarian fantasies, of which the Cattle Killing is the most famous South African example. There has been some evidence of this in the widespread destruction of schools over the past decade in protest against inferior education for blacks — apparently in the belief that new and better schools would be built out of the ashes of the old and wretched. In many cases new structures have appeared, and the older generation has become sensitive to the taunts of the younger, "You cried and got nothing, we burned and got progress." Grieving parents are assured that every drop of blood shed in the struggle is watering the Freedom Tree, and the idea has taken root that out of the present suffering political salvation will come.

How it will come, and how much suffering must be endured before freedom dawns with its rewards of justice, employment, education and a redistribution of wealth, is not questioned; **that** it will come on the yonder side of pain is an article of faith reinforced by each new violent outburst, each new personal tragedy. Those who would doubt the force of this seemingly irrational faith need look no

further back in history than to the Iranian revolution and collapse of the Shah, despite his mighty army, ruthless police and influential American friends. Those with a longer view may look to the foundations of Christianity, the millenarian cult of colonial slaves which appropriated the throne of the divine emperor.

The Pragmatic View

For those who are less emotional, more pragmatic and, in many cases perhaps, have more to lose in a revolution, the best chance for survival is to be found in blowing with the wind — obeying the immediate order backed by the threat or reality of force. It is a short term expedient, as short as the time that it takes for a policeman to take aim and fire, or for a flame to consume the wooden frame of a house. But, as one can say with chilling and literal truth, in the long term we are all dead. From well behind the barricades of white privilege, sustained by the arms and the men whose excesses so appal us, it is easy to shout good advice and to offer idealistic solutions.

What Hope?

What hope there is lies in that handful of people whose words can still be heard across the tumult of the warring factions, whose courage and presence compels calm and an element of trust, however much those hell bent on conflict seek to undermine and destroy them. Desmond Tutu, Molly Blackburn, a score of Black Sash ladies, a few thousand unsung relationships between people who can say, without posturing or patronising, "This is my friend," and so transcend the human frailties which continually threaten division — these are the basis of a small indomitable hope. Old Testament scholars would call them "the Remnant" — as if in some dream time they were the whole. Their hope is that their sane words will be heard sooner rather than later:

- that peace is not achieved by the violent suppression of the majority by the minority, nor by the violent suppression of the minority by the majority.
- that peace is not achieved without justice, and that as long as there is no equality before the law; no equality of opportunity, access to education, living space or means of making a living, there can be no justice.□

FOOTNOTES:

1. Abstract from affidavits attached to the **Report on Visit to Uitenhage** compiled by Errol Moorcroft M.P. and submitted as evidence to the Kannemeyer Commission of Enquiry.
2. Idem. (Some contrary evidence was led by the counsel for the S.A. Police, and at the time of writing the judge's findings had not been made known.)

MID-MARCH IN UITENHAGE 1985

"Come quickly Molly, they are killing our children!". Chilling words spoken by the Chairman of the Kwanobuhle Parents Association. A meeting place was hastily agreed upon, and 45 minutes later I, and 8 Black Sash colleagues drew up in front of the Uitenhage Post Office. A small group of parents – faces strained, voices hushed, met us. There was no time for embellishment of the facts – several youngsters between the ages of 15–18 had been virtually abducted from their homes early that Sunday morning, while others had been taken when they went to the police station to sign the bail register during the morning.

One of the fathers, grey with anxiety, described his own attempts to find his son that day – how knowledge of his son's whereabouts was denied by the person on duty, how – even while he stood discussing this, he had heard what he believed to be his son's cries for mercy – for the beatings to stop. We were appalled, and under guidance from the parents strode into the C.I.D. Office nearby. A pleasant sergeant temporarily calmed our fears by announcing that he could foresee no problems regarding the parents' desire to see their children. Following his directions, off we went to the police cells. A wrong turning brought us to double doors in an outer building – I knocked and entered.

Only time will reveal the significance of the scene . . . the young man writhing in pain on the floor . . . hands behind his back, manacled to the leg of a table . . . a man in civilian clothes bringing down yet another blow with a vicious orange whip on the bleeding victim. Three swollen-faced and bruised youngsters sitting in stunned silence on a bench nearby. Several men – presumably prison staff, lolling around in an unconcerned manner. They had doubtless witnessed just such a scene many times before – in fact one calmly munched his lunch during the whole sordid event!

The ensuing 10 minutes proved to be a salutary lesson to us in police tactics. We refused to leave the scene of the crime until the Station Commander arrived, and the C.I.D. declined to produce him to satisfy our demand. In the end they unshackled the prisoner and marched him off to the police cells. We felt our only option was to return to the main building to see the District Commander.

The remainder of the day reads like a John le Carré novel. A most amiable police Colonel listened to our tale with concern – picked up the 'phone, spoke to various departments, and then announced that no-one of that name had been anywhere in the police station that day. For once we were speechless!



Establishing the Truth

Eventually, we persuaded our friendly Colonel to accompany two of us in an attempt to establish what we knew to be true. First to the police cells – through the huge doors where we had seen the prisoner enter 30 minutes earlier, and into the office. Yes, I would be allowed to examine the records – no need to hurry, I could take as long as I liked – but they could tell me that no-one of that name had been there. They could also tell me that no-one could get into the cells unless his name was in the register.

We left, puzzled, and went into the “assault” office. All very neat and trim – not a chair or note-book out of place. “What about this blood on the floor?” I asked. Shrugged shoulders from the Colonel.

On to the C.I.D. offices to meet two Captains – blank faces – strong assurances that no-one of the name was in the building. Maybe the police could have some-one in their patrol van . . . but it didn’t have a radio and so could not be contacted. We were furious at the transparency of this tactic, and at what seemed to us to be open trickery. We left, saying we would give them an hour to establish the prisoner’s whereabouts.

Predictably, on our return we were met with masked stares and blank denials. An affidavit made days later by the prisoner revealed that during the entire “search” that afternoon he had been held in a room no more than 20 m.

from where we were standing. Also significant was that he was released without ever being charged with any offence.

Another youngster, taken on the same day, was not permitted a visit from his parents for a whole month. During this time, following strong demands, his lawyers were permitted a visit. Their description of his physical appearance intensified the parents’ fear for his safety, and could have justified the cat-and-mouse game of “hide-the-prisoner” which seemed to be the tactic adopted in his case.

It is tragically true that the majority of people in this country no longer regard the Law as their protector. Our witness of the torture has been well-documented, and legal procedures will be instituted in due course. In that what we saw mirrors the experiences of many, many blacks in our area, it is to be hoped that this case will at least expose a serious break-down in one aspect of police discipline. Many of us believe that until this particular section of the police force can be called to account by members of the public, and until they themselves are forced to operate within the law, not only will their contaminated image damage by association the reputation of our uniformed police, it will continue to foment the deepening racial tensions in this country. □

N.B. Events described here took place on March 17th – 4 days prior to the massacre on March 21st.

Guest Editor.

Michael G. Whisson, Professor of Anthropology at Rhodes University, member of the board of Reality.

Contributors

Margot M. Beard, Lecturer in English at Rhodes University, currently researching the relationship between Wordsworth’s writing and the social changes of the 1795–1805 period.

Molly Blackburn, M.P.C. for Walmer, Port Elizabeth, has monitored events in the townships from Cradock to New Brighton on behalf of the Progressive Federal Party and the voteless people in the region.

F.G. (Guy) Butler, Professor of English at Rhodes University, native of Cradock, author of **Karoo Morning** and much else besides.

W.J. (Bill) Davies, Stella and Paul Loewenstein Professor of Development Studies at Rhodes University. Formerly the regional director for the Urban Foundation in the Eastern Cape.

Chris J. De Wet, Lecturer in Anthropology at Rhodes University, engaged in long term research in the Keiskam-mahoek area of the Ciskei.

LAND TENURE, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CISKEI

Introduction

This paper aims to consider the role of land tenure and of local government in relation to agricultural development in Ciskei. It is written against the background of two earlier articles published in *Reality* – those by Tapson (vol. 17 no. 5) and Cross (vol. 18 no. 2).

Tapson questions the view that “the conversion of all or part of the communally owned land in the homelands to freehold title.....is.....a fundamental prerequisite before agriculture in the homelands can enter into a growth and production phase” (Tapson, 1984, p 3). While freehold title would allow for the formation of viable tracts of land, and would facilitate capital formation, it would also lead to the poor being dispossessed of their land, and would probably lead to farmers being burdened with severe debt problems. Moreover, Tapson argues, output on privately owned land in the homelands does not differ much from output on “traditional land”, and it is not the case that private ownership always results in better conservation practices (p 4–5).

Tapson advocates the adoption of a leasehold system whereby all land will be returned “to the public domain, by freeing it from existing rights” (p 5). Regardless of *de jure* stipulations, “traditional land is viewed as being communally owned by the tribe that occupies it” (p 3), and so land would then be returned to the tribe to whom it “belongs *de facto*” (p 5) under Tapson’s leasehold system. Land would then be rented out, with the rental going to the tribe “as the *de facto* landlord”, and would be distributed “directly to the individual tribal families in equal portions” (p 5).

This kind of leasehold tenure would have the following advantages:

- “1) Expedite the agglomeration of land into the hands of those with the resources and skill to make it productive
- 2) Take cognisance of the needs of the poor and destitute, who have ineradicable tangible and intangible interests in the land
- 3) Prevent the permanent alienation of public property into the possession of a rich and powerful elite, and... the dispossession of the poorer sector
- 4) Maintain or improve the tangible benefit derived from the land by all levels of the population, without destroying the intangible benefits, mainly security
- 5) Create mechanisms for the proper use and protection of the public resource” (p 5).

Cross (1984) replies to Tapson, arguing that while she agrees with his criticisms of freehold tenure, she does not accept that leasehold tenure will “deliver the goods” either – principally because “the perceived disadvantages of agriculture have little to do with tenure institutions or with the size of arable landholding available. Instead, they revolve around the kind of economic options that are viable at household level” (p 6). These options relate to

the fact that “outlying rural districts for the most part suffer seriously from locational disadvantages in relation to agricultural production” and to the reality that “wage work is the economic base of rural homelands society” (p 5). Wage work also offers higher returns than cultivation, which involves high costs and high risks under homeland conditions (p 7).

Cross argues that in peri-urban areas of Kwa-Zulu, still operating under “indigenous tenure systems” (p 4), land rights in arable land are “essentially private” and transferable to people of the holder’s choice (p 5). These tenure systems are able to “adapt very effectively to modern conditions”, developing into “informal freehold systems” in response to demographic pressures and a rural economy focussed on wage labour, rather than agriculture (p 5). Prevailing tenure “recognizes the community land ethic and uses it to control some of the dangerous tendencies of *laissez-faire* freehold” (p 7) – although quite how, Cross does not say.

Land tenure reform will not supply the key to agricultural development, as providing farmers in the homelands with the incentives and guarantees that will encourage them to forsake migrant security for agricultural risk, and enable them to build up farms and “compete economically in a market already supplied by established producers” (p 5) would probably require “prohibitively expensive subsidies and insurance schemes” (p 5). Cross recommends a more low-key approach, where the focus should be encouraging “the emergence of a strong local-level economy whose households are self-sufficient” (p 7). Agriculture should be seen as one of the strategies by which households deploy their resources to optimum effect, realizing that the principal source of these resources derives from wage work. Attention should accordingly be given to “intensive forms of arable cultivation on relatively small plots”, rather than to land tenure reform (p 8).

Tapson and Cross thus disagree about the nature of traditional tenure systems, and also about whether and how they should change. This may be because their research experience may relate to different areas and different types of land tenure. Cross’ article relates mainly to peri-urban areas of Kwa Zulu which do not appear to have had Betterment Planning, while Tapson refers to “traditional land” in Zimbabwe and the Ciskei, although his article is about the homelands in general. Tapson does not mention Betterment Planning in his paper. The applicability of their respective accounts of land tenure will now be considered in relation to the Ciskei.

Who Owns the Land in the Ciskei?

What is important for my purposes, is that neither of the types of traditional tenure systems discussed by Tapson or Cross appear to be found in the Ciskei. They have been replaced by various forms of land tenure introduced by white governments. In terms of these new forms of land tenure (some of which have been in operation for longer

than others, but none of which for less than fifty years), land is held in terms of individual certificates of occupation, or title deeds, which are legally granted, and can legally be confiscated by administrative officials whose authority overrides that of chiefs and headmen. (A discussion of the conditions relating to Freehold tenure, Quitrent tenure, Communal tenure, and South African Native Trust Land may be found in Mills and Wilson, 1952).

The process whereby land is held individually, subject always to conditions imposed by the Administration of the day, has been entrenched by the introduction of Betterment Planning, which has been applied throughout almost all of rural Ciskei. The Betterment Areas Proclamation No. 116 of 1949 provides the Native Commissioner (latterly the Magistrate) with sweeping powers to plan land use in rural villages. In many cases, the application of these powers has led to the re-delimitation, and re-registration of individual arable holdings, as well as the re-delimitation of grazing and residential areas. Chiefs and headmen have been powerless to stop this process.

While *de jure*, land in the Ciskei may be individually held, subject to Magisterial control, the *de facto* situation may be different. The *de facto* situation in the Ciskei seems to come closer to Cross' model of "traditional land tenure" than to Tapson's. People talk about their land as being individually held, and as being specifically theirs. They talk about the history of their land, referring to previous holders of the land, and to their rights to inheritance of it. People have attempted, through the Magistrate, to remove headmen whom they saw as interfering with their rights to their land. Informal transfers of land have taken place in some areas – rather like Cross' informal freehold – where land has changed hands without the change being officially registered. Some people have made material changes to their land, such as erecting fences and digging erosion ditches. All of these things seem to suggest that people see arable land as something which is individually held, and which, if they obey the law, cannot readily be taken away from them. It does not appear to be the case, as Tapson suggests, that "traditional land is viewed as being communally owned by the tribe that occupies it" (Tapson, 1984, p 3), or that "the land belongs *de facto* to the tribe" (p 5). Antrobus argues that in the case of the Tyhefu irrigation scheme, the company administering the scheme pays "profits" to the local tribal authority (Antrobus, 1982, p 7), but this is a somewhat exceptional arrangement.

Recent events suggest that the Ciskei Government may be moving towards a land tenure system which would place land under the control of the tribal authority within whose jurisdiction it falls. If this happens, then Tapson's idea of land belonging *de facto* to the tribe, may well become a reality.

In 1983, the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Economic Development of the Republic of Ciskei recommended that in tribally administered areas "Allottees should have the right to sell their allotments. These sales may be within or without the tribal authority's jurisdiction" (Lotter, 1984, p 107) and also recommended that "the tribal authorities must also be given the right to sell or lease land in addition to or as an alternative to allotment in the traditional manner. Such selling or leasing could be subject to any condition the tribal authorities chose . . . Besides the income from the selling or the leasing of the

land . . . transfer duty could also be paid to the tribal authority" (p 108).

A newspaper report quotes Mr Leon Louw, director of the Free Market Foundation, and by all accounts a key adviser to President Sebe, as saying "Some of the tribal authorities have started selling and leasing land. Their approval of the programme was unanimous" (E.P. Herald, 18.4.1985).

If Tapson's idea of land as belonging to the tribe – or more accurately to the tribal authority – reflects the thinking and planning of the Ciskei Government, it would be as well to consider his arguments in favour of leasehold tenure. It should however be remembered that he has expressed himself as being in favour of leasehold, but not of freehold.

An Evaluation of Tapson's Proposal to Adopt Leasehold Tenure.

With regard to the ability of leasehold tenure to achieve the agglomeration of land into the hands of the capable, Tapson seems to assume that the chances of profitable agriculture will be sufficient to attract agricultural entrepreneurs. He suggests, however, that arable land should be leased to entrepreneurs for a period of three years at a time (Tapson, 1984, p 5). It is questionable whether a three-year period is long enough for a farmer to make sufficient profit to justify the capital investment he will have to make to build up the land, or long enough to enable him to secure the necessary capital loan.¹

It is also questionable whether agriculture in the Ciskei is potentially profitable enough to attract entrepreneurs in the first place, who could otherwise employ their entrepreneurial talent more profitably in the urban sector. It seems that at the moment the Ciskei is unable to provide the infrastructure, in terms of roads, transport facilities, markets, credit, equipment and expertise, to make commercial agriculture viable in tribal authority areas (see de Wet 1982, and in press). Tracts of freehold land lie largely uncultivated, because the necessary back-up services are inadequate.

The ability of leasehold tenure to take account of the economic and security needs of the poor, assumes both a rent high enough to make a difference once it has been divided up into its many parts, as well as an efficient and corruption-free administration of the rent by the tribal authorities. As regards a high enough rent, Tapson argues that "the higher rentals are driven up by market forces, the better. Those paying rental may object, but income to the poorer sections will increase, and . . . productivity will of necessity increase to meet the rentals" (Tapson, 1984, p 6). It does not seem likely that productivity will increase to meet increased rentals, when it is unable to come to terms with the infrastructural problems mentioned above, and also referred to by Cross. If the Ciskei farmer's ability to make a worthwhile profit is in doubt, then so must be his ability to pay the tribal authority a worthwhile rent.

Recent research suggests that tribal authorities are not always efficient bodies, able to be brought to account by their constituency (de Wet – field notes; Manona – forthcoming). They have limited powers and budgets, and they tend to consist largely of older men with limited education and little administrative skill. As they are constituted along traditional lines, they are not as subject to re-election procedures as various other administrative bodies. Tribal authorities encounter problems of legitimacy as, in view of their protected position, they are not always obliged to be responsive to their constituents – nor indeed, are they always able to be. They also tend to be seen as being in the pocket of the Ciskei Government. Tribal authorities are dependent upon the Ciskei Government for their budgetary allocations, and these allocations tend to

reflect the limited funding the Government may be able to make available. Situations may well arise where rent received from land would not be used primarily for programmes to benefit the poor, but to keep the tribal authority solvent.²

Even if problems relating to administration of rent are overcome, it is still debatable just how much security people will continue to enjoy. Once individual land-holders have handed over their individual certificates of occupation or title deeds to their tribal authority, they may be said to have lost any effective control over their land. For one landholder to "claim back" his field, could threaten the economic viability of a consolidated holding, and it seems unlikely that the tribal authority would risk threatening the income of the community as a whole.

It is likewise not clear that leasehold tenure will prevent the permanent entrenchment of a landed elite, at the cost of a dispossessed poorer section. Situations may arise where the tribal authority is effectively unable to dislodge its lessees. If, because of the current lack of agricultural infrastructure, relatively few entrepreneurs will be able to make substantial profits, the tribal authority may well have to take what lessees it can get, or keep, in order to pay its constituents their dues. In such circumstances, a buyer's market may well push **down** the rent lessees pay. The situation may also arise where a lessee is politically too powerful to dislodge, and where market-determined rates may accordingly not operate. It is not whether rent is paid or not that makes the difference between the permanent entrenchment of an elite and a situation where the lessors are not dispossessed of their land, but whether the lessors have the ability to determine rent and to discharge lessees.

Even where the market improves, and the tribal authority is able to control its lessees, people still are in danger of being effectively dispossessed. Inasmuch as the tribal authority enjoys a somewhat protected position, and also controls land transactions, its power over, rather than its responsiveness to its constituency, is likely to increase.

Use and Protection

Tapson argues that the proper use and protection of the public resource of land will arise from rational land planning and from the fact that "the tribe will be able to demand of the lessees that proper husbandry practices be adhered to" (p 6). While leasing of land may lead to lessees looking after the land, this does not necessarily follow. For lessees to be sufficiently motivated to conserve the land they lease, they must be satisfied that agriculture is profitable, and convinced that they will be dislodged if they abuse the land.

Nor is it necessarily the case that a tribal authority will elect to adopt a rational land-use plan. Inasmuch as the tribal authority will be the owner of its land, it will be at liberty to adopt any land-use plan it chooses, and it may find it most profitable to adopt a flexible plan, which is responsive to the requirements of its lessees, which may change over time. While this may lead to short-term income, it may not lead to the best husbandry of the land in the longer term.

Tapson suggests as a rational use of land, the division of the tribal authority's land into three categories: home gardens, commercial land, and grazing land. Home gardens of 0,1 hectare would be allocated "to each registered member of the community" (p 5), while arable land would be leased as previously discussed, and grazing land would

be leased to cattle owners on an annual basis, with rentals being determined by "tenders on a per head basis" (p 5).

As Cross remarks, "The land reform plan which Tapson suggests is in many ways a revamped version of government betterment planning" (Cross, 1984, p 3). Apart from the leasehold aspect, the similarity to the land-use plan of Betterment Planning — which has already been implemented in the Ciskei — is striking.

Tapson states (personal communication) that he should not be interpreted as advocating Betterment Planning, or any other blanket application of a land-use programme. It would be for each tribal authority to determine its own land-use plan. His suggested plan is intended as merely that — a suggestion, and tribal authorities should be at liberty to accept or reject it. Inasmuch as his suggested land-use programme is thus not so central to his overall leasehold programme, it is not necessary here to evaluate the possible costs and benefits of such a programme in the light of the experience of Betterment Planning.

Grazing particularly seems to raise potential problems in relation to conservation. Rotational grazing and the exclusion of cattle that are unlicensed to graze, will have to be enforced for grazing to be conserved. Betterment Planning has been unable to enforce rotational grazing when there is no charge for grazing. People paying for grazing will be even more disposed to find what they regard as the best grazing for their cattle. It also seems unlikely that rangers will be able to identify unlicensed cattle by sight, unless some disc is placed on licensed animals. It also seems unlikely that rangers, who live in the area in which they work, will be able to resist the pressures of face-to-face communities, and prevail upon people who are used to free grazing, to remove their unlicensed cattle. Rangers who were responsible to those people paying to graze their cattle, rather than to local authorities and local community pressure, might well provide a more effective service.

Tapson has argued for the importance of increasing the productivity of land, and suggested that the introduction of a charge for the use of the land, as in leasehold tenure, would secure that increase in productivity. From Tapson's perspective, land tenure seems to be the most important constraint on agricultural development, with the other constraints mentioned earlier, by Cross and myself, being seen as of lesser importance.

If Tapson's proposals for leasehold tenure do not deliver the benefits he anticipates (and I have suggested that I do not think that they will), it will be precisely because they have been unable to overcome those other constraints. Tapson's and my approach differ in terms of our weighting of these constraints. Land tenure reform by itself cannot overcome the political, bureaucratic and economic problems that have historically led to bottlenecks of finance, administration and services. Land tenure reform by itself cannot change the Ciskei's position in the wider South African economy.

The Ciskei Government is a fledgling bureaucracy, short on funds, expertise, administrative skills, and personnel. Its problems are compounded by a local government structure which, for reasons discussed above, operates with limited effectivity. I wish to argue that the current local government structure is a significant obstacle to agricultural development, and that it does not make sense to contemplate an agricultural policy based on free enterprise principles, without contemplating a local government

structure that operates along similar lines. Commercial agriculture requires a local government structure that is professionally equipped and effectively obliged to respond to its constituents' needs.

Some suggestions for Agricultural Development in the Ciskei

Up to this point, discussion about the problems and prospects of agricultural development has focussed on areas falling under the administration of tribal authorities. There are however other categories of land relevant to agricultural development, viz irrigation schemes, and released areas. Released areas consist of previously white-owned farm areas which have been incorporated from South Africa into the Ciskei. There is valuable infrastructure in these areas in the form of developed farms and road networks, as well as electricity and telephone links. There is a very low population in these areas in comparison with the tribal authority areas. Some farms are deserted, while on other farms, the labourers of the former white farmers are still living there.

Inasmuch as the irrigation schemes in the Ciskei are already established, and areas for their possible expansion demarcated, I shall confine my suggestions to the tribal authority areas and the released areas. Since the circumstances in these two types of areas are significantly different, I suggest that different agricultural strategies should be developed for them.

i) Tribal Authority Areas

As has been argued above, it is not clear that land tenure is the major constraint on agricultural development in tribal authority areas, as the agricultural infrastructure that the Ciskei government is able to provide, does not seem adequate to provide the back-up which would enable commercial farming on consolidated tracts of land in the tribal authority areas.

Only as the Ciskei develops industrially and so becomes increasingly able to generate employment and income within its own borders, will it become able to supply and fund the infrastructural and institutional base necessary for successful commercial agriculture. This lessened dependence on South Africa will also mean that it will have greater command over the resources at its disposal, making for more stable and predictable financial planning.

Such growth will attract people from the rural areas to the developing industrial centres in the Ciskei, thereby alleviating the pressure on arable land. This will allow for consolidation of arable holdings to a commercially viable size at the same time as the structural constraints on commercial agriculture become progressively less as a result of economic growth.

Commercial agricultural development does not seem to take place in isolation from industrial development and the emergence of viable and representative local government structures. Commercial agriculture should thus be seen as the culmination of a process of increasing viability of an area like the Ciskei. Until the conditions necessary for successful commercial farming are present, land tenure reform by itself does not seem likely to result in the desired increase of productivity. The likely social and economic disruption will not be counterbalanced by adequate agricultural gains, or community income.

Agricultural development should rather be seen as a long-term project, related to the improvement of the quality of life of rural communities. As their general quality of

life improves, so people will be able to commit more of their resources and energy to agriculture than at present. Some possible starting points for improving rural communities' standard of living, which could also be of direct benefit to agriculture, are:

- a) Improved access to water. This could involve the placing of a few windmills throughout rural residential areas, and the possible subsidization of water tanks for households able to afford them. This would save time spent on fetching water, promote health conditions and make limited irrigation of gardens possible. Such limited irrigation could be made more effective through the introduction of trench gardening.
- b) Improved transport facilities. People would have access to a wider range of goods and services, both commercial and agricultural, at more competitive prices. Local markets, as well as social services such as hospitals and secondary schools, would also be more readily accessible.
- c) Improved access to credit. The provision of credit facilities, whether for agricultural or other purposes, makes the planning of a household budget easier. People might pledge stock as collateral or might invest in savings clubs, or in tribal authority-managed credit organizations, where debts could be repaid by providing labour for tribal authority undertakings, such as repairing roads or fences.
- d) Improved health services. A healthier community would be better able to study, earn and cultivate.
- e) The provision of short, intensive training courses in optimal use of scarce agricultural resources, in trench gardening and other techniques of water utilization, and in household budget planning.

As these suggestions do not relate only to agriculture, the burden of their cost and organization would not fall only on the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, but would be spread more evenly throughout the Ciskei administration. Their successful implementation will require the Ciskei administration to make a substantial commitment to its rural constituency, and to mount this commitment as an inter-Departmental undertaking.

The investment by the Ciskei government in the meeting of the basic needs of its rural population should be seen as a long-term investment in the increasing economic viability of future generations. While the agricultural benefits of such a policy may take longer to materialize, the political benefits to the Ciskei leadership would be much more immediate, in the form of increased support and political stability.

ii) Released Areas

While it seems that planning for the released areas is in an advanced stage, Ciskei officials have stated that they cannot release any details until such planning has been finalized and approved. Let me then, in the spirit of free enterprise — and therefore debate — to which the Ciskei has committed itself, throw in my suggestions for the development of the released areas.

It seems that it is in the released areas, which had supported commercial agriculture before they were incorporated into the Ciskei, that the best chances exist for the re-establishment of commercial agriculture on a free-hold basis, within the foreseeable future. The low population density, the existence of a fair amount of physical infrastructure, and the absence as yet, of an established form of local government, provide these areas with substantial benefits in relation to the tribal authority areas.

The re-establishment of commercial agriculture will require the development of the necessary co-ordinating and administrative infrastructure. Such an infrastructure would have to provide for basic services such as roads, water, electricity, as well as for the establishment and running of farmers' co-operatives, marketing services, extension services and credit schemes. Such a system of local administration will cost money to maintain, as it will require the employment of staff with professional administrative engineering, agricultural and marketing skills as well as the servicing and development of physical infrastructure and equipment. Farmers will accordingly have to pay rates to this organization. Inasmuch as they pay rates, they will justifiably want to have a say in who runs the organisation.

What seems likely to emerge is a type of organization far more like a divisional council than a tribal authority. It does not make sense to try to establish a professional agricultural community, required to respond to the market, and then to service it with a local authority system that is professionally and administratively not equipped to cater for the needs of its farmers and which is not fully subject to pressures of re-election. A commercial enterprise needs a form of local government geared along commercial, rather than traditional lines. This would in turn require the development, or re-activation of cognate authorities such as municipalities or magistracies, to perform functions not catered for by the divisional council type body. It would be logical for the Ciskei Government to extend its magisterial system to these areas.

Considerable funding would be needed to re-establish commercial agriculture in the released areas, both for the establishment of a divisional council type organization, and for the provision of necessary physical infrastructure, as well as to provide farmers with the credit needed to buy land and to establish themselves. The Ciskei Government would also probably have to subsidize the on-going costs of running the "divisional council", as such organizations in South Africa are usually not able to pay their own way from the contribution of their ratepayers.

A possible source of such funding could be the Development Bank of Southern Africa, which came into being in 1983. Among its stated objectives are "The promotion of economic development in its broadest sense in the less developed areas of the Southern African economic region; The reduction of imbalances in the levels of economic development in the various areas of the region; The promotion of investment of public and private capital, and the utilization of capital funds for developmental purposes; The provision of technical assistance and training" (Brand, 1984, p1).

For the Ciskei Government to attract the best available farmers to the released areas, it may be necessary to adopt a laissez-faire selection policy, in the sense that the best applicants would be selected, regardless of whether they were Ciskeian citizens or not, or black or not. If efficiency and productivity are to be taken as important goals, then the Ciskei Government may have to establish a compromise between economic goals and domestic political goals.

To say that at this moment there may be more skilled and experienced white farmers than black ones, is not to say that whites (or white farmers) are naturally superior to their black counterparts. It is merely to say that, given the relative fortunes of white and black agriculture in South Africa since (say) 1910, more white people who

want to farm have had the opportunity to gain the necessary skill and experience required for successful commercial farming than have blacks.

Inasmuch as the Ciskei Government has publicly committed itself to non-racial policies, the development of a multi-racial farming community should not provide any insuperable administrative or legal problems. The Ciskei would be pioneering an exciting experiment designed to achieve both optimum productivity, and inter-racial co-operation.

I have suggested that commercial farming be developed in the released areas along freehold lines, for several reasons. For farmers to make a long-term commitment to commercial agriculture, they need both the security of tenure and the incentive provided by freehold. If farmers are to raise loans they have to be able to pledge some kind of security, which is usually that of privately owned assets, notably land. To ensure efficiency, farmers must be bound only by commercial considerations: if their land is controlled by an outside body, such as a tribal authority, they do not have the necessary entrepreneurial freedom. In the context of the released areas, freehold tenure will not involve the dispossession of the poor, as these areas are at present sparsely populated, largely by farm workers who do not hold rights to the land they occupy. These farm workers could well be taken up on the new farms and the citrus estates currently being established in parts of the released areas by the Ciskei Government.

The Ciskei Government's tax incentives are designed to promote industrial development and to create employment. If they achieve these goals, people will be attracted away from the crowded tribal authority areas, to the developing industrial centres, thereby alleviating pressure on arable land in rural areas. A stronger economy, together with a movement of people out of the rural areas, would provide a more realistic setting for commercial agriculture in the tribal authority areas. If this situation develops, we will be able to rethink the position of these areas more realistically in the light of agricultural and administrative experience gained in the released areas.

Footnotes:

- 1) I am grateful to Michael Whisson for suggesting this last point about the ability to secure the necessary capital loan.
- 2) The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Economic Development of the Ciskei in fact suggests that "Besides the income from the selling or the leasing of the land — transfer duty could also be paid to the tribal authority" (Lotter, 1984, p 108).

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EASTER HOME-COMING FOR ATHOL FUGARD

Refreshed from Europe's artesian fountains,
the abundant spiritual springs,
reluctant he comes,
winging south
to what Fairbairn called
'the dry nurse of lions'.

Buried somewhere in his baggage
two dozen transparencies:
St Peter's Dome, the Pietà,
The columns of the Parthenon;
the Delphic charioteer . . .
nostalgic beads to tell
in the desolate times ahead.

The quilted countryside of France has fallen away
to hours of moody sea;
the slow set of sun;
then the plane's aluminium propelling pencil
bores blind night; between Saharas of stars and sand
he dozes into oblivion, then dreams on into
the slow rise of sun,
hours and hours pulsing over jungle and bush;
early morning on Highveld grass below in sheets of liquid
gold;

and now, at last, ahead, beyond the Orange River,
drought-stricken
red as a reviving shame,
his ravaged old frontier landscape,
the Eastern Cape Karoo.

Twenty seven thousand feet below
under a fog of heat
rolling in like a breaking sea
the artless earth that bred him
rises to meet him, lifts slowly to his eyes,
one after one, wave crests of watersheds,
the breaking horizons,
eroded escarpments carved by the Sundays River,
the tributaries of the Fish
like the veins in desiccated leaves.

There, to the west,
sharp as black quartz crystal against the blue
rises the Compasberg,
among whose foothills Bethesda's dying village
carries its caravan of immortal dreams to the moon.

Straight ahead is Teebus, clean, out of Euclid,
at whose base
after seventy miles in the tunnelled dark
the waters of the Orange River well
glinting like shivering mercury
into the long clean chutes of cement canals.
To the East the head of Hangklip rises proud
close to Queenstown, so named
when Victoria's global rule was glorious;
and, neat among the tumbled Tarkā crags,
the sacred sisters, Martha and Mary;
then all the Winterberg and the Amatolas,
where Thomas Pringle's pen first gave to these rocky
nothings
a poetic habitation and a name.

Details, names, histories get lost in erosion.
Over the muddy waters of Grassridge Dam,
generalised into a geology
of sandstone scarps of blue-green shales,
intrusive dykes of purple dolerite:
the deep wheel spoors of tented wagons trekking north,
the ghosts and bones of nine wild frontier wars,
the rawhide shields, the scarlet tunics, lost
in alluvial flats;
stripped of the skin of grass and gentle vegetation
earth's pink and cinnamon flesh now basks and blisters,
stippled with an angry scrofula
of drought-resistant scrub.

Appearing now with personal insistence
buildings and fields of farms he could name;
De Keur, Katkop, Salt Pans Drift,
Swinside, Driefontein,
each African farm with its own story, each like a bead
strung far apart on the thin white thread,
a dirt road which runs beside, or crosses the rail or river,
the Fish, the Brak, or the Tarka streams;
strings from a parcel unwrapping in his brain,
seven roads converge in a knot,
knot still intact, uncut,
the bloodknot of his town.

More abrupt than ever before
on any map or photograph
the intolerable paradox:
the separate facilities
of white town and the black:
tar and trees in the streets;
no tar, no trees in the streets,
houses large in various gardens of green;
no gardens, small cottages mass produced;
stone churches, one in the manner and scale of Wren;
chapels of rusty tin and wood;
and on the edges of either area
awaiting the same slow geological oblivion
or dramatic sudden crack of doom
the dead lie in their separate lots:
one, a patient regiment of polished granite and marble
as if on the deck of the sinking 'Birkenhead',
the other a rippled patch of earth
punished by scarecrow crosses;
from which planisphere his treacherous eye selects
the parish church of St Peter,
St Peter standing still,
still standing
amongst those weathering headstones,
those indigo cypress trees.

As the sky and the world turn over and over
into endless night and back into endless dawn
red cockerels in startling relays
signal unending betrayal on always reborn horizons,
and the church of St Peter
stands
still.

In a flash himself he sees,
boy in choir stalls, hearing the lesson read:
a sense of doom and universal shame:
Good Friday looming up, a ghastly shadow
already heavy in that upper room;
and John on Patmos, exiled, old,
after nineteen centuries still Christ's particular friend,
bringing a lump to his stupid throat with the words:
"having loved his own that were in the world
He loved them to the end."

Why, as the plane begins its descent,
the pitch of the engines changing down
near Olive Schreiner's grave on Buffels' Kop,
its shadow plunging into Ganna Hoek,

Why as the plane sheds height over Slachter's Nek,
broken ropes on the makeshift gallows,
lower over the Sour Mountains, that no-man's-land,
where Stockenström Senior met his chivalrous end,

Why, as lower over the Sundays River,
over the orange groves, the desolate salty pans,
stone quarries, brickfields of Coega,

Why, as lower still
over the Ford Assembly Plant out on a wild cat strike
with bitter lessons from Aloes,
the smoke-smearred Swartkops marshes
with footpaths for Boesman and Lena,
smouldering schools in New Brighton,
street barricades up
in the match-box monotony of Kwazakele,
Why, wheeling out to sea
over the blue crinoline of the Bay
shaking its restless frills of surf
on frivolous rainbow beaches,
through which once, an ancestor
ignorant, hopeful, jaunty,
stepped into the dull green
already tragic
terrain,

Why, should the heart beat so
with what can only be joy?

For years he had raged at this intractable country:
sometimes with a shoulder-shrug like Touchstone smirked:
"ill-favoured, but mine own."
But now that is no longer enough,
not anything like enough,
now that a sepulchre breaks open
and the buried love of half a lifetime stalks
shameless and luminous over its grave.

In a place,
in a time,
as restless, violent, remote, provincial as this,
something like that first Last Supper must have happened
and words like those been said.
How dare he then,
the plane touching down,
withhold a simple
avowal of Love?□

Guy Butler
May 1973 – May 1985

TOWARDS A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE EASTERN CAPE

The Failure of the Development Plans

Region D – which is the Eastern Cape – was created as one of eight National Development Regions embodied in the Good Hope Plan for a new regional development strategy for Southern Africa. (RSA, 1981). This is the latest in a series of regional development initiatives launched by the RSA Government (e.g. RSA, 1975), all of which have had the common point of departure that the fundamental mechanism for regional development is the decentralisation of industrial activity and that such decentralisation must be directly linked with the stimulation of employment-creating investments in the “homelands” which lie at the foundation of the separate development policy. The pursuit of regional development and industrial decentralisation has, therefore, been based upon the pursuit of a political ideology rather than on a pursuit of economic efficiency.

Although the process of decentralisation was commenced in the 50s and 60s, and in the Eastern Cape led to the establishment of major textile factories as “border industries” in the East London/King William’s Town area, it was first formalised as a deliberate national strategy in the 1975 National Physical Development Plan (NPDP) (RSA, 1975). In the Eastern Cape, the NPDP created a

series of “growth points” in the Border/Ciskei/Transkei area at which prospective industrial investors could secure concessions designed to overcome the economic disadvantages associated with plant location in that area (e.g., distance from markets, cost of electricity, training for labour, cost of capital). The full package of decentralisation concessions was not available at any other places in the Eastern Cape and the focus of the regional development thrust was clearly skewed towards the Border/Ciskei/Transkei (See Figure 1). The main concentration of population, skilled labour and economic infrastructure in the region was undoubtedly the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage area which, in terms of the NPDP, was declared one of four Metropolitan Regions which were, by implication, places from which decentralisation should take place – or, at least, places to which new industrial investment should not be encouraged or otherwise facilitated. The Physical Planning and Utilisation of Resources Act provided a “stick” to use against metropolitan regions while the “carrot” was dangled in “growth points”.

The decentralisation strategy propagated by the 1975 NPDP was not successful (RSA, 1981 p.69) and failed to bring about any significant re-organisation of the South African space economy. This was due to a number of circumstances both at the “growth points” and in the

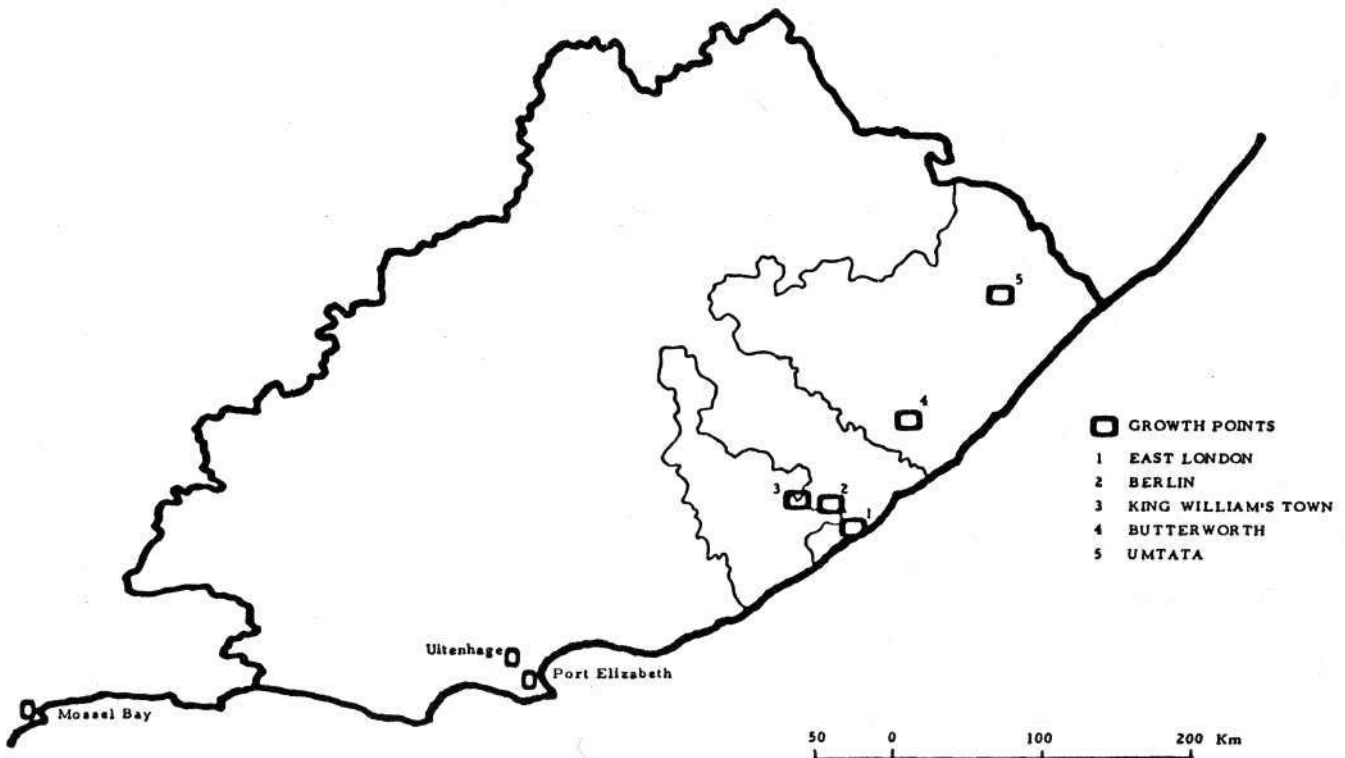


FIGURE 1 DISTRIBUTION OF 1975 NPDP "GROWTH POINTS" IN THE EASTERN CAPE REGION

Metropolitan Regions which continued to attract new investment despite the incentive/disincentive policy – especially in the case of the PWV Region. In the Eastern Cape, the strategy was unsuccessful for two main reasons; in the first place, there were simply too many “growth points” clustered together in the Border/Ciskei/Transkei sub-region. This had the effect of dissipating the impact of investment which, according to the theory, should have contributed to the development of spread effects and a series of forward and backward linkages that would ensure that a process of self-sustained growth and development would be set in motion. Divided amongst five declared “growth points” the investment attracted was spread too thinly to have the propulsive effect necessary. Secondly, the concessions were designed to overcome economic locational disadvantage, but could not effectively cope with the socio-political disadvantage associated with uncertainty about the stability of the sub-region and its political future. Thus, the late '70's was a period of indecision about whether East London and/or King William's Town would be included in the Ciskei (Conference Associates, 1978), vagueness about the Ciskei's “final” boundaries and a general decline in confidence in the area as a reasonably safe investment.

The lack of success of the 1975 NPDP strategy led to the reformulation of the regional development impetus, in which attention was focussed mainly on improving the concessions available. Little consideration was given to the fact that a significant part of the problem lay in the spatial distribution envisaged by the 1975 NPDP. Thus, the “new” plan adheres strictly to the ideological foundation of separate development and, in the Eastern Cape, this has strengthened the skewed focus of the plan's intent. **Figure 2** shows the distribution of “Industrial Development Points” in the Eastern Cape in terms of the 1982 Good Hope Plan, and clearly indicates the further concentration of relative advantage in the north-east of the region, as well as a further proliferation of “qualifying” places. There

is little doubt that the focus of “development” incentives in the Border/Ciskei/Transkei region of the Eastern Cape has effectively inhibited development in the rest of the region, and especially in the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage area.

The Ineluctable Spectre of the Might-Have-Been

It is perhaps useful, at this stage, to consider what might have happened if the RSA regional development policy had not been focussed on the spatial manifestation of separate development but on the economic imperative for efficient and effective regional development. Under such assumed circumstances, it is reasonable to expect that the focus of regional development would have fallen on the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage region, and that this would have resulted in at least twenty years of new investment attracted to that area with no dissipation of impact caused by an arbitrary distribution of incentive advantages amongst competing “growth points” in close proximity to each other. Moreover, had this been the case, then more attention might have been given to comprehensive research conducted in 1968/69 which concluded that “the growth of industry (in Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage) has shown an extremely biased development, and remains in large measure, dependent on the fortunes of the motor industry” (Phillips & de Koning, 1969 p. 165). This study indicated further that there was evidence of a possible deceleration of growth in the basic foundations of regional industry for the future and stressed the necessity of attracting new industry to the region or of promoting the expansion of existing industry – hardly circumstances under which a punitive growth-inhibiting policy should have been applied. If the Phillips and de Koning analysis and proposals had been taken seriously, then a valuable impetus for industrial diversification, reduced dependence on the motor industry and general regional economic growth could have been stimulated in Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage from 1969/70 onwards.

Such a programme would have had a significant effect on the capacity of Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage to attract

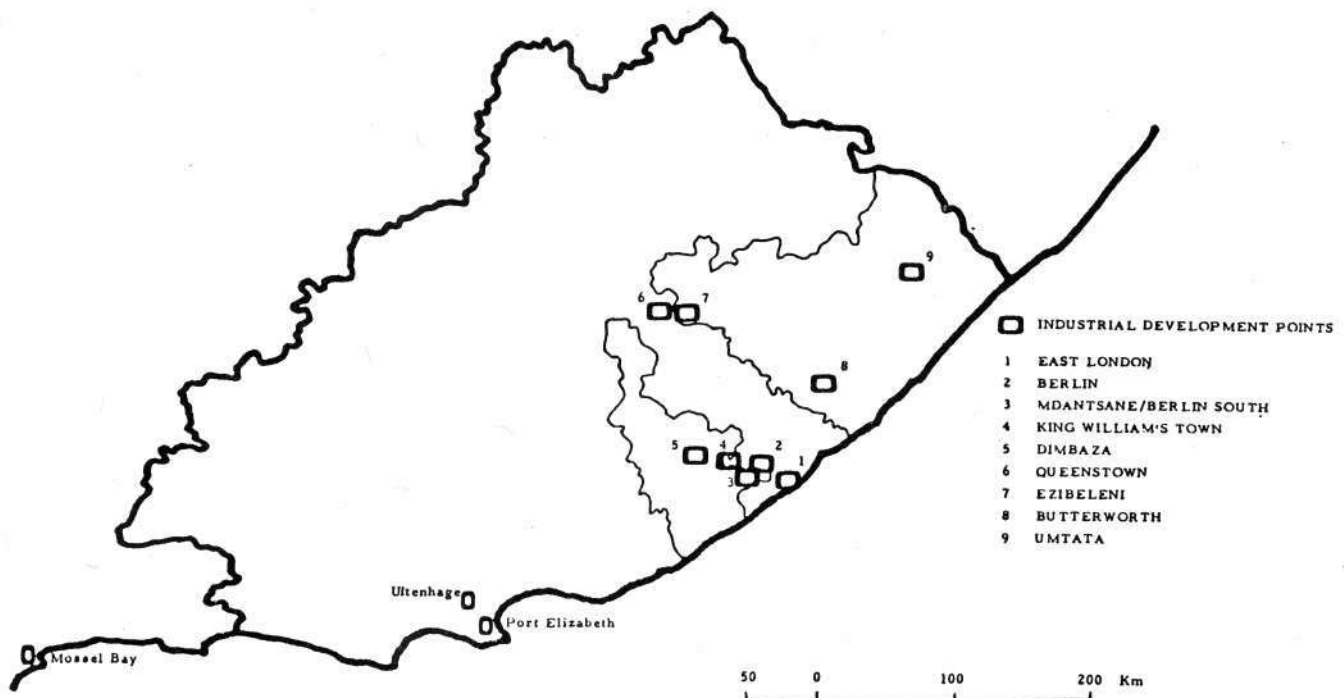


FIGURE 2 DISTRIBUTION OF 1982 GOOD HOPE PLAN "INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT POINTS" IN THE EASTERN CAPE REGION (REGION D)

and expand development investment and would have provided a significant potential force for attracting people. However, there were four important aspects of government policy at the time which inhibited the full realisation of the potential of such a programme — all four of which have currently been either dropped altogether or are under serious review following official recognition that they have not worked.

The first of these is the policy of influx control which restricted the ability of Africans to move in response to economic opportunity. The second is the view of Africans as temporary residents in "White" urban areas which inhibited effective urban planning, the availability of housing, access to secure tenure and participation in a private housing market. The third is, the denial of access to opportunities in the free enterprise system, especially as far as the acquisition and development of significant business interests is concerned; and the fourth, the over-all policy of separate development which required that African economic and political aspirations could only be realised in "homeland" areas which, in most cases, were quite unable to support the scale of in-migration that the policy prescribed for them.

To pursue the scenario further, it is necessary to assume that, during the 1960's the following circumstances applied:

1. Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage was identified as the principal focus of a regional development strategy.
2. Influx control was eliminated and adequate planning provision was made for growth in urban African population.
3. Freehold tenure and access to financial institutions as sources of housing development was available to urban Africans.
4. Restrictions on access to private business development by urban Africans were removed.
5. The process of forced removals of Africans to "homelands" was halted and a principle of free interchange with such areas was promoted instead.

It is instructive to emphasise that **all** of these assumptions are either a reality today or events are moving in that direction.

The effect of such a scenario would have been to create a substantial concentration of population, diversified economic activity and infrastructure in Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage by 1985. There can be little doubt that this would have constituted a powerful regional economic force which would have provided a basis for spin-off development throughout the Eastern Cape.

U-turn or U-bend for Region D

The object of this exercise has not been simply to dwell upon what might have been. Clearly, there is an urgent need now to devise a development strategy that will contribute towards getting the Eastern Cape out of its present impasse; and that means promoting a shift from what is to what might have been as quickly as possible. That this will be much more expensive now than it would have been then goes without saying — but there simply is no other way. In summary, the regional development strategy for the Eastern Cape (Region D) should be based upon the following points of departure:

1. The 1982 Good Hope Plan has been operative for three years and requires a two-year notice period for

suspension or amendment. Immediate notice should be given of such intent, which would mean an effective five-year access to the "new" incentive package and a ten-year access to the "old" package for the Border/Ciskei/Transkei region.

2. The full regional development incentive package should be transferred to Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage as soon as possible with additional consideration being given to a re-evaluation of the local content programme as applied to the motor industry, the vigorous promotion of export-oriented manufacturing and other innovative developments, including a full commitment to the promotion of small industries.
3. Immediate and detailed feasibility studies should be commenced with respect to opportunities for development in Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage **now** in response to anticipated growth in the Mossel Bay area as a result of the possible growth of a petro-chemical industry. When Mossel Bay does become a reality, and all indications are that this process will begin shortly, it will bring about a significant reorganisation of population distribution and infrastructure in the Eastern/Southern Cape which will shift the focus of attention from the Border/Ciskei/Transkei area in any case, and Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage should be put in a position to capitalise on this growth.
4. The availability of land for residential expansion in Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage must be immediately assessed and acted upon in order to facilitate forward planning. This applies to all sections of the population, but more particularly to the African population whose natural increase alone will exhaust the land currently available in the near future.
5. The policy of influx control must be abolished entirely with immediate effect in order to facilitate access to jobs by people and access to employees by entrepreneurs. Such action would clearly require to be effected in conjunction with the development of more effective residential expansion planning procedures and the acquisition of more land.
6. Concurrently with the removal of influx control, action must be taken to secure further land for residential expansion in smaller towns in the Eastern Cape. In this case, the issue should be approached with some circumspection, taking account of the potential for job-creation in such towns and the probable propensity of workers to migrate to other towns, given the abolition of influx control.
7. Real access to the free-enterprise system must be accorded to the African population throughout the region, but especially in Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage, so as to facilitate the emergence of African **employers** of consequence and to remove the view of Africans as being **employees** only. In this respect, the restriction of African business development to "their own areas" must be removed, and free access to industrial and commercial property anywhere in the city must be facilitated.
8. Access to freehold tenure by Africans must be finalised, and the conversion process from 99-year leasehold tenure must be resolved as soon as possible. This will facilitate the development of a more stable and

secure access to a meaningful stake in urban areas for the African community, and will promote a shift away from subsidised housing which was the basis for the old government policy which denied the permanence of Africans in "White" urban areas.

9. Two other aspects of change in the circumstances of Africans in the region require immediate attention. These have not yet been referred to in this paper because they have a much wider national application as well. However, they remain real for the Eastern Cape because without these, the changes referred to above would be considerably devalued. The particular issues involved are the following:

(i) Real reform in the structure of and access to education and training. For example, in Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage, this will involve a broadening of the base of access to the University of Port Elizabeth, and especially its Centre for Continuing Education – rather than the wasteful pursuit of a separate university for Africans, and it implies an organised approach to access by Africans to institutions such as the Technikon and the Teachers' Training College.

Some action is clearly also necessary at the level of African schools, although this matter has now been left to simmer and deteriorate for so long that nothing short of a complete acceptance by Government of the recommendation of the de Lange Committee (HSRC, 1981) in terms of educational structure, management and financing will suffice. There is very little that the region can do in this regard; the initiative for fundamental reform must come from above.

(ii) The Local Authority structures created by Government for urban African areas have been completely rejected. Throughout, government has chosen to ignore the principle of full and equal participation in urban administration and management that has been enunciated by the communities themselves. In this respect, a thorough re-evalua-

tion of the system of local government is crucial in order to restore a semblance of credibility in any proposals that emanate from Government.

The most important consideration that emerges from this analysis is that there are no simplistic solutions – to spend time seeking these now is nothing short of dangerous and irresponsible. The issues involved are all closely inter-related to the extent that adjustment in one or a few will have an immediate effect on all the others, thus requiring a further adjustment which, in turn, will set off another round of adjustments, and so on. This has been part of the problem with government's policy concessions in recent years, viz., they have been characterised by makeshift ad hoc decisions that have resulted in jerky discontinuities rather than in the smooth process of effective change that is urgently required. It should be clear by now that separate development as the foundation of regional development policy has failed, and that immediate steps must be taken to redress the inequities of the past. The Eastern Cape reflects all of the worst effects of Government policy in this regard and would be a very good place to start the process of reconstruction that will bring people together. Such an initiative will require imagination, foresight and great courage – but the opportunity must be grasped now before it slips away to be lost in the mists of tear-smoke.

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HOME FROM HOME

Seven months spent revelling in the ancient richness of Oxford's ambience and learning too quickly come to an end and it is time to leave, to go home — to Grahamstown. It is a tremendous distance to travel — thousands of miles over land and ocean — but the distance to be travelled emotionally and mentally is far greater. Happily engaged as I had been in research into the early Romantic writers I had cocooned myself in the recesses of the Bodleian, quite deliberately averting my eyes from the painful readjustments that I knew awaited me at the end of that sabbatical. But the time came to go and so we had at last to face the full extent of that distance from our home town — a distance which had brought a fresh perspective as well as a sense of alienation consequent on that fresh perspective. Now still emotionally straddled between Oxford and Grahamstown, I set down these thoughts about returning to the Eastern Cape in the early months of 1985.

Air travel in itself contributes to one's extraordinary dislocation. To travel from snow to tropical heat overnight is physically shocking but the shock to one's psyche of the overnight journey from Thatcher's England to Botha's South Africa is profoundly disorientating. In the old days the ten day sea voyage promoted gradual acclimatization. As the ship's course was plotted daily so one's emotional route was marked out. The first sighting of that spectacular mountain and bay always left one moved by the sheer physical beauty of this fairest of Capes. But from Heathrow to Jan Smuts is a mighty leap indeed. Our stay at Jan Smuts was brief, our connecting flight to Port Elizabeth was ironically the long one — via Kimberley and East London — ensuring that we would traverse the length and breadth of the land and have an eagle view of its particularly African dryness and spaciousness — a stark contrast to the airview of England, plotted and pieced in a quilt of rich greens and browns. All airports have their particular sordidness. At Jan Smuts one is struck by a bleak air of officialdom. In the concourse, early that morning, apart from the crumpled and bleary-eyed arrivals, there seemed to be only khaki-clad officials, policemen, and black cleaners.

"Children, it will seem very brown after England — it will be very hot." As if to mock these lugubrious warnings the Eastern Cape had put on a mantle of green and more rain started to fall as we left Ben Schoeman (yes, we're back in a land that names airports after politicians!). The countryside between Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown was extraordinarily attractive and we were saved the distressing heat and drought that always seems to lie just below the surface. Grahamstown, damp and misty, had put on its most English air to make the transition less marked. Yet as the days passed, even though the weather remained what we South Africans term "English", the particularly Eastern

Cape aspects of Grahamstown life reassumed their distinctive configurations. "Hello — glad to be back? Nice to see you. What was it like? Glad to be home?" For the first weeks we were bombarded by such questions, recognising them as the shorthand form of a welcoming back into the community by friends and colleagues. Not only friends but mere acquaintances are eager to probe one's mood and attitude, for the increasingly pariah-like status of South Africa ensures that a returning traveller is an immediate source of interest. Some reveal a touchy chauvinism especially in relation to England. They express surprise that I could have enjoyed any aspect of a country seen to be fast going to the dogs with a wretched climate to boot. Others with the self-absorption nurtured by boycotts ask "What is the Brits' attitude to us?". One hardly likes to admit that the media coverage of South African affairs is relatively small.

The avalanche of responsibilities, the minutiae of reorganising one's home after a seven month absence, the re-establishing of the network of timetables and lift-clubs — all this enforced busyness — cushions the initial shock. Repeatedly I asked myself — is this where I belong and feel at home? The English experience was still vivid and magnetic for I share with many South Africans a cultural pull towards England — grandparents and language have their source there — and in my particular case English literature and a particular interest in Wordsworth and his contemporaries has necessarily strengthened the ties. As the source of the material of the writers I study and teach, I have grown to know and love its topography, its history, its culture. In practice, on previous extended visits, I have recognised a total and immediate empathy which is finally more than a cultural attraction. England is still a society which values tolerance, a society where the young and the old are still seen to need protection, a society where inequality is not made part of a deliberate legislative programme. Thatcher's government is certainly bent on eroding the welfare state, promoting gross exploitation, increasing the divide between the favoured south and the depressed north, destroying a whole mining community and the distinctive relations between the British bobby and the populace — all these distressing aspects are very evident in Britain today and are the ones most likely to be known to South Africans, although the official South African view would seldom lay the fault at the door of Thatcherite economic policies. Particularly evident, because eminently televisual material, was the saddening and violent confrontation between police and striking miners throughout those long months of deadlock and increasing polarization. Yet it is still clear that the English are shocked by such a vicious circle of distrust and violence and that it is still considered deplorable for the police force to be, or even to be seen to be, the strong-arm upholders of the policies of

any one particular party. England in the 1980s is no paradise but returning from that society to this it is immediately obvious that the institutionalized violence and inequality of South Africa, its radically fractured society, makes most western nations still seem havens of tolerance and humane values.

Scenes of violence in Britain gave way in the Spring of 1984 to scenes of even greater and personally more distressing violence as the troubles in South Africa erupted. It was impossible not to feel deeply distressed and yet there was relief too at being physically absent. Reports from home told of Grahamstown's particular troubles — arson, stonings, shootings and deaths — as well as of the horrendous symbolism of a search-light placed on Gunfire Hill beamed across at the huddled townships around Makana's Kop. We were to return with children to a country with problems which seemed less and less capable of a peaceful and rational solution. The television pictures revealed the visible eruptions of violence with painful clarity whereas the conflicting strands of the daily experience of living there could not be conveyed. And now that we have returned I recognise how it is not so much the possibility of specific violence that continually disturbs, it is rather the sense that the deeply rooted causes of such violence remain, as always, off the official agenda.

Grahamstown's notorious poverty and unemployment with all the attendant ills has been exacerbated by the economic slump of the past year. Of course there is much unemployment in Britain — even well-heeled Oxford revealed this in the noticeable proliferation in busking. One even came across open begging — unusual in the English experience — but what one forgets about Grahamstown is the immediate awareness of lots of people with nothing to do and nowhere to go. The street urchins are only the most vociferous and most visible evidence of thwarted and wasted talent. The full iniquity of young children being on the streets and not receiving a nurturing and caring education strikes the one returning from a country that still invests heavily in its young. One feels angry, but better these angry feelings than the blind lethargy that descends and reduces those who cluster around one — “20 cents for bread, Madam” — to a rather irritating aspect of local colour. In Grahamstown it is not possible to avoid daily confrontations with the disastrous consequences of the system. Too small to have the glossy veneer of a city where standards of living are generally higher and the really indigent seldom penetrate the enclaves of middle-class suburbia, the town is yet too large to be a paternalistically controllable village. Already overflowing with talented, unfulfilled, unemployed, frustrated people it daily attracts the destitute from the increasingly unviable surrounding farms and is yet incapable of fulfilling the promises associated in rural minds with the bright lights of a “city”. The town has suffered markedly the effects of the severe recession. Shops seem barer, businesses have closed down. The drought is blamed — it is an obvious factor, but the term “drought” has metaphoric implications too and it is the dryness of spirit whose source is the denial of the common humanity of others which constitutes the basis of a racist society. And it is the racial aspect and its effect on every moment of one's life that stands out so clearly when one has escaped its tentacles for even a few months. It is rightly shocking and upsetting and one fears mainly the gradual accommodation to its sick demands which coarsens one's sensitivities.

Party to the System

In a racially unequal society everyone is a party to the system — the colour of one's skin willy-nilly identifies one. However much I might rage against it, as a white South African I inevitably partake of all the advantages of the racially biased system. The possibility of ordinary human relationships is remote. I seem to discern in many of the black faces I see that deplorable result of enforced deference — a little awe of authority, a lot of dissimulation. The doorbell rings. Because this is Grahamstown it is as likely to be a beggar as a visitor. Outside stands the first of the many who will come to seek help. Some proffer intricate and implausible hard-luck stories, others have long since dispensed with any attempt to retain their dignity. I do not want to have adults dependent on me because I am white and they are black. Such dependency breeds all sorts of ills as much in those with largesse to dispense as in those who humble themselves to receive what in a civilized society would be their right and due. Inevitably the petty crime rate has soared and with it an obsessive concern with the protection of property. Signs in a local hardware store proclaim “Is there life after death? Trespass and find out”, “Danger — landmines. Survivors will be shot”. Perhaps I should see them for the jokes they are meant to be but the humour is black — a society reveals itself by what it finds amusing.

As for the cultural deprivation — after the richness of Europe how can one help but feel adversely affected. Yet here too the racial inequalities taint the pleasure in what little there is. So much is only mine because I am white and thus even satisfying cultural possibilities are hedged around by elitism and exclusivity. In fact the political malaise infects my whole life, taints the pleasures of my home and garden, destroys my freedom of spirit. Returning to this country is like returning to a prison where the privileges granted me solely because I am white paradoxically destroy my well-being. Every action one makes has political implications, every move is a moral choice — to live constantly with that knowledge is very taxing.

Romantic Writers

It is a privilege and a relief to have been away — away but never unmindful, for in my researches into the seemingly remote early Romantic writers I saw a society and conditions that reflected my own. I am exploring the lives and writings of middle-class intellectuals who in the 1790s found themselves in opposition to a government waging an ideological war and passing increasingly repressive measures against its own people. Despite their profound love for their country they were often branded as unpatriotic. Increasingly aware of the growing politicization of the disenfranchised masses, they recognised the need for radical changes in the structure of their society if only to avoid the bloody consequences of revolution. Pacifist at heart they were faced with the dilemma of the need for violent measures in the face of an intransigent government. Unlike the more rugged politicians like Jefferson, they could not accept with equanimity that “the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.” Often they found it hard to resist a paternalistic attitude to the people whose cause they were advocating. They grappled with problems of poverty. Often recognising the inadequacies of humanitarian aid, they still generally shied away from the radical redistribution of land and resources which alone could

solve the growing problems. When the polarization became more marked, when the people began to reject the cautious measures of the liberal approach and assert their ability to organise themselves and advance their own cause, some took fright and retreated into support of the status quo. Others, younger and perhaps thus fortunate not to have lived through the trauma of revolutionary wars, retained their faith in liberty, equality and fraternity and remained committed to the cause of the people. But is it perhaps significant that it was from the distance of his self-appointed exile in Italy that Shelley wrote his rallying cry in reaction to Peterloo:

Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable Number!
Shake your chains to earth, like dew
Which in sleep had fall'n on you
Ye are many — they are few.

Weeks have now passed into months since we left England. Around me the Eastern Cape is in daily turmoil as unfulfilled and rejected aspirations are being transformed into angry and assertive demands. The Eastern Cape's history of early black/white frontier conflict and consequent politicization, its long tradition of missionary educational foundations, combine now with its crippling economic decline to ensure that it is now one of the country's most troubled areas. Returning to a quiet backwater I find it an area which promises to be in the vanguard of change. I must acquiesce to the reality of my being here, painful as it is. Perhaps the sensitivities honed by the respite abroad make it a little more painful but I welcome that opportunity to have been resensitised. May I retain what sensitivity and perspective I have gained thereby, for if that is dulled all that I have thought about and re-examined will cease to be creative forces, sustaining my awareness, and those seven months will subside into a dream.□

review by M.G. Whisson

DISSECTING THUNDER

Jeff Opland: *Xhosa Oral Poetry — Aspects of a Black South African Tradition*. Ravan, Johannesburg.

The **Imbongi** in the Xhosa tradition combines in his person several elements which have their own terms in English. He may be the **poet laureate** to his chief — the person singled out by virtue of his various gifts, to produce his poetry for special occasions. He may also be a **bard** who, through the memorable phrases he declaims, ensures that the history of his chief and chiefdom remains close to the consciousness of the people. This he achieves less through poetic narrative or anecdote than through allusion as he refers to the qualities of his chief and ancestors. He may be the **cheerleader**, rousing his audience to support their chief by acclamation or by their arms in battle. He may be the charismatic **soothsayer**, speaking in a state of ecstasy the truths (which are not always palatable to the authorities) which he perceives through his unique combination of knowledge and inspiration. While any element may be dominant according to the occasion, all are, in essence, combined in the one person — the character who dominates Dr. Opland's book as wholly as he dominates his audiences.

To try to pin him down — to record the cascading words whose reflections glisten in the hearer's eyes; to translate them out of the resonances of Xhosa into the nearest approximate literal meaning in English; to examine each

phrase to see if it is an original creation or a recollected "formula"; to count the allusions to beasts, ancestors, gods or events as indices of his changing role in a transformed political culture, — and say, "this is the **Imbongi**," is to try to dissect thunder, or to take a bucket of water and say "this is the Victoria Falls".

To the early European travellers to Xhosa country, the **Imbongi** had something of the quality of Cacophonix, the bard who sings to Asterix the Gaul, as the visitors understood neither the words nor the cadences and rhythms of the language. Contemporary non-Xhosa audiences, treated to the poetic performances of even such luminaries as David Yali-Manisi or Chief Burns-Ncamashe, are probably no more sophisticated in their application, and the translations do little to help them in the absence of a detailed commentary. Further, the examples of those events which Opland gives — the installation of a new Chancellor at Rhodes, an address to St. Andrews School, the opening of the International Library of African Music in Grahamstown — are as circus performances beside the olympic gymnastics for the **Imbongi**, whose genius is in his power to communicate with his own people. It is perhaps, one of the few regrettable aspects of **Xhosa Oral Poetry** that the

author treats his poets almost as "suitable clinical material" and tests their versatility and ability by demanding special performances in his quest for understanding. By doing so, he robs them of a part of their artistic integrity, even as the translations in print rob the performances of their life.

To those who have been fortunate enough to experience a poetic performance in its proper context, with the **Imbongi** inspired by the occasion and urged on by an appreciative, participating audience, the circus turns for white audiences and the translations in print are about as inspiring as reading an Italian opera libretto in English. We had such an experience with Yali-Manisi in a darkened house in a squatter camp. A research team, including Yali-Manisi, had been received hospitably by the impoverished community and had joined in a modest ritual "to tell the ancestors we are here" shortly before we left. It was an appropriate occasion to say, "thank you", but Yali-Manisi had more in store for us. After various elders had spoken their praises and boasts, against a background of quiet chatter, the stranger rose. By the time that he had announced himself the room was silent, but soon the people were grunting their appreciation and the muse took over. For a few minutes out of time the words flowed in a growling torrent and then, "Ncincilili", (I disappear). He sat down, vanishing into the crowd around him. After a moment of total silence, the babble of voices proclaimed that here indeed there had been the magic of artistry.

Opland has known such moments with Yali-Manisi, and his attempt to describe and analyse the poetry (both written and truly oral, despite the title of the book) veers somewhat unevenly between his efforts to communicate the magic of the experience and what he sees to be the demands of scholarship to locate the tradition in its historical, cultural and formal academic context.

Contexts

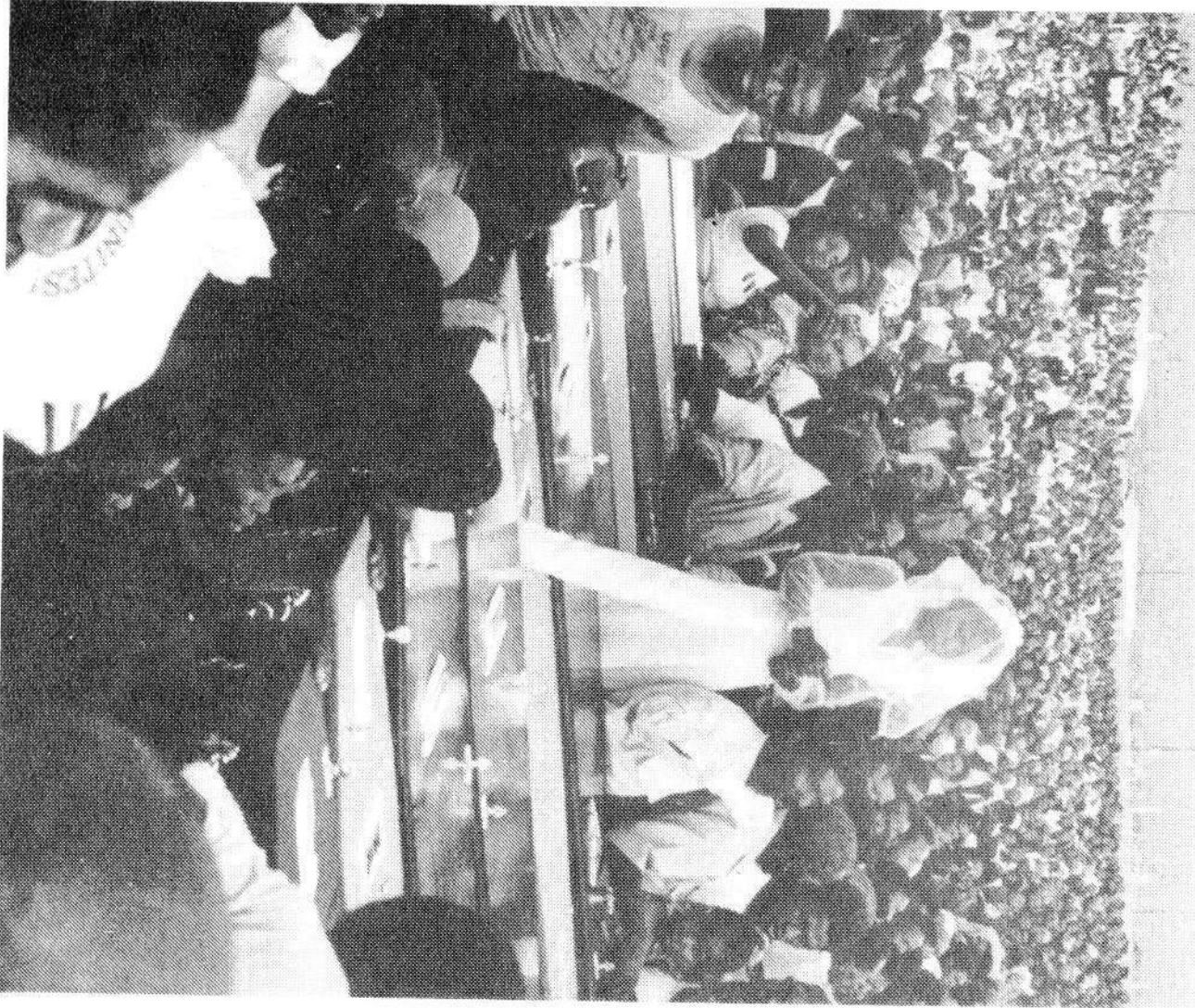
The historical context is dealt with in three of the eight chapters — in the first, where we are introduced to the **Imbongi** through the writing of early travellers and missionaries; in the seventh, where we learn of the efforts of the missionaries and educationalists to control the evolution of Xhosa literature through their initial monopoly of literacy and the printing press; and in the eighth where changes in the tradition are examined. In each case, whether it is the novel of A.C. Jordan which overwhelms the observations of Lichtenstein or Kropf, the poet Mqhayi who challenges and eventually conquers the bowdlerisers of Lovedale, or Sabata's **Imbongi Qangule** who hurls his verbal darts against the might of Matanzima, it is the poet who transcends the history and the political forces which to lesser men would seem supreme.

The more formal academic analysis, which occupies the middle third of the book, is clearly aimed at the specialist, the patristic fathers of folklore and oral performance who are endeavouring to build some sort of ordered structure out of the ritual chaos of creative performance. The input from the Xhosa material is of great value in the debates which rage in this somewhat esoteric field, for here there is some first-hand material from a truly oral tradition (though the poets that dominate this volume were or are literate). Serious language scholars, however, may find the absence of the original Xhosa texts for many of the poems a hindrance in their attempts to do more with the material than simply accept the author's word, while those more interested in the social meaning and context of the poetry will have grave doubts about Opland's research technique of demanding spontaneous performances from his informants.

Spontaneous?

The clinical exercises which Opland imposes on his poets make some sense when what is at stake is the extent to which such compositions and performances are truly spontaneous, or involve the manipulation of set phrases or formulae to a significant extent, or are largely the recitation of previously composed and memorised poems. The answers are not always satisfactory, although adequate to support the school of Ong against the more rigid school of Lord. The scholars who ask the question, "How do they do it?" in various ways could do worse than explore the concept of the **bricoleur**, as used by Lévi-Strauss in his analyses of myth. The **Imbongi** is a poetic **bricoleur**, a composer who rummages in the great box of idioms and images, phrases and conventions of his culture in order to produce a work of art relevant to the occasion. No two successive arrangements are identical, nor do they necessarily use the same elements, even when the occasions are virtually the same. What marks out the greater from the lesser **Imbongi** is his detailed knowledge of his subject (traditionally his chief and tribal history); the size of his collection of verbal bits and pieces so that he may use many only once or twice, and always be able to locate the most appropriate in meaning or assonance for his purpose; and, most crucially, his intuitive powers of recall, ordering and performance.

Another general theme which Opland explores with the aid of his poets is the spiritual or philosophical status of the poet and his utterances. The ground here is tempting and treacherous — not least because of the interaction for about two centuries between western religion and philosophy and the Xhosa world view, and the dominance of English, and of people educated in the English tradition, in the interpretation of the Xhosa tradition. Aware of the problems, Opland treads gingerly, but an interesting idea emerges. In a society without documentation (which can include interpretable material objects as well as written records) the past lives only in the hearts and minds of the living, and can be communicated only in words of oral testimony. Since it is words which create the past for the living, and the living venerate their ancestors, the words that recall the ancestors have a more than passing significance. In a sense they are what they create, and the Name is the person. Small wonder then that the men who can re-create the past, and the ancestors who peopled the past, in a form that is truly memorable, should themselves be objects of awe and respect — and obtain some sort of sacred status in the community. Their status will protect them from reprisals when they proclaim their vision of truth and the moral order — and condemn those, even their own chiefs, who fall short of the cultural ideals. The history, the analyses, the speculations about meaning and even the frozen translations are not what is important about **Xhosa Oral Poetry**. What is important is the poetry and the poets themselves who transcend the scholarly structures erected around them. They speak of an indomitable, creative human spirit which is not crushed by cultural imperialism or by puppet dictators — nor even by the paralysing burdens of scholarship. It is to Opland's credit that he allows that marvellous spirit to shine through his study. To those who despair for the culture and institutions of the Xhosa, the poets offer hope, for did not God agree to spare the evil city of the plain if but ten righteous men could be found in it? Yali-Manisi, Qangule and their fellow **Imbongi** have not bowed the knee to the alien gods. □



THE FUNERAL IN KWA-NOBUHLE