Dr Molema’s writing life is also the subject of this chapter, which continues exploring *The Bantu*’s chronological and allegorical structure. In particular, the ethnographic chapters, forming the second part of his precolonial history (his “Old Testament”), are discussed. Molema’s “New Testament” then becomes the focus: it deals with his history of “The Present”, the age of missionary and colonial expansion. The last four subsections examine his ambiguous representation of both “Present” and “Future” (the book’s last quarter).

**Molema Ethnographer:**

In many ways, Modiri Molema lived out the contradictions of being colonised: these made him observe African societies acutely. In their religious, educational and commercial activities, his family opposed many Tshidi norms. Personally, he ignited a cultural conflict by opposing his father’s authority. In 1920, Silas emerged victorious on the side of Rolong culture from that clash, and informed his son that he should return from seven-years in Scotland. But Modiri had several months to wait before Silas sent money for the passage home. The patriarch made his point: despite advancing age (almost 70), the world’s increasing modernity and his renown as a progressive chief, Silas Molema remained master in his own house.²

Once home, Modiri (aged 36) lived in the square brick house his father had built in the Mafikeng Stadt’s centre. Six years later, on Silas’ death, he became head of the extended Molema family, lekgotla member and leading Mafikeng figure. Nearby stands the rocky natural lekgotla (*Mafika-kgoa-Choana*) that his grandfather, Molema, and his Christian followers had made their refuge. Not far off is Molema’s Methodist Church, which his father’s brother Israel later rebuilt. In Modiri’s time, it was called “Maratiwa” means “places of the lovers”; he lived there with his first wife, Anna Moshoela, after their marriage.³

Silas broke significantly with Serolong culture in building a square home like his brothers’.⁴ The new architecture and the new town expressed the influence of missionary beliefs and western commodity culture on the Molemas’ daily lives from the late-1860s. Forty years on, Silas and Joshua were prominent Mafikeng businessmen and church-leaders. Silas invested the profits of his vast cattle-trading and crop-farming concerns into the newer trading opportunities colonial settlement afforded: he became a “newspaper proprietor, a retail merchant, and a land rentier whose clients included white farmers in South Africa and the Bechuanaland Protectorate”⁵. His profits in the precolonial economy funded ventures in the region’s emergent capitalist structures. As the Comaroffs observed, this transfer

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3 Solomon and Elisabeth Molema Interviews, Dec 1992. The name may be older, referring to Silas and Molalanyane Molema’s love. In 1992, Solomon suggested that it commemorated Modiri and Anna’s love. See supra, p.168. Also see supra, p.206 fn.56: MPP A979 Ad1, 16 May 1920, SMM, Glasgow, to STM, Maf.
4 Comaroff & Comaroff (1997: 486 fn.85 & 304) cited Holub (1881: 2, 13): their father, Chief Molema, preferred “‘the native style of architecture’”. A combination of African and colonial styles in Tswana towns was common by the mid-1870s.
5 For Silas’s lease agreements with clients, see MPP A979 Aa3.5.4ff, May 1898, “Memorandum of agreement between Silas Molema and JJ van Royen [sic] whereby the former agrees to lease a piece of ground known as Tantanyane to the latter...”. A979 Aa3.5.5-Aa3.5.16 contain Silas’s leases to other clients. Also Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 155.
of surplus from the agrarian to the industrial economy “casts doubt on the exclusive association of commodities and competitive individualism with industrial capitalism. Or with modernity”.6

Cattle were the Tswana’s “supreme form of property”. The beasts’ worth betokened their owner’s value.7 Silas’ sizeable fortune came through breeding and trading cattle; their crucial commodity-value continued well into the colonial era and beyond. Silas and Modiri educated the rising Molema generations “with cattle”, stated Professor Leloba Molema.8 Thus, the precolonial economy’s valuable commodity gave their owners the footholds of property, status and learning in modern colonial society.

The changing value of cattle and many precolonial customary practices fascinated Modiri so greatly, that he built The Bantu’s ethnographic chapters around them. He became revered as an expert on local history. Several Tswana chiefs-elect urged him to conduct their official installations: Tshidi Chief Lotlamoreng’s successor, Kebelepi, and Jan Masibi of Disaneng.9 In 1959, he presided over Lucas Mangope’s installation as Hurutshe chief at Motswedi. He did not live to see Mangope leading a fragmented Tswana Bantustan, including the country of the Rolong, to bogus independence as “Boputhatswana” in 1978.10

To the Molema children, the architecture of their uncle’s great learning made him remote, even intimidating, his brother’s daughter recalled:

...he had this study…into which he used to disappear, this kind of holy of holies. And we [children] brought him tea, you know, gather yourself together. And I myself in any case never got into that study and actually read all of those books that he had in there....

“Those books” were a source of his erudition; other sources were the stories or teachings that older family members and the Stadt community had passed on. Of Molema’s abiding interest in the Siege that confined him to the Stadt as a child, Leloba Molema commented: “…he would have got some of the stories from old people who participated in that [Siege of Mafikeng] including Plaatje”.11

Although Molema later decried oral history, he had grown up in a Tswana community and, by his own admission, been tutored in its cultural practices. While at school, he had expanded his interests in African society more generally, as his participation in school and university debates confirms.12

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8 Comaroff & Comaroff (1997: 208) cited MPP, Aa2.28, 18 March 1909, Bathoen, Kgosi [Chief] ea Bangwaketse, Kanye. Chief Bathoen offered to settle an old debt to Silas in “cattle or money”, showing these two currencies’ co-existence. Leloba Molema Interview, 1992: Sefetoge, her father, had spent: “…ten years [in Edinburgh]….And he didn’t have a scholarship; he was educated with cattle left to my uncle by his father, charged with taking care of his younger brothers and sisters, and I guess he did a good job, took it very seriously”. Cf. supra p.184 fn.130.
9 Warada Molema Interview, 1992: Molema’s reputation as a doctor, historian and politician spread to the Northern Cape and Bechuanaland. On Chief Lotlamoreng’s dispute with Bakolopang and the Molemas, see supra, pp.155ff. In the Molopo Reserve, Tlaro Chief Jan Masibi owed allegiance to the Montshiwa chief at Mafikeng (see supra, p.120).
10 Lodge (1983: 278) confirms that this was not Mangope’s inauguration as head of the spurious Bantu Authority at Lehurutshe (07 Aug 1959), later the apartheid Bantustan, Bophutatswana, but his earlier installation as Hurutshe chief. Motswedi is near the Northwest Province-Botswana border. Piriepa Thwane Interview, 1992. (See quotation, supra, p.247). Rre Piriepa added that well after Modiri’s return from Glasgow, he joined a delegation to Pretoria with Chief Lotlamoreng, who was judged “uneducated” and denied entry. Summoned instead, Modiri demanded, out of respect to the chief, “...a paper and a permit, because I’m not the Chief, the Chief is outside”. Lotlamoreng later said publicly, “[e]ducation is a very powerful weapon...actually a person who is a chief...[should be] educated and if Modiri did like, he could have taken away my chieftainship”. The incident illustrated Molema’s respect for traditional authority and the Chief’s regard for his integrity.
11 Leloba Molema Interview, 1992, is the source of this and the indented quotation. Warada Molema Interview, 1992: because their mother’s were sisters and they were invited in Modiri’s house by Mrs Lucretia Molema, Warada and Leloba (Sefetoge Molema’s daughter) called each other “sister”. Victor Mapanya Interview, 1992: in the mid-1920s, Modiri often discussed the past with Mafikeng schoolteacher, Barnabas Samson, Mapanya’s grandfather. Cf. supra, p.171. TsalaBC, 10 Feb 1912, “SA Native Congress”: Mr Samson joined Chief Joshua Molema in representing Mafikeng at the Congress’ founding, Jan 1912.
12 Molema, Johns Interview, 1964, and Molema (1951: 188-89) on the frailty of oral sources. Cf. supra, pp.231-32, 246-47. Also supra, pp.189ff & fn.159, 204, 206, for his growing interest in debates about Africa.
However, it was while preparing for *The Bantu*, that he consolidated his learning. Six chapters summarised his knowledge of African customary practices, accumulated by his mid-twenties. In Part II (Chapters IX-XIII and XV), diachronic structure yielded to synchronic narration as he shifted from historical to ethnographic analysis. He withdrew the aspect of time artificially to explore precolonial spatial and power-relations of daily life.

“Time-free” idealisation of the past forms, states Clifford, an “ethnographic pastoral”. Those using the ethnographic pastoral as narrative strategy deploy a “relentless placement of others in a present-becoming-past”. They anticipate indigenous societies’ imminent demise as they surrender to supposedly “stronger” cultures or, in popular parlance, “lose” their traditions: “[i]n the name of science, we anthropologists compose requiems”. Fear of cultural loss is neither only African nor only colonial. It is an old *topos* in western and Christian culture. Fifteenth-century Scots poet William Dunbar made the *Responsorium* to the Office for the Dead’s Seventh Lesson a refrain in his “Lament for the Makaris”: “*Timor mortis conturbat me*” (“the fear of death deeply disturbs me”). “The Lament” is a standard elegy about earthly life’s brevity. Although he wrote in another age and genre, Dunbar mourned the passing of the courtly ideal and a sumptuous culture of learning and poetry, much of it oral. Many centuries later, Molema and other African writers of “ethnographic pastoral”, mourned the imminent loss of their culture, though for reasons different from Dunbar’s. Molema and many of his contemporaries seemed to experience the early colonial era as a time of imminent cultural loss, and feared it like impending death.

His ethnographic pastoral nestled in an imaginary mid-nineteenth century, which he judged distant enough to constitute “precolonial” in the subcontinent: “...*before they* [the Bantu] *came into contact with the missionaries or any other civilising influence*. Chapters IX and X, “Manners and Customs” I & II, conjectured a “timeless” era of ethnic integrity, uncomplicated by war and politics. Despite stressing the “pastness” of these traditions, he asserted the continuity between past and present:

> [m]any things in this chapter are, of course, *as true of the Bantu of to-day as of those of yesterday*, but the majority would be untrue. But to avoid confusion and retain uniformity, the reader may imagine the Bantu of the middle of the nineteenth century.

“Imagine” was the key word: he asked that readers suspend disbelief and collaborate with him in re-inventing that past before...[the Bantu] *came into contact with the missionaries*. This specifies a period before the early nineteenth century. However, critic Liz Stanley observed that:

> “[t]he past” is not a time and place that “exist” (like Auckland in New Zealand; or Grahamstown in South Africa; or Austin, Texas...) — it does not go on its own sweet way whether I visit it or not. Its time is over and done with and it exists, now, only in and through representational means. Its “then” no longer has existence except through “now” and those moments of apprehension which are concerned with it.
The “now” Molema lived, from 1914-1920, whetted his desire to imagine the past that had shaped his society. Hence, autobiography was not his sole project. His “then”, a broad canvas, depicted large social groups, their histories and cultures. “Now” was doubly dramatic and violent: overtly, in the Great War and, more obliquely, in South Africa’s long “war of extermination” over land and labour. To him segregation was a broad battle for ideological and physical space. Since colonisation began, settlers had reshaped and renamed places, subduing the country into their own cultural topography. Like Plaatje, Molema feared that the seizure of African land and dispersal of its occupants would eliminate their history or open it to falsification. While writing The Bantu, he found that African history and ethnography relied chiefly on colonial observations of African subjects. His objections were not entirely racial; while he greatly respected certain missionary and anthropological accounts, he increasingly distrusted Settler representations.

Veiling his own life-story, he explained Bantu-speakers’ living conditions to British readers. This narrative contact helped him overcome the alienation he felt in Scotland. Though he extolled the Empire’s cultural values, he believed that most Britons considered South African racial politics very unlike their own. Although writing “ethnographic pastoral”, Molema did not idealise the African past. In Chapter X, he problematised The Bantu’s exposition of African culture, filtering it through Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s philosophical reflections. Precolonial Bantu society’s prerequisite that individuals sublimate their own needs to the community’s was illuminated through Rousseau’s theory of the social contract. Clarifying “Bantu communism” and “utilitarianism”, he adapted Rousseau with “advantages”:

“[e]ach of the Bantu puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and in their corporate capacity[,] they recognise each member as an indivisible part of the whole”.24

This hybridised passage displayed the state’s existence above and beyond its citizens’ subsistence needs:

[j]instead of destroying natural inequality, the fundamental compact substitutes for such physical inequality as Nature may have set up between men an equality that is moral and legitimate, so that men who may be unequal in strength or intelligence become every one equal by convention and legal right.25

Molema believed that this modern re-assessment of African society through enlightenment philosophy’s lens cast the precolonial in comparative perspective: with colonised African societies, and with universal human values. Precolonially, he argued, African “tribes” had little concept of other communities. They inhabited discrete moral worlds, applying communalism to themselves alone: “...the[ir] narrow sympathies extending no further than the tribe”.26 This world was pre-nationalist and

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21 Chapters IX and X of The Bantu were entitled Manners and Customs (I and II, respectively). “Mekgwa le Melao” is a fixed Setswana phrase for Customs and Usages (or Laws). Silas Molema entitled his short traditional history in the Chief’s Letter Book, “Mekgwa le Melao”. (MPP A979 Cc1.)
22 Molema (1920: vii) “[t]he Great War is quoted to explain everything”. Plaatje’s headlines regularly termed government onslaughts on Africans “war”. TsalaBT, 10 May 1913, “The War of Extermination” (leader): “[t]he war is very easy to steal a pin, but the Union Government should realise that to steal a whole sub-continent is not quite so easy”. “War of extermination” was Abdurahman’s phrase (Plaatje, Kimberley Evening Star, “Along the colour line”, 23 Dec 1913. In Willan, 1996: 167). TsalaBT (21 June & 23 Aug 1913, “War of Degradation”) protested against passes for women. Molema (1920: 263): “In South Africa the intellectual space between the blacks and the whites is far greater than …in America….”.
23 Willan (1984: 188-89): when they met in 1914, Plaatje may have told Molema of his recent dispiriting meeting with Johnston whom he had asked to write an introduction to Native Life. Initially, he was willing to oblige but, after reading Native Life, declined unless it were totally rewritten! See MPP A979 Da42, 15 Jul 1915, STP, Leyton, Essex, to STM, Maf, at first noted Johnston’s positive attitude to his work. Cf. supra, pp.255-56, 271.
24 Molema (1920: 134) cited JJ Rousseau [1762]. The Social Contract. [Book I, Chp. VI, p.14]: the italicised passages showing Molema’s adaptations read, respectively “Each of us” and “they recognise” in Rousseau’s original, which inserts a comma after “capacity”. Cf. infra, pp.298, 321. Chapter Four discusses Modiri’s sense of alienation in Scotland.
26 Molema (1920: 134-35) used the colonial term “tribe”.

pre-modern; overarching concepts of “Tswana” or “Bantu” unity, did not exist. Because of surrendering individual will to the common weal, the “entire tribe” suffered constricting “stereotypy” or traditionalism. Individual difference was barely tolerated; a form of mediocrity prevailed, few if any daring to challenge chiefly rule or dominant norms. Tradition’s weight stifled expressions of individuated genius and dissent. In Molema’s reconstruction, tribal traditionalism was the obverse of modern twentieth-century society, which fetishised these qualities.

“Communism” had abundant advantages: people shared commodities like land and labour, and little poverty existed. The strict moral system brooked none of twentieth-century England’s social deviance. “The unblushing abuses we tolerate in Piccadilly or Regent Street could never exist under Kafir rule”, observed Dudley Kidd, who with Evans was a signal source for this assessment.

Molema avoided trite characterisations of tribal (naively and nobly savage) and industrialised societies (connivingly mercenary), a European Enlightenment heritage. He tried to preserve each society’s complexity to correct readers’ notions of precolonial morality. Yet, two terms that missionaries and Settler historians used to sum up the differences between Europeans and Africans resurfaced in his theoretical vocabulary: “barbarian” and “savage”. To him, “barbarian” did not imply “freedom from [social] forms” and “perfect liberty of conduct”. Nor did “uncivilised person” equal “natural person”:

I the barbarian is as unnatural as the most polished civilian and has not a jot of liberty more. His actions are controlled by iron reins of tradition, his conduct is constrained by rigid custom. His very words are often a formula. Some words may be taboo to one sex, as for instance in the custom of uku-hlonipha (or to honour) among Xosa-Zulu peoples, whereby a woman might not mention the name of her father-in-law.

The Comaroffs attributed these perceptions to “evangelists and other Europeans wander[ing] into the African interior”. Firstly, humanity was partitioned in a “binary model”, which contrasted “civility to savagery, light to dark, Christian to pagan…but also condensed all these contrasts into the polarities of a grand evolutionary telos”. Evangelists and travellers also bequeathed the notion of “bounded, centralized polities” that Molema echoed in his depiction of ethnically distinct precolonial tribes.

In the above passage, Molema deconstructed western culture’s othering of Africans: western society was fallaciously seen as bound by laws, protocols and duties, while Africans roamed free, too “primitive” for such obligations. “Iron”, “rigid” and “formulaic” suggested that he, like many European writers, regarded African tradition as inflexible and unchanging. Yet, he relieved “barbarian” of some derogatory connotations, asserting that it was a relative term, like “civilised”, originally meaning “other or foreign”. Precolonic Africans were as, or more, concerned to maintain their social fabric as “cultivated” Europeans. In Africa, laws and systems of conduct governed each sphere of existence. He consulted Charles Montesquieu (1699-1755), that satirist of French civilisation, for support: “I consider the spirit of politeness to be that which will so govern our behaviour, that by our words and actions others may be pleased with us and with themselves”.

28 Cf. supra, pp.232, 246.
31 Comaroff & Comaroff (1997: 79): “[t]his assumed that the world was composed, naturally, of bounded, centralized polities; African kingdoms being the primitive forebears of the (then emerging European) nation-state”.
32 OED (1980: i, 166): Barbarian (n): “foreigner… whose language and customs differ from the speaker’s”; “one living outside… the Roman Empire and its civilization”; “rude, wild, uncivilized… barbarous”. Civilised (p.422): “made civil”; “to bring out of a state of barbarism; to … elevate on the scale of humanity; to enlighten, refine and polish”.
33 Molema (1920: 136) cited Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, (1748). L’esprit des lois, and provided the original French: “[i]l me semble que l’esprit de politesse est un[e] certaine attention à faire que par nos paroles et nos manières les autres soient contents de nous et d’eux mêmes” [Molema’s translation is cited above.]
Montesquieu’s prescription for politeness (consideration of fellow beings) was that people should live to please each other. Society’s governing principle was reciprocity, which customary forms helped people recognise and perform. Writing ironically, Molema noted that Africans were as devoted to custom and ceremony as any other people, even if some practices contradicted each other: “[s]uch inconsistencies are of course to be found even amongst the more advanced races of mankind”.34

Comparative history and philosophy armed Molema to challenge existing literature’s stereotyped images of Africans. Rousseau and Montesquieu supplied an universal cultural language through which he could translate one society’s ideas and values into those of another. African society was not as alien as Europeans might think: “it is both instructive and interesting to note the close resemblance between the Bantu polity and the ancient ‘State’ of the European nations in whom the government was also essentially patriarchal”.35

Through this narrational and philosophical strategy, he hoped to give readers unparalleled access to Africa. Making himself their guide, he organised the elements of African society into a composite whole, much as Montesquieu had anatomised the early modern state legalistically in L’esprit des lois [1748].36 He introduced readers to the two primary points he strove to make in his grand tour of “Manners and Customs”:

- That African societies were organised on utilitarian lines, for the common protection of the entire society; the individual must yield to the community’s will.
- That understanding of the allegedly “Dark Continent” would come through the reader’s closer identification with the object of analysis. This would be best achieved through cultural and historical “translation” of African experiences into those more familiar in Britain.

Table 12: “Manners and Customs”: Molema’s Primary Points

In the “present” (c.1920), aware of the South African government’s betrayals of African people, Molema began Chapter IX by discussing precolonial governments’ utilitarianism. African communities, he argued, believed more than most societies that the end of all socioeconomic organisation was the greatest good for the greatest number: “[t]he greatest happiness and good of the tribe was the end and aim of each member of the tribe”. Accordingly, daily life involved constantly testing whether one’s desires served or damaged the whole community. All morality was relative: if one’s duty was to protect the whole, then a lie might become a “good thing” if it did!37 This reasoning challenged Theal’s absolutist moralism: “[t]ruth is not a virtue of barbarian life” and that African admired those who strategically told “falsehoods”.38

Lying, Molema protested, was greatly exaggerated, but “a Bantu native was a diplomat by nature. Centuries of oppression sharpened his diplomacy and united to it suspicion of all who were not members of his tribe…”.39 Africans reacted astutely to foe and friend, and might lie to protect their chiefs or deflect a “slave-raider” or “a magician”. Whereas Theal stated that the Bantu willingly offered hospitality to “equals or superiors”, Molema declared that destructive foreigners would be unwelcome, but added equably: if strangers treated an African with “but a small fraction of the civility and goodwill of a gentleman and Christian, [they] will find the staunchest ally in the self-same savage”.40 His light,

35 Molema (1920: 113) cited Sir Henry Maine’s Ancient Law, p.135, as the basis of this idea.
36 L’esprit des lois. Montesquieu’s semifictional Les lettres persanes (1721) satirised the customs and politics of eighteenth-century France.
38 Theal, 1919: 292.
ironic style communicated that purported Christianity aside, colonists could be more hostile than heathen Africans.

The tribe was the basic communal unit of Sotho-Tswana and Nguni societies. Reiterating in this ethnographic comparison the notion that the former were more democratic and the latter autocratic, Molema compared Nguni and Tswana-Sotho lifestyles. Economically self-sufficient villages under a chief or a headman (ruling on his behalf) were tribal society’s basic units. Each village comprised extended families living in adjacent wards. Molema faultily implied that wards existed in all communities, but they predominated in the interior’s towns. Coastal settlements were more diffuse.

This social anatomy introduced non-African readers to a political order akin to mediaeval Europe. African readers, he assumed, knew these societies more intimately: many older readers had grown up in precolonial times, and their present settlements retained elements of earlier social organisation in local units of production. Precolonial African economies ran on proto-socialist lines, where the extremes of “capitalism and pauperism, competition and despair, sinecures and sweated labour, gorgeousness and squalor were impossible...”. Private property and individual land tenure were unknown; chiefs controlled land-distribution, planting- and harvest-times, and trade with other communities.

A subsection on African economic pursuits followed, distinguishing between coastal and interior societies. “Warlike” coast tribes preferred pastoral farming, while “peaceable” interior communities practised agriculture. All-told, African implements were “rude” (a synonym for pre-industrial). His definition of “technology” as the practical application of science was current when he wrote. He did not consider precolonial tools as proper technology, avoided a broad anthropological view that technology included any tools used to transform the environment. He was not alone; Livingstone had also viewed the hoe, Africans’ cardinal agricultural implement, as an “exotic and primitive” artifact. The implements that missionaries made, used and introduced into Tswana farming were part of their modernising initiative:

[The objects so fabricated become iconic of mission cultivation at large; at once instruments of production and symbols with special meaning. Thus Molema (1920:119), the Tshidi historian and a devout Christian, was to write that “no single machine...[did] so much for the civilization of the Bantu than the plough.”]

But the plough took only some credit for modernisation: the “...cessation of inter-tribal wars” combined with it to “...revolutionise[d] the practice of agriculture among the Bantu”. This coincided with Mfengu opinion, according to pioneering Eastern Frontier Wesleyan missionary William Shaw: “[i] this thing [the plough] that the white people have brought into the country is as good as ten wives.”

41 Schapera (1937 & 1956: 173) upheld this interpretation.
42 Molema (1920: 114): “...among the military tribes of the east coast...the government tended more towards despotism, the chief being a military autocrat in most cases. Among the tribes of the interior...the government was democratic, the power of the chief being limited by public sentiment...”. Cf. supra, pp.276ff. MPP A979, Aa3 and Aa5: Molema had personal experience of this arrangement: Silas was the Tshidi headman on Montshiwa’s behalf at Lotlhakana in the 1890s. Comaroff & Comaroff (1991: 130-31) defined a ward as a subdivision of a Tswana motse (town): “...two or more agnatically-related segments [of the community]...made up the core of the ward (kgotla)”.
46 Comaroff & Comaroff (1997: 135) citing Molema, substituted “than” for Molema’s “as”. Mears (1967: 89) also thought the plough the height of civilisation.
47 Molema (1920: 119) made this statement directly before the one the Comarroffs cited.
Chapter Six

Turning to African technologies of war, Molema judged them “primitive”, but devastating. Warfare was a way of life among the Bantu.\(^{49}\) Wars often began with the raiding of that most precious commodity, cattle, and escalated into cataclysmic battles. Widespread fighting between rival communities greatly added to Bantu “stagnation and stereotypy”, he asserted. To explain such warfare to readers, he invoked a dubious hero of Scottish literature, William Deloraine, a Scottish moss-trooper, in Sir Walter Scott’s “The Lay of the Last Minstrel”.\(^{50}\) The relentlessly violent onslaughts of one highland clan on another were a fitting European equivalent for intra-Bantu wars.

With evermore energy concentrated in battle, nineteenth-century wars became more violent than hitherto and disrupted civil society’s gender relations, as “[y]oung females might be taken as prospective wives to the soldiers”. In earlier generations, women were “never killed in cold blood”, but during Shakan wars and Matebele raids on the Highveld, “no female stood in the way of general massacre”.\(^{51}\) In these violent encounters, women were at risk of being victims, while the men of many communities were trained to be their instigators. He examined the gender-based education that produced this dispensation.

The Rites of Passage — Education, marriage, motherhood and polygamy:

Careful not to offend British or white South African readers, Molema hinted that western ethnographers prejudicially constructed Africans as the uncivilised, uneducated other. He retaliated with a careful analysis of the ceremonies (“Institutes”) marking key developmental stages in black communities’ lives. Attempting to surmount the chasm of cultural difference that Theal, Evans, Keane and others built between Europeans and Africans, he argued that education, the foundation of “civilised” societies, sustained and structured African societies. Daily tasks formed African children’s “school”: young boys’ learned goat- and cattle-herding, and young girls were initiated “into...domestic duties, such...as the fetching of water, the tidying of the house...”. Anticipating that readers would find African rites of maturation radically alien, he invoked the gendered labour division practised in British households.\(^{52}\) However, bogwêra and bojale retained an exotic flavour and preserved the Africa-Europe difference.

Cattle-posts (rural locations distant from Tswana homesteads) were boys’ “training school and college, and the cattle were his lessons and material on which he must experiment”. Though innumerate in western terms, young boys grew skilled at counting their cattle, and could tell “at glance, tell if any ox or a cow was missing out of a hundred or so...”.\(^{53}\) Cattle-herding also developed a youth’s knowledge of the environment (“biology”) and animal reproduction; this education graduated him from childhood to early adulthood.

That threshold is guarded by two ceremonies, bogwêra for men and bojale for women, “...the most important event in the ritual calendar”. Initiation, both a physical and intellectual rite, was “engraved on the bodies of the novitiates”:\(^{54}\)

\(^{49}\) Theal (1919: 291) had called the Bantu “inveterate cattle thieves”.

\(^{50}\) Molema, 1920: 120. Cf. Molema, 1920: 117. [http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/works/index.html]: Sir Walter Scott Digital Archive Scott’s (1771-1832) romanticised Scottish history was very popular in Molema’s day. In this epic, “stout” Sir William fights to the end (as his fair lady weeps o’er him in vain). A surviving knight menaces the English enemy thus (Canto III, Stanza XIX): “Yes! I am come of high degree, /For I am the heir of bold Buccleuch/And, if thou dost not set me free,/False Southron, thou shalt dearly rue!/For Walter of Harden shall come with speed,/And William of Deloraine, good at need,/And every Scott, from Esk to Tweed; /And, if thou dost not let me go,/Despite thy arrows and thy bow /I’ll have thee hang’d to feed the crow!”

\(^{51}\) Molema, 1920: 120.

\(^{52}\) MPP A979 Ad1, 09 July 1915, SMM, Glasgow, to STM, Maf, explained that women were performing industrial work that they had not previously done given the absence of men at the “front”. Ray Strachey, 1928 & 1979. The Cause: A Short History of the Women’s Movement in Great Britain. (London: Virago), p.370: armistice in 1918 ended the prosperity of women factory workers, who were released in their thousands.


separate but coordinated sequences were performed: bogwêra, for immediately prepubescent boys, took place every few years [Lichtenstein 1973: 72], when a royal son was old enough to lead the age regiment established in the process; bojale, timed to coincide with the conclusion of the male circumcision, drew in girls after the onset of menstruation. Everyone had to undergo this passage: an uninitiated adult was a contradiction in terms, a thoroughly unsocialized being who was unable to marry or participate in collective activities.35

Bogwêra (initiation), a cultural rather than a religious ceremony for boys aged between eighteen and twenty-one, and held every three to five years. Initiation schools conducted vital aspects of a young man’s education. Schools ordered young men into age-regiments (mephato), to perform vital agricultural and military labours and protect the chief and community’s honour. Modiri found two instructive points of comparison: during initiation ceremonies, young boys donned garb similar to Ancient Roman youths’ in equivalent rites of passage.36 Secondly, age-regiments’ military function resembled that of British army regiments, like the Seaforths, the Scots Guards, and Coldstreams. Schapera and Godwin later affirmed:37

[a]mong the Tswana...the men’s regiments not only constitute the tribal army, but in time of peace are often called upon to round up stray cattle, to destroy beasts of prey, to hunt for the Chief, to clear new fields for his wives, or to build his huts and cattle-kraals.38

They expanded on women’s duties: “...women’s regiments help build and thatch the huts, fetch earth and smear their walls and floors whenever required, fetch water and collect firewood for the Chief’s wives, and cultivate their fields”.39

Both male and female rites were secret. For bojale, young women aged sixteen to twenty were summoned to an isolated spot where older women prepared them for wife- and motherhood, and “duties to the state and to the chief”.60 This seclusion culminated in an elaborately-costumed dance before chief and community to mark the passage into womanhood. Young men and women had to be initiated before marriage. Before that could take place, the intricate lobola ceremonies had to be negotiated.

Nowhere did Molema mention conflict between missionaries and Tswana over these ceremonies. To Moffat they were “‘absurd superstitions’” and “‘profane ceremonies’” impeding conversion. Mackenzie called initiation baptism’s “profane equivalent[s]”. Broadbent termed it a “debased vestige of Old Testament practice”, showing (the Comaroffs thought) the propensity to equate the other with “degeneracy”.

56 In “Individual Development”. In Schapera (1937 & 1956: 99-107), Eileen Krige stated that most Tswana communities held only one circumcision school, and the ceremony was not spread over several years, as among other Sotho-Tswana. Montshiwa’s mephato, Manwâ, was initiated just before the battle of Khunwana (see supra, p.66). Plaatje, 1927. “The Late Chief Silas Molema”: Silas Molema headed his age-regiment, which often absented him from teaching duties in Mafikeng.
57 Molema (1920: 121-22) stated that initiates (makoloanyane in Setswana and abakweta in Isizulu) were “isolated for a period of three months, being supervised...by the antiquarians, who lectured them on tribal traditions and customary laws”. Yet, Krige (1937b: 100, cited in Van der Vliet, 1974: 229) stated that the Zulu did not usually practise initiation; while the Xhosa, Tswana-Sotho, Venda and Tsonga. The regiments cited are among the oldest in the British army. http://www.army.mod.uk/coldstreamguards/history.htm: the Coldstreams descend from General Monck’s Regiment of Foot, formed under Cromwell, 1650. http://www.regiments.org/Regiments/UK/inf/072Sea.htm: the Seaforths descend from northern Scottish counties, and served in France and Greece in World War I. http://www.warpath.orbat.com/regts/scots_gds.htm: the Scots Guards, part of the Regular Army, helped to guard London during WWI.
60 Molema, 1920: 123.
Long after *The Bantu*’s publication, Molema did field research on initiation. He interviewed a ninety-year-old man, one of two survivors of a *mophato* born during Chief Leshomo’s reign. The interview explained the time-elapse between boys’ and girls’ initiations. The boys’ school generally took place from April to June and the girls’ two months after the boys’ broke up, thus in August. Girls and boys initiated in one year were judged members of the same *mophato* (age-regiment).

Molema’s informant explained that young men were educated in the customs and history of their community during their initiation seclusion:

> [t]hat was the education of the olden days and a person who had not been to the initiation school was looked upon as an uneducated person, just as we to-day look upon people who have never been to school. The initiates were taught the order of seniority of the different makgotla of the town (motse), so that when he [sic] returned from initiation, he knew his juniors, his seniors and his equals in the village. They were taught the whole body of Tswana Law and Custom...the songs of the tribe, the praises of the chiefs of the tribe and of the heroes of the wars in which the tribe had been involved in the course of its history. They were taught something of the history and origin and migrations of the tribe.

The transmission of history, culture and general education was a key aspect of initiation and as important as the physical and defensive skills a young man acquired there. He also stressed the schools’ secrecy and that his informant’s account had omitted much to preserve that confidentiality.

Young female initiates were kept closer to the village, and not at a distant place. They still went three times to the veldt during their seclusion, each journey marking a stage in the acquisition of womanhood: *dikgwedi* (months), puberty, *go la khunwane* (to go to the red), blood that flows when “girls are deflowered” and finally, *go la matebeleng* (to go to the Matebele), becoming women. Singing, dancing and festivity accompany both male and female ceremonies’ completion, when the community welcomes the newly adult initiates. *The Bantu*’s account omitted these details, to respect British codes of female modesty, and also because Molema had not yet met his elderly informant.

Initiation prepared young people for the next major ceremony: marriage negotiation. *Lobola* (Isizulu) and *bogadi* (Setswana) were not precolonial traffic in women, as some critics trumpeted. The implied contrast between African marriages and modern western wedlock produced Molema’s amused tone: “…the parties to be united had little or no say in the matter…The whole contract was then mostly settled by the parents.”

Molema’s implied westerner might see lobola as a “commercial concern”, but it was a gift (of cattle) to appease the bride’s father, and the inverse of a western “dowry”, given by a father to a future son-in-law. Molema criticised the modern degeneration of *lobola* to bride-purchase; it had begun as the bride’s insurance against “ill-treatment”. If abused, she could return to her father’s home, where the cattle her husband had given her father would protect her. In customary law, children born to a man who had not paid *lobola* were not legally his; his wife would have custody of them, should they separate.

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62 For Leshomo, Chief Tawana’s regent, see *supra*, pp.50-51; 71. See UNISA, M842, Dr SM Molema Papers, [microfilm] 2:XM118: 77/3: 1/41, SM Molema, “Initiation”, [cited as Molema, “Initiation”]: Molema stated that this was a transcription of a Setswana interview, with some added commentary and analysis. Leshomo’s chieftaincy ended c.1818, and if this man was over 90, the interview may have been done (at a stretch) in the 1920s. The essay is undated.

63 Molema, “Initiation”, p.1. Van der Vliet (1974: 232ff): girls’ schools linked to the boys’ initiations exist among “the Lobedu, Venda, Pedi, South Sotho and Tswana”. She affirmed Molema’s comments about the timing of Tswana girls’ schools, though noted that their length varied per community.

64 Molema, “Initiation”, p.2.


66 Molema, 1920: 124. Schapera, “Cultural Changes in Tribal Life”. In Schapera (1937 &1956: 380-81): “…early missionaries and many other Europeans also objected strenuously to *lobola*, which they regarded as wife-purchase. But despite many attacks, and even attempts to suppress it, custom has been tenaciously retained”.

67 Molema (1920: 124-25): the number of cattle depended on the bride’s father’s status.
Winifred Hoernlé later extended this ethnographic description: “[m]arriage being a contract between two families as much as between the two individuals chiefly concerned, the behaviour of a large number of people to one another is changed by each marriage that takes place”.68 As already noted, Molema would not get away with a “modern” match on returning to Mafikeng in 1921.

Before her marriage, an African bride adorned herself in secret for days. When the hour arrived groom and family “marched in the morning to the bride’s abode, and there the intended couple realised their dream, without any religious ceremony”.69 Wedding feasts entailed demanding dancing and eating. Molema clearly summarised the diverse lobola and marriage systems of southern Africa, leaving lengthier description and analysis to future scholars like Krige, Schapera and Godwin.70

Molema termed Tswana marriage “endogamous” or permitted within one’s own community, and differentiated it from Nguni marriage-practices. The Tswana barred marriage between paternal cousins (two brothers’ children), while the Nguni disallowed marriages “…between all blood relations”.71 The Comaroffs hailed Molema’s account of African marriage systems as a “conventional” (though untrained) anthropological account of marriage. They expanded his view of Tswana endogamy: “[m]ore precisely, they preferred to marry cousins of all types, including father’s brother’s daughters”.

A clear pointer to The Bantu’s genre was made by omission: while he was writing, the Tshidi were mired in fierce succession battles that turned on the more controversial (and secret) aspect of his grandfather and his brothers’ marriages, seantlho. Avoiding family or dynastic reference, Molema wrote in autoethnographic mode, focusing more on cultural practice filtered through personal interpretation. Had he written autobiography, such family secrets might have emerged. Instead, he chose cultural translation, likening seantlho to the levirate. He discreetly implied that this practice did not mark Africans as Other; rather, it was an “hebraic touch” with Biblical parallels: “if a man died, his brother or some near relation of his married his widow, or…’went into the house of the deceased’ to ‘raise seed unto him’”.72 Krige located the custom in all groups, but the Xhosa believed strangers better suited to the task.

Where did Molema’s ethnography place him in relation to other twentieth-century writers? Bozzoli and Delius situated Molema and Plaatje, who “provided rich portraits of Tswana history”, at the head of one of “four early patterns of radical thought”. Rather than dismiss their connections to missionary and colonial ideology, Bozzoli and Delius noted their involvement in the slowly evolving radical critique:

68 A Winifred Hoernlé, “Social Organisations”. In Schapera, 1937 & 1956: 73. Cronin (1952: 240-48): Molema and Glasgow classmate, Cronin, may not have been acquainted, but Cronin’s premarital modus operandi exemplified Molema’s point: he proposed to his wife before asking her family’s permission.

69 Molema, 1920: 125.


71 Molema, 1920: 126. Hoernlé (1956: 86-87) explained what Molema perhaps took for granted, as marriages between cousins were common in his community. A new Tswana bride would not be a stranger in her husband’s home, being also his relative. Endogamy involved kin in a “complex range of possibilities of behaviour towards the same persons”. Hoernlé (1956: 74): yet, “the Nguni…rigidly prohibit marriage, or sexual relations of any kind, with people related through any of the four grandparents”.


73 Molema, 1920: 129. See Holy Bible, Genesis 38: 8 “And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother’s wife, and marry her and raise up seed unto thy brother”; also Luke 20: 28; Mark 12: 19: 24. See infra, pp.332-34, on his discussion of religion.

“[s]uch writers, mainly drawn from the Christian and educated elite of the time, explored precolonial and African history and sought to recover the oral traditions of their communities”.

The Comaroffs, heirs to Schapera’s extensive Setswana scholarship, accorded *The Bantu* still greater recognition. In two recent illuminations of Tswana society’s modernisation (1991 and 1997), they counted Molema a significant source on Tswana history and custom. The differences between their analyses are instructive. They advanced on his early analysis of gender difference, observing the interplay between agnatic and matrilineal structures throughout Tshidi society. Household organisation and daily operation made it a key site of socio-cultural interaction, wherein relationships of affiliation and power originated. Molema perhaps underplayed patriarchal or matrilineal loci of power, being more concerned to create a synoptic overview of African societies, and compare customs across the coastal-highveld divide.

**Dr Molema’s “Casebook”:**

(i) **Women’s Reproductive Power:**

Glasgow University’s 1919 class produced two prolific doctor-writers: Molema and AJ Cronin. Divergent opportunities for writers in metropolis and peripheries won Cronin huge acclaim in the 1940s and 1950s, while Molema’s divided career, rarer subject-matter, and — above all — his race, marginalised his writings. Cronin surrendered a flourishing London practice to become a highly popular novelist, whose humbly-born romantic heroes were often doctors aspiring to Harley Street fame. Remarkably, Molema maintained all areas of working life concurrently: doctor, politician and writer. Cronin also enjoyed a radio and television “afterlife” through *Dr Finlay’s Casebook*, his acclaimed series. Molema’s race, his more intellectually challenging books and anti-segregation views did not captivate South Africa’s small reading public. Nor, by the 1960s, did he attract young black readers, influenced by urban culture and black consciousness politics. Differences aside, Cronin and Molema never quite left Glasgow University behind: both often included medical expertise in their writing, and Molema’s study of women reads, partly, like his own “casebook”. Much of Cronin’s writing on medical themes provides insight into the lives of Glasgow medical students in the early-1900s.

On “motherhood”, Molema contrasted modern British health care with precolonial Africa’s, some comparisons being stated (general health care), but others understated (maternity care). He correlated Scottish infirmaries’ recently modernised scientific care of women with African societies’ lack of specialisation. African women fared better than their ailing urban sisters: “[i]n spite of the entire ignorance of obstetrics prevailing among the Bantu people, labour was generally conducted very successfully”. *Your* modern mortality-rates, his implied ironically, exceed those of my “primitive” ancestors!

Medical authorities struggled to relieve alarming infant and maternal mortality among Glasgow’s women. Most women thought Lying-In Hospitals “the resort of desperate women often bearing illegitimate children”. Most births were at home, more often with midwives than with doctors attending.

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77 *Dr Finlay of Tannochbrae* (Bath: Chivers, 1978) became the BBC television series, *Dr Finlay’s Casebook* (1962-1971), and a BBC Radio series. Cronin, 1952: 73-240: Finlay’s experiences were based on Cronin’s post as a doctor in Tannochbrae village.
78 Molema, 1920: 126.
Poor hygiene meant that medical personnel often bore “dangerous infection from patient to patient”, threatening mothers’ survival. Many women died of puerperal sepsis and babies died just weeks old, or inside the first year.\(^79\)

In contrast with Glasgow’s undernourished mothers, living in dilapidated tenements and wynds, African women were particularly healthy, stated Molema, owing to an outdoor lifestyle and beneficial climate.\(^80\) They escaped “those morbid conditions like osteomalacia (or bone-softening) and rickets, which are the common causes of deformed pelves [pl. of pelvis] and therefore, difficult labour in the city dwellers”.\(^81\) Older married women, self-taught midwives, attended at confinements. AK Chalmers, Glasgow’s MOH in 1906, blamed unqualified midwives in 44% of maternal deaths in childbirth.\(^82\) While Glaswegian doctors attributed infant mortality to phenomenologically identifiable causes, Africans blamed: “…evil spirits [making] the child unwilling to [enter] the world”. As discussed, Molema mistrusted traditional healing, and discounted the “infallible roots and herbs, the witch-doctor...[used to] protect the baby against all evil powers, whether natural or supernatural”.\(^83\) For him, the line between medicine and witchcraft, religion and superstition was abundantly clear.

(ii) Women’s Productive Power:

Molema managed to distance his Christian disapproval of polygamy, in order to convey its precolonial importance. He wrote without reference to missionaries and settler historians who judged it baffling and immoral: “[t]he documentary record is filled with reports of ordinary [Tswana] men and women trying patiently to explain to the churchmen the unique significance of conventions such as bridewealth, polygyny, or rites of passage”.\(^84\)

Molema explained polygamy logically and rather humorously. Utilitarianism justified it, as constant warfare skewed the ratio of men to women. So, taking wives (plural) was a community’s “…salvation from extinction, nay, the increase of the tribe, and therefore its chance…of withstanding [and] conquering hostile tribes”.\(^85\)

Theal, who regarded polygamy as another sign of the Bantu’s “low” morality, added that it might be justified to compensate for male deaths in warfare. He saw polygamy as a precolonial “hangover” still useful in the colonial era: the Cape 1904 Census showed that for every 100 men there were 106 women. His moralistic outlook differed from Molema’s purely ethnographical interest:

[b]y force of circumstances, in many parts of South Africa polygamy is greatly decreasing among these people at the beginning of the twentieth century, but for their own sakes it may be hoped that it will not quite cease until they learn to have more command over themselves than is the rule at present.\(^86\)

\(^79\) Olive Checkland (“Maternal and Child Welfare”. (In Checkland & Lamb, 1982: 117) called the maternal and child health care problems “intractable” and (p.124) cited Chalmers (1930: 258): Puerperal sepsis deaths peaked at 64.8% a decade before Molema joined the Western Infirmary, and dipped to a still severe 39.3% (1915), and 31.3% by his last year (1920).

\(^80\) Mears (1967: 95) made this racially-offensive, sexist comment on African women’s strength: “[t]he hampering long dresses and innumerable petticoats, which nineteenth-century fashions of respectability and native ideas [about] the dignity of married women popularized…threatened to destroy the usefulness of the wonderful strength and virility of the native women”.

\(^81\) Molema, 1920: 126.

\(^82\) Checkland & Lamb (1982: 124) cited Glasgow, MOH AR (1907), 14.


\(^84\) The Comaroffs (1991: 245) used “polygyny” to describe a man’s multiple relationships with women (plus extra-marital encounters), as distinct from “polygamy”, which refers to the social system permitting a man to take more than one wife.


\(^86\) Theal, 1919: 278.
He hinted that in sex as in warfare African male lust went untempered. African demographic increase gravely concerned Theal and his ethnographic peers, who expatiated with lips curling in distaste, on polygynous Africa’s thriving procreation! Western Christian standards were dominant norms to these writers, who discounted African marital ones entirely.

Appearing cool-headed and non-judgmental by comparison, Molema situated polygamy in relation to mothering and nurturing, and the low cost of raising a child:

Bantu women had none of the new-fangled ideas about having only a limited number of children. Each woman bore as many children as she safely could without prejudice to health, and generally, the more children she had, the more she was proud of herself. This, combined with the fact that almost every woman without exception bore children, tended to swell the numbers of each Bantu tribe.87

Perhaps he intended to shock readers with tales of African family sizes, as his playful tone hinted: an average Bantu family had nine children, though some as many as twenty-four. There ended his deliberation on a topic that drove moral panic into the hearts of white administrators and members of the white public: the ratio by which black people outnumbered whites in South Africa was often discussed in terms that associated African “virility” and “fecundity” with animal increase.88 Dubow found that,

...the first decade of the twentieth century it was becoming clear to experts that the Bantu-speaking African population of the country, far from “dying out” as other aboriginal people did when confronted with European colonisation, was, in fact, increasing.89

Despite using Theal and Evans as sources, Molema avoided many of their opinions, and held reports of polygamy greatly exaggerated. Although many Africans supported it in theory, few could actually afford it; given the strain marriages placed on the cattle budget, most men married just once. So, material conditions rather than changing belief systems curtailed polygamy. He let two erudite cynics make his point:

[the philosopher Schopenhauer and also Voltaire have stated that polygamy is the natural inclination of all men. That, in other words, monogamy is a forced condition due to divers circumstances. In this case, the circumstances that enforced monogamy were, for the most part, lack of means.]90

In royal dynasties, polygamy regularly exacerbated succession disputes between a chief’s heirs by various wives. Take Xhosa inheritance practices. Only a son of the chief’s Great Wife (usually his last and youngest, wed in his old age) could inherit, often meaning that the new chief was perilously young, which could induce a power vacuum and political fission.91 In Setswana, the Comaroffs added, “polygyny, lefufa, was also the generic term for ‘jealousy’ [and]...the vernacular for ‘cowife’ (mogadikane) [is] derived from go gadika, ‘to rival, to annoy,’ or, even more vividly ‘to cause a pain in the stomach’”.92 Enough said.

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88 Evans (1911: 63) called Africans a “…virile people, all the women of whom marry, who exercise no artificial restraints, but to whom a man child is strength to the clan and a woman child more cattle in the kraal…” . Theal (1919: 211 & 143): “[the Bantu] were probably the most prolific people on the face of the earth. All the females were married at an early age, very few women were childless, and in most…tribes provision was even made by custom for widows to add to the families of their dead husbands” and “…the [Bantu] to-day outnumber by more than threefold all the other inhabitants of the country put together, and are still increasing at a marvellous rate”.
89 Dubow (1995: 168) noted Theal’s 1910 fears in particular.
90 Molema, 1920: 129.
91 Xhosa politics was riven with such disputes. See Jeff Peires, 1981. The House of Phalo: a History of the Xhosa People in the Days of their Independence. (JHB: Ravan), Chapter 3.
Molema’s approach to the role of women was progressive, after his father’s example. Not an old-school traditionalist, Silas had educated his and Joshua’s sons and daughters. Modiri attended two co-educational Eastern Cape schools, and had almost as many women as men in his graduating class at Glasgow University. His relations with his sisters Seleje and Harriet seemed warm and equal, though they deferred to his seniority just as his brothers did. Besides, he was in Britain at a liberating moment, observing women’s entry into spheres of work outside the home, which effected a great shift in British and to an extent South African gender relations. His anti-patriarchal stance permeated *The Bantu.*

Raising no religious objections to polygamy, he still abhorred its diminution of “respect for women”, which monogamous marriage promoted. Yet, polygamy deterred some great western evils, like prostitution, “that terrible scourge of most...civilised countries — entirely unknown to the Bantu”. While Theal’s claims that polygamy averted the betrayals and hypocrisy bedevilling single-partner marriages may have informed Molema’s work, he may have been expressing his own views on past and present Tswana lifestyles. For a moderate man, his analysis of African and western women, begun in his depiction of motherhood, was revolutionary for its time. Irony illuminated this comparison of western and African societies:

[It]here is not the slightest doubt that among the Bantu in general, women were not the happy themes of poetical essays as they are among civilised nations of modern times, nor were they the objects of chivalry as they were in mediæval times in Europe. No doubt also the women among so rude a people did not receive the same consideration as they do among the more advanced races, among whom...they do not enjoy equal rights with men, but the idea of their having been repressed and reckoned with property is a confession of entire ignorance, or want of due appreciation of the Bantu custom.

By comparing “so rude a people” favourably with the “civilised nations of modern times”, he subtly unseated “the West” from the pinnacle of “progress”. If western women lacked equal rights with men, how could Europeans protest the “oppression” of African women? He also hinted that his sources (not specifically named) had ignored the inequalities in western society, while complaining that the Bantu maltreated women, — a misreading of Bantu culture. Implicit in this statement was an understanding that ethnographic judgements often reveal more about the ethnographer than the object of analysis!

*The difficulty of knowing the culture of the Other — “Motho ga itsioē ese naga” (“A Human Being, unlike a Country, cannot be thoroughly known”):*

Molema found cultural misunderstanding habitual to the colonial encounter. Thus, he sought to explain the structure of public life and communication in the second part of “Manners and Customs”, dealing with culture’s expressive forms: language, jurisprudence, crime, punishment, and natural philosophy (science).

Misrepresentation of the differences between colonising and colonised cultures was frequent, especially when the latter were simply treated as the objects of colonial policy. As a Christian and colonised writer, Molema portrayed a society without industrial concepts of time, urgency, and saving “for the

93 See supra, p.190 & fn.161.
94 MPP A979 Ad1, 06 Oct 1918, SMM, Glasgow, to STM, Mafikeng and Ad1, 09 July 1915, SMM, Glasgow, to STM, Maf, and supra, p.300 fn.52.
97 Suffragettes suspended their protests during the war. Strachey (1928 & 1979: 367-69): British women were only enfranchised in 1918.
98 Plaatje (1916b: 70, Proverb 462): in modern Setswana orthography, *itsioē* is written *itsiwē*. Multilingual Plaatje gave as the European equivalent, a French maxim, by Luc de Clapiers, Marquis de Vauvenargues (1715-47), from Pensées diverses: “Les hommes ne se comprennent pas les uns les autres. Il y a moins de fous qu’on ne croit” (“Human beings do not understand one another. There are fewer mad people that one would believe”).
...the Bantu were remarkable for that mental torpor, that self-complacency, that uninitiative and carelessness of futurity which is so characteristic of ignorant people of all nations and classes. The average Muntu (pl. Bantu) was perfectly satisfied to speak, to act, and to live as his father and grandfather had done before him.99

He refused to represent “Merrie Africa”, a blissful precolonial world before the wicked colonials’ arrival. Yet, the first part of this statement’s apparent pro-settler harshness may have prompted critics to call Molema reactionary.100 To some extent, it is a class perception, rather than racial betrayal. He wrote as an educated man appraising the precolonial African peasantry’s behaviour and attitudes. The paragraph, at the end of Chapter IX, also summarised his critique of tradition’s role in paralysing individual initiative and change. What actually turns the statement into a positive comment is “ignorant people of all nations and classes”: he was elevating Africans from their low status in Theal, Stow and Keane’s eyes; they were no better or worse than any pre-industrial peasantry.

The notion of the noble savage informed many European perceptions of the “barbarous” peoples of Africa. Molema intended to show that “barbarous or savage” communities did not live in a state of nature, without social or moral constraints. Law and custom carefully regulated African societies, and transgressors were duly disciplined. Indeed, he injected the typically negative term “barbarian” with new meaning. He dismissed the colonial fiction (with Renaissance origins) that indigenous people lived as “natural beings”: “[t]he barbarian is as unnatural as the most polished civilian, and has not a jot of liberty more”.101 “Natural”, not only the converse of “social” and “conceptual”, also connoted “foolish”, and “low-born” or, in the religious sense, “without spiritual enlightenment”.102 He deconstructed the European binary opposition, barbarian-civilian, to open up African culture to readers. His analysis made of “barbarian” another pre-capitalist lifestyle, rather than an entirely Other existence.

Rather than existing in a state of nature, “tribal” individuals let tradition shape their identity, which inhibited questions about such cultural forms. Just as members of European societies were created by and in turn create language, so were precolonial Africans. For instance, an individual speaker often used formulaic language, immediately recognisable to other community members. Certain words might be taboo to one gender: a married Nguni woman is taught “uku-hlonipha”, the language of respect to one’s in-laws. She may not say her father-in-law’s name, nor look directly at her daughter’s husband. Another linguistic ritual, greeting, is extremely important, as it helps to define the respective interlocutors’ social status: “[t]he inferior was expected to recognise his superior, and the visitor his host”. He did not add that, in greeting, respect is also accorded to age: the personal pronoun and subject concord change from singular to plural.103 The decision to shake hands (widely popular in African society) is up to the more important person.104

99 Molema, 1920: 144.
101 Molema (1920: 136): this discussion of “natural man” followed his application of Rousseau and Montesquieu to the South African situation and indicates the sources of his concern to redefine “barbarism”. See supra, pp.297-98
102 _OED_ (1980: I, 1899); “natural” meaning “naturally deficient in intellect, half-witted” was still used in 1876. Also current at the time was the Renaissance sense of natural man as “unaccommodated man”, the condition a man may descend to when living entirely without socialisation. See Shakespeare, 1914. _King Lear_. [c.1608] Ed. WJ Craig. (Oxford: Clarendon), III, iv, 110, p.1072.
103 In Setswana, a mother greets her daughter, “O kâe, wêna?” (“how are you?”). Her daughter replies, “Ke tê ng, mme, lonà le kâe?” (“I am fine, mother, how are you?”). The singular subject concord becomes plural: _O_<le; the singular second personal pronoun becomes you plural: _wêna_ < _lonà_. These modulations show the younger person’s respect for the older person’s status.
Socially recognised gestures also accompany the serving of food. A host was obliged to taste a little of the food being offered to a guest to indicate that it was wholesome and not poisoned. The guest should receive the food with both hands; using just one hand was “extremely bad form”. Moreover, when receiving meat, a male visitor should wish the herd well: “May your sheep (or cattle…) abound!” and “May your liberality increase!” If an important guest visited for some days, it was proper to kill a beast in his honour, and let him take the meat with him on departing. A polite visitor would leave some meat for the host. 105 These may seem small linguistic and physical gestures, but without them, an African would be thought unmannerly, and the texture of daily culture lost.

Customs that generally offended Europeans were not just explained, but represented as normative in African society. One was animal slaughter for specific occasions, which Theal denounced as “revolting cruelties [which] shocked no heart among the spectators, for the Bantu in general were utterly indifferent to the sufferings of animals...”. 106 His damning remark left much unsaid: implicitly, he accepted commercial killing in butchery or shambles, but judged wielding the knife oneself, perhaps while chanting ritually before assembled relatives “uncivilised”. In African societies “each one was his own butcher”, Molema clarified. African Gods had not fixed their cannon against animal-slaughter. 107 The power structure in which Theal wrote legitimised his ethnographic interpretation, but simultaneously disempowered the views (and the society) Molema represented, rendering them “Other” to the colonial norm. Molema’s perspective as an educated Christian would cause him to render as Other the views of non-Christian African communities as well as those he termed uncivilised. 108

“More things in heaven and earth, Horatio/ Than were dreamt of in your philosophy...” 109

Had the imagined reader, after high tea on a wet afternoon, thought The Bantu’s cultural tour might clarify the issue of misrepresentation, Chapter XI, “Moral Conduct”, would have demonstrated its irreducible complexity. Later, after digesting its epigraph from Hamlet and the ensuing chapter, Shakespeare would, perhaps thaumaturgically, have illuminated the rationale of Molema’s cultural translation. 110 “Moral Conduct” was a chapter on methodology.

Shakespeare’s meaning emerges as one absorbs Molema defiance of ethnographical and political heavyweights who upheld African people’s intrinsic inferiority. He tackled their “loud condemnations”,

...which state that the Bantu in common with other Negroes are, among other things, cruel, devoid of the virtues of truth and honesty, possessed of strong animal passions and extremely lustful, hopelessly lazy, irresponsible as children, shameless and immodest. Some state them immoral, others declare that they are unmoral. On the other hand there are a few others who lay claim to a more thorough acquaintance with the Bantu, and who deny these sweeping denunciations, and in fact adopt quite the opposite attitude.

Many negative opinions, he asserted, compared the poorest samples of the African population, and “the noblest ideals of European society”. 111 He found this unfairness odious:

[i]t is a relative misrepresentation, a disproportionate picture, and is as far from the truth as it would be to go into the slums of any European city and describe the inhabitants of those quarters as representing the nation.

105 Molema (1920: 137-38) inserted the Setswana proverb for this occasion: “Mocoa [motswa] Kgomo gase lesilo” (He is an ill guest that does not drink to his host”. Cf. Plaatje (1916b: 61, Proverb 386).
108 See infra, p.350.
110 Hamlet, p.1030, III ii, 385-396. Molema (1920: 149): “[t]he [Bantu] race may be said to be on probation in these thaumaturgic [miraculous] things called civilisation and Christianity, whose precepts they must accept”.
111 Molema (1920: 145) is also the reference for the above quotation.
Imagine, reader, a man or woman taken from the Cowcaddens or Gallowgate in Glasgow…and shown to the world as a representative and type of the Glasgow…citizens. 112

Molema’s own circumstances intruded into The Bantu as a useful comparison. Medical considerations were never far from his thoughts. Cowcaddens and the Gallowgate had long been abject Central Glasgow slums where people suffered permanent hunger and dread urban illnesses. 113 Ten years before his arrival, voluntary associations began offering free meals to pregnant and nursing mothers in Cowcaddens and the grim Gallowgate, near the Clyde’s noxious waters. Both wretched areas were in walking distance of his less indigent Partick lodgings and the university neighbourhood. Conditions had not improved much by World War I. 114 Cronin’s description of the medical shops that non-degreed, unscrupulous Licentiates of the Medical Faculties ran in these seedy areas showed what inadequate health care the slums received. 115

As a trainee-doctor gaining practical experience at the Western Infirmary, Molema treated patients from Glasgow’s underbelly. 116 Seven years in the city probably made him more able to evaluate Glasgow than many brief sojourners in South Africa were to judge it. Too often, he lamented, travellers with fleeting glimpses of Africa rushed into print as “authorities”. Great Lakes explorer, Joseph Thomson underlined the point: “[i]t can only be by a prolonged residence in the district and a thorough command of the language that a person is entitled to speak with the confidence of certain knowledge”. 117

Molema argued (following Thomson) that studying Africa involved important epistemological questions. Yet, many itinerant scholars commented opportunistically, using inadequate information, “grossly exaggerated reports” or “ex parte statements”. Length of stay alone did not make one expert; it often just increased racial prejudice. Ill-informed, racially-biased statements (“slander-mongering”) could stir up still more “race-conflict”. 118 A fatal flaw imperilled colonial knowledge of Africa:

...people of one nation measure the moral character of every other nation, not by any standard recognised by the world, and representative of all nationalities — civilised and uncivilised — not by a common measure, but by their own ethical standard. 119

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112 Molema (1920: 146-47) cautioned that going to the opposite extreme and judging only exceptional Africans was likewise unjust. Chalmers (1930: 44): in the 1911 Housing Report designated for demolition and reconstruction many areas (city centre, Gorbals, Broomielaw and Cowcaddens), where the death rate exceeded the city’s average. Cf. supra, p.216 & fn.111.

113 See “Map of Central Glasgow”, supra, pp.215-16. TC Smout, 1986. A Century of the Scottish People, 1830-1950. (London: Fontana), p.30, cited Reports on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Scotland. (House of Lords Papers, 1842, v.28, p.156: in 1855, Edinburgh Royal Dispensary’s Neil Arnott and social reformer Edwin Chadwick found Glasgow’s Central slums lacked sanitation entirely. The small passages swarming with humanity were “…dung receptacle[s] of the most disgusting kind….This picture is so shocking that, without ocular proof, one would be disposed to doubt the possibility of the facts”.

114 According to Carolyn Pennington (“Tuberculosis”. Checkland & Lamb, 1982: 86-88). TB was one among several acute respiratory diseases prevalent in Glasgow. After the isolation of the tubercle bacillus (1882), hospitals like the Western Infirmary treated it more aggressively. The bacillus thrived in unpasteurised milk, so supplying safe milk to urban populations was a vital to fighting the disease. Checkland & Lamb, 1982: 214-29, Appendix II. “Glasgow chronology, health and sanitation measures, 1800-1890”: Glasgow’s epidemiological profile for 1910-20 reveals these instances of reported disease: (c) = cases, (d) = deaths. Enteric (typhoid): 963 cases (c) 148 deaths (d); Typhus: 31 (c); Whooping cough: 1610 (d); Smallpox: 536 (c) 112 (d); Measles: 29,514 (c) 1,399 (d); Pneumonia: 1,278 (d). Tuberculosis: 2,534 (c) 1,457; (d). Influenza: 3,934 (d). Malaria: 1,428 (c).


116 Lamb (1982: 35 et passim): the Western Infirmary (opened 1874) was one of several public hospitals established in the later-1800s. In 1880, Glasgow city fathers attempted to improve student access to medical training and offer better services to the city’s escalating population by opening the Infirmary’s medical school opened on Gilmore Hill.

117 Molema (1920: 146) cited Joseph Thomson, To the Central African Lakes and Back. [N.pub, Nd], pp.139, 328.

118 Molema (1920: 147-48) again advised on taking these quibbles “cum grano salis” (with a grain of salt). Cf. supra, p.268.

119 Molema (1920: 147) referred to the Journal of International Ethics (omitting the article’s author and title): “[w]here international morality is in question, the average ethical teacher finds himself quite beyond his depth. His criticisms and his judgments are beside the mark because they are based upon a single code. He is bound to the standards of his nation or his own particular school, while it usually happens that the nations criticised are following very different standards”.
Thus, Molema articulated the principal issue of colonial and postcolonial writing: representing the “Other”. Colonial misperception governed the public’s outlook on Africa, and involved notions of race and culture, and marginalising indigeneity. His observations partly anticipated postcolonial theorists’ insights into western conceptions of the colonised. Importantly, the problem was, for him, first philosophical, then political. He proposed, as an alternative to western misrepresentation, a variant of cultural relativism, which recognised colonised cultures as equivalent rather than inferior to those that strove to dominate them:

[t]he Bantu people have their own moral code which differs very much from those of other nations. Their ethical beliefs alone guide their conduct and behaviour, and...are peculiar to them only, as with every other nation the prevailing ethical beliefs are restricted to that nation, and virtue or vice is judged according as the practices are in conformity with or opposed to the beliefs.

His idea that intensive exposure was essential to comprehending others was accepted ethnographic practice. Evans advised: “[t]o know a race, one must live with them”. Still, prejudice distorted observation of the “Other”. Evans’ views resembled white segregation: no amount of intimacy with Africans prevented one finding “…deep-seated hidden race tendencies...[making one wonder if]...any white man will ever be able to understand the workings of the black man’s mind and spirit”. Despite Evans’ belief, like many contemporaries, that racial encoding gave blacks and whites’ mental capacities separate and unequal, Molema usually respected his scholarship. Believing racial difference immutable, Evans backed segregation to protect each race’s physical and cultural difference. Black and White in South-East Africa concluded:

[t]he white man must govern...The main line of policy must be the separation of the races as far as possible, our aim being to prevent race deterioration, to preserve race integrity, and to give to both opportunity to build up and develop their race life.

Thus, segregation was an enlightened creed, its entrenchment of white power and economic advantage notwithstanding. He wrote in the wake of late nineteenth-century academic and popular anxieties to stem racial “degeneration”, a composite notion derived from Victorian moral panics over “mass industrial society, disenchantment with liberal universalism, apprehension about racial decay and social disorder, and confusion about progress and modernity". Conceptually, “degeneration” drew on Social Darwinist fears about the continuity of western “progress”, and both promoted the idea of “whites’ biological superiority and a perception of their social vulnerability”.

Implying a synergy between Evans’ segregationism and government policy, Molema cited Smuts’s Savoy Speech on the Native Affairs Administration Bill (1917): “[b]lack and white are not only different in colour, but in their soul also”. His prefatory words, “[t]he general said, whatever he meant to imply...”, distanced him from Smuts’s racism. He later called Smuts’s bluff, challenging him to allot equal amounts of land to blacks and whites. Equitable segregation would not entrench power in white hands: “[a]s regards political rights, race and blood should not be made the ground of

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120 See supra, pp.241-42, on Orientalism.
123 Evans, 1911: 310-11. Evans (1911: 281, 242) believed that “miscegenation” would “have a serious effect on the moral status of both races”. To him, segregation was: “...[f]atherly rule for the majority; Provision for the emancipation from tribal rule and custom as they become fully fitted and desire it”.
discrimination”. He sardonically noted that the property-based franchise might then exclude “some of the poorest... most ignorant whites”.126

Molema strove to realise both races’ ethics and morality.127 He demonstrated precolonial African society’s strong legal, moral and cultural systems. Contrary to Theal, Evans and Smuts’s doubts, he declared, “the Bantu have a conscience...”, exhibiting his primarily humanist beliefs.128 Allaying readers’ doubts, he cited Enlightenment philosopher, Kant, in whose writings western Modernism was grounded, to argue: “[c]onscience is not a thing to be acquired, and it is not a duty to acquire it; but every man, as a moral being, has it originally within him”.129

Evans and Smuts exhibited a racial essentialism that Molema did not entirely escape, but his belief that all groups were equally moral decidedly favoured relativism. An unequaled amalgam of these two frameworks, essentialism and relativism, characterised his work: “[t]he moral ideas of the Bantu differ in no essential feature from the moral ideas current among the most civilised nations of Europe...”.130 This equation was provocative as he distinguished morality from intellectual and practical issues. Using the term “backward”, he contrasted Africans’ circumstances to early forms of global knowledge and technology. He did not mean intellectually “retarded”, but behind in learning, a deficiency adequate education could easily remedy.

As stated, The Bantu exhibited a “cultural relativism” or nascent “environmentalism”, an emergent social science critique of evolutionary thought and eugenics. In 1911, its principal American proponent, Frantz Boas, propounded “the plasticity of human types”, and opposed the orthodoxy that all races began savage, then scaled the evolutionary ladder to civilisation’s heights.

While Molema left no evidence of having read Boas, two clues hint at contact with his influence: Du Bois and Johnston. Boas (1858-1942), a German Jewish anthropologist settled in the USA, mentored Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Zora Neale Hurston — and Du Bois.131 Molema greatly admired the University of Atlanta’s Economics and History Professor, Du Bois, who invited Boas to deliver the 1906 Commencement Address, “Outlook for the American Negro”. Boas confronted that staunch “plank” of segregationist thinking, African barbarism. To an audience comprising “…black working people, preachers, and professionals”, he “…refuted two of the major premises of the dominant paradigm in anthropology at the time of the Address, social evolution and racial formalism”.132

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127 Molema (2020: 149), cited HT Buckle (History of Civilisation in England, [London, 1857-1861], p.136) in support: “the standard of morals is constantly changing...it is never precisely the same even in the most similar countries or in two successive generations in the same country”. Iggers (1975: 33): Buckle was, like Taine, a positivist.

128 Molema (2020: 149, 150) cited Butler’s Sermons and Dissertations on the Nature of Virtue defined “conscience” (one’s “second heart” in African cultures) as “a moral approving and disapproving faculty; that principle by which we survey, and either approve or disapprove our own heart, temper, and actions”. http://149.69.1.21/~dwhite/buter/infu19.html, Joseph Butler (1692-1752), bishop of Bristol (a very poor diocese) and chaplain to Queen Caroline, George II’s wife held that man’s self-interest and instinct for benevolence were evenly balanced. He is thought to have influenced many nineteenth-century writers, (including Darwin), who may how Molema, who had read On the Origin of Species, came to his work.


131 http://www.pbs.org/fmc/interviews/baker.html: “Interview with Associate Prof. of Cultural Anthropology, Duke University, Lee D. Baker” (author of From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954), 19 July 2000, “[i]n 1905 Franz Boas wrote his first public piece on African American bodies, demonstrating that they’re not inferior than any other bodies, in a special issue of Charities in 1905. Two weeks later...Du Bois writes [to] Boas...’Hmmm, we can use this sort of research in my studies in Atlanta’...[A] long and fruitful relationship between Franz Boas [...] Du Bois and many other scholars in the African community [ensued]”. Although other scientists did not welcome Boas’s ideas in the early 1900s, African Americans did: “…his research...provided the initial scientific underpinning for their claims for equality”. Cf. supra, p.23.

If Du Bois brought Molema and Boas “together”, their meeting was literary, not personal. Molema admired and frequently quoted *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois’s autoethnographical account of African-American history and culture pre- and post-emancipation, which reflected admiration for Boasian relativism. To a large extent, Molema and Du Bois shared political projects, both insisting on full admittance to the franchise for African (Molema) and full United States citizenship (Du Bois). By 1917, Du Bois carried great weight in the African diaspora; as an eminent social scientist, he organised the international movement to spread Black Nationalism. Arguably, his NAACP was a model for African and the West Indian nationalist organisations — like the SANNC.

In organising the 1911 Universal Races Congress in London (an expansion on 1904’s Congress), he perhaps set another stage for Boas and Molema to “meet”. Boas delivered a thematic address to the assembled delegates; Molema was of course, still studying at Lovedale. However, while preparing *The Bantu*, seven years on, he read Spiller’s edition of the Congress’s papers. Here, frustratingly, Du Bois’s metaphoric “veil” descended on events; Molema used Johnston’s essay in this collection — that much is known. Did he peruse other essays? He had opportunity, motive and, as an avid reader, ability, to encounter Boas. His statements that “the black races” had had their nadir, and that if “progress is vibratory or oscillatory”, their “pendulum is now making its forward swing”, indicate his strongly relativist thinking. However, that “pendulum swing” still implied his belief that all races progressed vertically from savage to civilised. If he did read Boas, it only partly dislodged the Social Darwinist foundations of his thought.

A further clue as to his acquaintance with relativist thinking lay in the *Hamlet* Epigraph, which opened the methodological Chapter XI. He “inverted” the usual interpretations of Shakespeare’s play by making the quotation’s context imply that this Prince was black. Thus, as in his use of Pringle, Hamlet served allegorically to speak for marginalised Africans. The play involves a struggle between deeply ethical Hamlet (appalled that “conscience makes cowards of us all”) and his powerful uncle, King Claudius who, feigning honour, secretly commits regicide and fratricide, and then marries Hamlet’s mother. Hamlet’s struggles to prove the murder, avenge his father and unseat his uncle. Knowing Claudius can direct the state’s full might against him, he delays exposing the King until sure of his guilt. A “play” in which travelling actors perform a theatrical regicide before the court helps him “catch the conscience of the king” and prove him guilty. But, the verbal motif “play” has broader meaning throughout *Hamlet*, as Act III ii’s, final speech shows:

> [w]hy, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voices, in this little organ; yet cannot you make it speak. S’blood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.

133 See Molema, 1920: 268, 276, 334. Anthony Monteiro (“The Science of Dr. WEB Du Bois”, 1995): “Du Bois’s emphasis upon class and social structure as the primary causal factors of social behavior, social action and social conflict, subsequently propelled a tradition in American social science that stretches from Franz Boas, to the Chicago School of Sociology and up till the present. Professor E. Digby Baltzell argued that...Boas in *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), echoed the findings of Du Bois in writing that ‘the traits of the American Negro are adequately explained on the basis of his history and his social status...without falling back upon the theory of hereditary inferiority’”.


135 See Du Bois (1920: 332) cited Johnston’s article from Spiller (1911: 335-36); whether he read Boas’s contribution to Spiller’s collection is unknown.

136 See Molema, 1920: 196.

“Play” has three meanings here:139

- As deception, “play” suggests the disparity between truth and duplicity. Guiltily concealing an immoral deed is also “play”.
- In drama, “play” is theatrical “deception”, ironically more able to expose the truth than can the interactions of “real life” characters.

As in performing on a wind instrument, “playing” entails covering and releasing stops to produce sounds. Hamlet uses “play” to mean “manipulate to produce a desired effect”. In the passage, he uses “play” to show he understands spies Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are abusing him, by reporting to Claudius on all his actions.

| Table 13: Molema’s “Hamlet” |

Molema left it to readers to infer that Claudius personifies both the authoritarian state, and white “experts” on Africa. Hamlet represents the African, whose morality critics have doubted too long. No “rogue and peasant slave”, he has free will, intelligence and conscience and knows the state (and Africa’s critics, by extension) aim to prove him foolish (“mad”) and “immoral” (or “unmoral”).140 He believes the state’s hirelings, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, (or writers spinning a misleading book from brief African sojourns) use him at will, as their instrument, not realising his true creativity: “[c]all me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me”. Hamlet rejects manipulation and, like Africans aware of their historiographical exploitation, resists the state representatives’ distortions.

Throughout The Bantu, Molema let literary works verbalise his objections to racial oppression. In this new metaphoric context, Hamlet spoke volumes for the anger and pain he endured personally when Africans were depicted as less than human, less than moral.141 His interpretation of Shakespeare’s play prefaced part of his attempt to rectify historical misperceptions.

Rebutting Theal, Evans, Keane and Bryce inter alia, he entered the emergent discourse on segregation via the front door.142 In 1908, he was 17 and in his penultimate year at Healdtown when, with Union looming, theories of the Bantu’s “Hamitic heritage” entered public debates on the African franchise and segregation.143 By the time he reached Lovedale, he was ready to debate such issues with his friends in the Training Society.144 It is hard to prove that he knew the exact terms of the acrimonious dispute that erupted, but it helped to create the intellectual climate that he later analysed in The Bantu. His admiration of the Schreiners would place him on the side of Cape Liberals on the issue of segregation. Prominent public figures, Olive and Theo Schreiner and the reactionary FW Bell squared up. Bell articulated many conservative white South Africans’ views. At issue was African readiness to participate beside “civilised” whites in governing the country. Many presumed that their allegedly low “place” on the evolutionary ladder dictated their unreadiness. Clearly, the broader context was the run-up to Union.

admitted that Hamlet the play is the primary problem, and Hamlet the character only secondary”.  
139 Hamlet, Act III ii, 641-42: “...the play’s the thing/Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king”.  
140 Hamlet, II, 584. Molema (1920: 145) used “unmoral” (for amoral).  
141 Martin Orkin, “King Lear and the 1913 Native Land Act”. In Shakespeare Against Apartheid. (JHB: Ad. Donker, 1987).  
142 Bryce, 1899. Lord Bryce (1838-1922), a noted classical scholar, was also a Glasgow University graduate. His Impressions influenced British public opinion in the South African War. His later report (1915) allegedly exaggerated German soldiers’ atrocities in Belgium during World War. In any event, it influenced America’s entry into the war, www.firstworldwar.com/bio/bryce.htm  
143 One of his letters from this period survives, and does not deal with racial issues. Cf. supra, pp.175-76 & fn.72.  
144 See supra, p.189 & fn.159.
On both sides, discourse revealed the long arm of Social Darwinism. Olive Schreiner, South Africa’s leading novelist supported “radical political causes”; her brother Theo, the independent “Fighting Member for Tembuland”, upheld the Cape “native” franchise. Both believed the then “enlightened” or “Cape liberal” view that the Bantu were superior to “Negroes”. Olive thought the former deserved the franchise as “one of the finest breeds of the African stock...Not only is the South African Bantu (a race probably with a large admixture of Arab blood!) as distinct from the West Coast negro...the ancestor of the American slave”. Implication One: “American slaves” retained the ladder’s bottom rung; implication Two: race had its own metaphoric language: “blood”, “breeding” and “purity” ascribed negative and positive cultural values to people’s physical appearance.

For this thesis, three members of the Schreiner family are significant in that they offered a variety of opinions on Boer-British relations. WP and Theo supported Rhodes, the Jameson Raid and the Imperial cause during the South African War. Olive, however, was more pro-Boer, despite the fact that Afrikaner Bondists attacked her for misrepresenting Boers in The Story of an African Farm (1883). All three Schreiners united in criticising white racism towards black people: “[b]y trying to rise above (white) race prejudice, Olive opened herself to the suspicion of English-speaking South Africans...”. Bell, influential member of the Transvaal Native Affairs Society, struck a lower blow two months later. Guns blazing with Keane’s attestations, he backed national segregation, rejecting the African franchise “[because they] were a ‘lower race’. Instead of drawing them into ‘the vortex of our party politics’, they should be helped to develop along the lines more suited to their nature”. He invoked history to prove that the very natures of blacks and whites differed fundamentally:

“...no full blooded negro has ever been distinguished as a man of science, a poet, or an artist, and the fundamental equality claimed for him by ignorant philanthropists is belied by the whole history of the race throughout the historic period”.

To Bell, “nature” signified “the general inherent character or disposition of mankind”, and “the inherent power or force by which the physical and mental activities of man are sustained”. This implied that he thought that by nature, the “Bantu” were actually a different species from western human beings.

He discounted African American achievers like Du Bois and Washington “on the grounds that they were not ‘pure negroes’” but so fortified with Caucasian corpuscles that they hardly represented the deficient “Negro” majority. His views contrasted with Molema’s (which leaned Schreiner-wards) on “civilisation” and “morality”. Bell argued that Settlers’ whiteness made them automatically “civilised” and “moral”; Africans were, ab initio, not. His ideological influence spread as widely-read newspapers echoed his thinking. Johannesburg’s Rand Daily Mail editorialised that Africans should “be taught the virtues of manual labour and slow development instead of being given a smattering of European education and classed as a civilised people when all the time it is but a veneer”. This insulted the small but vocal African elite who, like Molema, prided themselves on their learning, ability to enter the same professions as white settlers, and “progressive” outlook on culture and society.

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145 On 23 Aug 1913, TsalaBT called Theo Schreiner by this complimentary nickname. He addressed a meeting on the NLA in Kimberley. Phlatje seconded the vote of thanks; Modiri was then teaching in Kimberley. Cf. supra, pp.199ff.
146 Molema (1920: 5, 333) raised this distinction throughout.
150 Dubow (1995: 90) cited Rand Daily Mail (16 Dec 1908) which reported Bell’s address.
153 Dubow (1995: 90) cited Rand Daily Mail, 16 Dec 1908. Bell’s address was reported alongside the editorial.
The Schreiners’ support for a moderate form of Eugenics evidently did not perturb the Cape’s African elite. Plaatje greatly respected Olive and had warmly supported her husband Cronwright-Schreiner’s attack on Prime Minister Rhodes.154 Theo’s rejoinder to Bell in another popular paper, the Cape Times, admitted Keane’s notion of “Negro” inferiority. However, he disagreed that this justified denying the franchise to “‘those negroes or natives who had raised themselves to the level of the ordinary run of Europeans’” — both a class and a racial comment. He balked at Keane’s selective use of Johnston to “prove” his racist case. Instead, Theo quoted Harry Johnston’s recent argument that “‘Negroes’ had been ‘underestimated’”.155

Although it is at best tenuous to link Molema directly with the Bell-Schreiner spat, he did continue the disputation that they had helped to place in the public media. He also referenced Johnston’s protests after his shock visit to the USA’s segregated southern states:

“[i]t is an exploded myth by now that mission-educated natives are lazier or more untruthful than pagan or Mohammedan Negroes, or, indeed, than many of the white people around them”.156

Molema also employed Johnston, then thought liberal, to rebut conservative white critics in “The Bantu and Labour Supply”. Africans contributed fully to the modern economy: “‘[a]ll things being equal, the Negro is as willing to work for salary as the Asiatic or the European’”, but had for centuries been seen as “‘fit subject[s] to be cheated’”. Johnston helped Molema assail Keane and followers’ “nothing new from Africa” angle: he hailed “Negroes” as the sole “non-Caucasian race” to compete with whites “in science, the arts, literature, and mathematics”. Many “new world” races, he claimed, had not partaken in world cultural and scientific endeavour. Yet, “Negroes” now excelled in art, science and technology and worked in “the white world and in emulation with the first talent of Europe and America”.157

By accepting Johnstonian reasoning, Molema developed three corollaries: firstly, that race did not overdetermine an individual or group’s social functioning. Secondly, social conditions modified inherited racial traits. With time and education, Africans could equal European scientific and artistic feats. Thirdly, once Africans began interacting with modern science, technology and art, they made “progress”. Interracial contact, via missionary education, aided such progress.158

In its day, Molema’s interpretation was refreshingly positive about Africa, but a minority opinion. Most South Africans clung, like Bell, to Africans’ notional inferiority. One semi-literate Port Elizabeth “fundamentalist” illustrated the level of many white voters in writing to WP Schreiner:

Sir....Lower Forms of Human Beings were created as well as Animals, Birds, Insects, and Fish.

Created Lower Forms are so and will remain so. Disaster follows any attempt by Man to correct the mistakes of the Almighty.159

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154 Willan (1984: 47) stated that this attack (in an address on “The Political Situation” at the Town Hall, Aug 1895) impressed Kimberley’s African community. Plaatje named his elder daughter after the novelist. Molema (1920: 111) quoted her Stray Thoughts on slavery: “...out of every four children born to a slave mother three were by her [Boer] master”.
156 Molema (1920: 224) did not specify from which of two Harry Johnston texts in The Bantu’s bibliography this passage came: The Colonisation of Africa by Alien Races. [Cambridge: CUP, 1913] and Pioneers in South [actually West] Africa. [Blackie, Nd]. Molema (1920: 16) first mentioned Johnston (1858-1927) as one of the “more modern explorers of Equatorial and South Africa [whose]...writings...are familiar to all who have inquired into the literature on that subject”.
Such spurious theology appealed to many white segregationists. Molema’s wide reading extended his understanding of the prejudices Africans experienced and helped him to form critical conclusions about the nature of South African society and its representation in historical and ethnographic discourse.

“Is there in truth any difference between one racism and another?”

Molema supported the qualified franchise guardedly. As a social actor who would not be “played”, he apparently agreed with the Schreiners: a qualified, property-based franchise should select those Africans entitled to vote: “[w]here the bulk of the coloured race are obviously unfit for political power, a qualification based on property and education…should permit the upper section of that race to enjoy the suffrage”. On closer examination, he did not advocate that qualification as the exception, but as the rule.

Wary of universal suffrage, Molema and others wanted the African elite to represent all Africans. Reflecting on this ambiguity in Molema’s thinking, it is important to recognise that in 1917/18 no South African political agenda backed “Votes for All”. Forms of eugenic theory, whether subtle (the Schreiners and some liberal SANNC members) or blatant (Bell, his eminence blanc Keane and the segregationist Botha-Smuts government) underlay most public opinion by 1920. Segregationist practice, theory and policy thrived, as socioeconomic transformation challenged the public, intellectuals and governments.

Three decades later, Frantz Fanon re-phrased this problem, still besetting African intellectuals in relation to colonists and their descendants: “[i]s there in truth any difference between one racism and another?” In South Africa, the question implies that even “Cape liberals” may have been racist. Today, with universal suffrage and human rights enshrined in South Africa’s 1995 Constitution, the Cape Native Franchise may easily be misunderstood and tagged “disguised racism”. A century ago, the Schreiners were three among many liberals endorsing the Cape’s “colour-blindness” and dedication to liberal freedoms. Liberals white and black seemed impervious to two contradictions: that the qualified franchise excluded more Africans and “Coloureds” than it included, and did so on racial and class grounds.

Trapido indicated that Cape liberalism’s progressive component was often exaggerated. Both “Great” and “Small” Cape liberal “traditions” encouraged small numbers of Africans’ incorporation. A historical materialist, he incurred some liberal historians’ ire for stating that the exclusion of voters on racial grounds was disguised class cooption in the white elite’s interests. However, he did not accuse the “small tradition” (like the Schreiners) of expediency, but identified them as sincere representatives of liberalism’s nobler motives, a trend less apparent in Cape parliamentary politics than at local level. Many politicians played liberal politics when it suited them, such as Merriman, Rose-Innes and Sauer. However agreeable to the African franchise some Cape parliamentarians might be, during

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162 Simons & Simons (1983: 49, 50, 73, 108-12, esp. 194): even the International Socialist League stated, “Africans would be excluded from government even under socialism until they reached maturity”.

163 Dubow (1995: 124): post-World War I, Eugenics held considerable sway, though mainly among “middle-class professional and intellectuals. Natural opponents of eugenics included religious organisations (particularly the Catholic Church), trade unionists, and liberal humanists who were wary of imposing constraints on the rights of individuals”. Eugenics lost its allure in Britain and the United States only a decade later.

164 Fanon, 1967: 87.

165 Davenport, 1987: 21: these freedoms included justice, speech, economic pursuit and political association.

166 Trapido (1980: 258-59, 267): these nobler motives included “access to justice in the broadest sense of the term, freedom of speech, economic freedom and political rights”. Cape Liberal caution over the franchise invites comparisons with nineteenth-century British liberal concerns about extending the franchise in the 1832, 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts. The Cape franchise was increasingly curtailed, rather than extended. See Hobsbawm, 1987: 85. Walker, 1937: 22.
Union negotiations, the conservative former republics successfully diluted Cape liberalism’s effectiveness. After 1910, various ex-liberals fighting for political survival colluded with the northern provinces in introducing segregation. The Schreiner brothers, among several principled die-hards, rallied to the African cause, and refused to collaborate, like Sauer, with Botha’s segregationist plans.\(^{167}\) *Tsala ea Batho* called Theo one of the SANNC’s strongest parliamentary supporters.\(^{168}\)

The Schreiners’ embodied the minority white opinion, Cape liberalism’s “small tradition”, with which Molema and most of the African elite sympathised. Such, then, were the boundaries of racial opinion within early twentieth-century national politics. Yet, even at its most enlightened, Cape liberalism exhibited the contradictions of the term “nonracial franchise”. Only a minority of Africans was thought fit to enjoy the freedoms the white majority received. Thus, even at the “liberal” Cape, the majority of Africans were considered insufficiently educated and propertied to vote and excluded from the body politic. Merriman displayed some ambiguity on the issue of race, in that he seemed to believe, in 1918, that white workers were less deserving than black workers. He suggested that Africans were as, if not more capable than working-class whites of participating fully in economic and political life. The “colour bar”, however, stood in their way and empowered white workers to:

“…dominate a quarter of a million Natives who get 2s per diem and who practically do all the work. These men (the Natives) display considerable skill and are capable of learning, but what is known as ‘the colour bar’ prevents them from rising and from getting a decent wage for the work they can do perfectly well. Meanwhile the white workers have their trade unions and their strikes, and talk of this as ‘a white man’s country’. How long will it last?”\(^{169}\)

While Fanon’s question about one racism’s difference from another may prove impossible to answer, race itself was undoubtedly a cardinal point of debate in the academic study of early twentieth-century South African society and the colonial world. Theories of race permeated the Molema’s sources and the most South Africans’ political behaviour. Some paradigms, like Social Darwinism, claiming a basis in scientific “fact”, gave rise to varying intensities of racial determinism. Molema (as a scientist) was rapidly concluding that race had limited scientific and social uses. Dubow noted the extent to which Scientific Racism was the “blind spot” of western intellectual endeavour:

\[\text{[a] curious form of collective amnesia, until quite recently, obscured the centrality of intellectual racism in Western thought during the early part of the twentieth century. Although the existence of racist attitudes has been widely acknowledged, and notwithstanding the importance of several pioneering historical studies of the subject, there has been a considerable underestimation of the extent to which theories of racial difference form part of mainstream international intellectual traditions.}\]\(^{170}\)

Molema confronted race as the most serious issue facing South Africa, in the past and the present. He did so at a time when many white scholars tackled “race”, but the difference was that most of them wrote within one or other racial theory. Basing his critique on his race (enough to disqualify a writer’s authority at the time), he questioned existing racial frameworks from outside the mainstream racialised discourse. Possibly this marginality contributed as much as its publication and distribution troubles to *The Bantu*’s relatively limited readership.

That said, we return to his text. Molema’s liberal attitudes to race and class framed *The Bantu*. For him, race was the most important category of cultural difference. Firstly, it was a natural biological system classifying the world’s peoples physically and geographically. In addition, “race” was, to him, an


\(^{168}\) *Tsala BT*, 24 May 1913, Leader.


ideological discourse that white writers and governments used to generate distorted representations of African people’s abilities and, therefore, needs. This subtle distinction showed that, to an extent, Molema understood that the “scientific” racial categories many writers believed “immutable”, were ideological constructs often extremely prejudicial to African people. In appreciating race as a substantially ideological classification, he distanced himself from those segregationists who believed in race and evolution as scientifically proven “facts”.

He brought Part II to a thematic climax, depicting the conundrum of the past’s relationship to the present: traces of the past endured, influencing present day life profoundly, but present historians and ethnographers but slenderly knew the African past’s complexity. He drew general conclusions about the structure and customs of precolonial African communities, arguing (in what today are disputed terms) that precolonial Africans were “primitive”, but could, with colonial guidance, compete equally with the rest of the world:

[j]o backward and degraded were the Bantu, shortly before their contact with the Europeans. They were, however, manifestly not savages, according to the proper use of that word, seeing they cultivated the soil, kept and raised cattle, sheep, and goats, had a rudimentary knowledge of metals and of working them, and had a form of government. 172

Africans adapted positively to modernisation, he stressed, and the socioeconomic strength of precolonial populations formed a basis on which colonial society could build. This submission complicated his treatment of race and change. Few communities achieved change in isolation, but theorists divided sharply over “whether there is or there is not such a thing as ‘independent civilization’”. Articulating this idea in the closed circuit of South African historical writing was daring: “[s]ome scientists hold that civilisation...must always, come from without; that progress can only be achieved by contact with a more civilised race”. He tacitly accepted the pull of imperial culture, a precursor to the global culture that dominated the world after the 1970s. In 1920, Molema accepted that South Africa belonged to a “world economy”, over which “a handful of states” (the European Empires) held power. 174

While he believed Africans could “progress”, experience taught him WP Schreiner’s bitter lesson: that however far colonised peoples progressed, colonial powers would incorporate only a minority into their political domain. Molema himself illustrated the workings of colonial assimilation, in the parent country itself and in its colonial simulacrum. In practice, racial politics hampered the extent to which the colonised gained political rights and public acceptance. As Eric Hobsbawm observed:

...given the pervasive racism of bourgeois society, no amount of assimilation would turn men with dark skins into “real” Englishmen...even if they had as much money and noble blood and as much taste for sports as the European nobility — as was the case with many an Indian rajah educated in Britain. 175

Molema went a significant distance towards assimilation. The white ruling-classes nevertheless proved insufficiently elastic to accommodate him (or any African) fully, despite his noble birth, exceptional education, and mastery of academic discourse. Awarded his medical degree in record time at one of the Empire’s leading universities, he gained apparent acceptance into metropolitan society. Yet, the contradictions of empire soon emerged. Glasgow University was “open” to all races and faiths, but had only seven black students in 1914 and his sense of racial difference characterised his stay there. 176

171 See Molema (1920: 325-26), debunking craniometry.
172 Molema, 1920: 194.
175 Hobsbawm (1987: 152) indicated that even in the white nation-state, ethnic communities, like Jews, were marginalised.
176 See supra, pp.218-19.
Being black *inside* South Africa was an even starker racially-inscribed experience. *The Bantu’s* unremitting commitment to analysing racial prejudice testified to his personal sense of difference. He understood the frustrations of being defined, willy-nilly, as a barbarian at the gates of Rome.

He recapitulated the contrary meanings of “barbarian” and “civilized” in a telling example that provided Part II’s final cultural translation. Initially, he had situated *The Bantu’s* writing in the context of “the Great War”, and now counterpoised historical illustrations of the two warring parties’ antecedents.\(^{177}\) That the two proud European empires now battling each other with sophisticated armoury came from barbarian origins was perhaps humbling. It also demonstrated how the tide in men’s affairs could turn: if yesterday’s “barbarians” were today’s leading powers, then there was hope, he implied, for Africans.

Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* provided both relativist and evolutionist examples. His exposition of German savagery in the days of Roman historian Tacitus matched much modern literature on Africans. The moral of Molema’s story was that their “descendants” were the British Empire’s wartime enemies, as the Germani had been the Roman Empire’s in 90BC. In this pivotal comparison, Gibbon showed the “uncivilised” beginnings from which modern Germany had matured.\(^{178}\) Fifth century Britons, Gibbon noted, “appear to have relapsed into the state of original barbarism from which they had been imperfectly reclaimed” by the Roman Empire.\(^{179}\) He also relied on Green’s *History of the English People*, which demonstrated third-century Britons’ devotion to warlike pursuits:

> “Tribe warred with tribe, and village with village, even within the township itself feuds parted household from household, and passions of hatred were passed from father to son….A grim joy in hard fighting was already a characteristic of the race”.\(^{180}\)

This passage reads ironically beside the comments that Molema quoted from Theal on Zulu bellicosity.\(^{181}\) Without comment, Molema let readers draw their own inferences from Gibbon and Green. These warring peoples, the ancestors of modern colonial powers, had practised customs that twentieth-century societies now deemed “barbaric” in Africans! The lessons of history he drew from Tacitus’ *Germania* and Green’s exposition of Anglo-Saxon England, helped him counsel readers to view Africans in broad perspective. If Germany and Britain had survived such apparently “primitive” conditions to become leading European and colonial powers, then so could Africa, if given time and opportunity. He did not much pursue the implications of England and Germany’s Great War engagement: had their inclinations not still been “barbarous”, and rather similar to recent African wars? The provocative question he planted in readers’ minds in Chapter XXVII was whether Africans, with comparably barbarous roots to Britain and Germany, could soon wield equal power.\(^{182}\)

Molema withheld his own answer, but deferred again to Rousseau.\(^{183}\) In Part III’s “Résumé”, he let Rousseau displace European civilisation from absolute preeminence over the cultures of the world. In

\(^{177}\) Molema, 1920: vii.

\(^{178}\) Edward Gibbon, [1806]. *A History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. [London]. Online text available at [http://www.ccel.org/g/gibbon/decline/](http://www.ccel.org/g/gibbon/decline/). Molema (1920: 196) cited Gibbon [1806: Chapter IX, “State of Germany under the Barbarians”, Book 36, I, 15]: “[t]he most civilised nations of modern Europe issued from the woods of Germany; and in the rude institutions of these barbarians we may still distinguish the original principles of our present laws and manners”.\(^{179}\)


\(^{181}\) Molema (1920: 93) cited Theal (no edition of the *History* given): “[t]he government is about the most despotic that can be conceived. Until very recently, cases of violent death were of frequent occurrence, and...when a man was put to death one or more of his wives suffered with him”.

\(^{182}\) Other SANNNC leaders wrote similarly: Thema (1935: 38): “I saw that the white people, who had achieved such wonders of civilisation, came out of conditions similar to those under which my people were living...”. See Msane, infra, p.338 fn.300.

\(^{183}\) Molema, 1920: 134. See *supra*, pp.296, 298. Molema inferred from Rousseau’s writings that “…men who may be unequal in strength or intelligence become everyone equal by convention and legal right”. Equality and inequality were social rather than natural conditions.
1750, the philosopher had exposed the ideological nature of language and culture, and the hypocritical uses humans made of civilised behaviour to cloak their vices: “[b]efore art had moulded our behaviour, and taught our passions to speak artificial language, our morals were rude but natural”.\(^\text{184}\) The “heights” of cultivation merely hid the basest human passions. Fundamentally, Europeans were as “savage” as other human beings — but concealed it more artfully. Anticipating a day in which “other” cultures might take an anthropological interest in Europe, Rousseau wrote:

> [s]uppose an inhabitant of some distant country should endeavour to form an idea of European morals from the state of the sciences, the perfection of the arts, the propriety of our public entertainments, the politeness of our behaviour [...]our constant professions of benevolence, and from these tumultuous assemblies of people of all ranks, who seem, from morning till night, to have no other care than to oblige one another. Such a stranger, I maintain, would arrive at a totally false view of our morality....Our minds have been corrupted in proportion as the arts and sciences have improved.\(^\text{185}\)

This excerpt bridged the distance between the world of African nationalism and the European Enlightenment, confirming Molema’s increasing adherence to the belief that culture (or “civilisation”) did not necessarily elevate one race above another.

“To listen to the missionary with one ear, and to tradition with the other”:
Dr Molema’s New Testament:\(^\text{186}\)

In *The Age of Empire* (1987), Hobsbawm, introduced the late nineteenth century as “...the classic age of massive missionary endeavour”. Missionisation was not imperialism’s willing handmaiden — but could not have achieved its goals without it:

> [o]ften [missionary effort] was opposed to the colonial authorities; pretty well always it put the interest of its converts first. Yet the success of the Lord was a function of imperialist advance....And if Christianity insisted on the equality of souls, it underlined the inequality of bodies — it was something done by whites for natives, and paid for by whites. And though it multiplied native believers, at least half the clergy remained white.\(^\text{187}\)

Seventy years earlier, Molema had not thought colonial missionary involvement ambivalent. Imperialism was a different matter. He portrayed imperialism’s initial motives as beneficent. But after Britain’s abandonment of direct rule in South Africa (1910), he depicted Empire’s mercenary face. Still, this betrayal could not sully missionary activity for him. Their religious and social work extended far beyond the Scriptures, to the greater benefit of African communities:

> [b]esides being evangelists and civilisers, the missionaries have also been in South Africa...the political champions of the Bantu. For them they have interceded and conferred with Governments from the beginning of missionary work to this day. They have stood up for the rights of the primitive peoples even at the risk of their own popularity and...safety.\(^\text{188}\)


\(^{185}\) Molema (1920: 315) cited Rousseau, [1750: 133]. The first ellipsis indicated his omission of the phrase “...the affability of our conversation”; and the second ellipsis, the omission of “…where there is no effect, it is idle to look for a cause: but here the effect is certain and the depravity actual; our minds have been corrupted etc”.

\(^{186}\) Molema (1951: 58) characterised the difficulties which chiefs faced on the missionaries arrival: “[t]he best that a chief could do, by way of compromise — and in fact it was a well recognised philosophy of African royalty — was to put only one foot in the church, and keep the other outside; to listen to the missionary with one ear, and to tradition with the other, to grasp the new faith with one hand, and keep the other hand behind the back”.


\(^{188}\) Molema, 1920: 203.
In introducing the colonial era, Molema described African suffering at the hands of stronger indigenous communities and settlers. Missionaries, he held, helped define African interaction with the colonial powers: the Cape, Boer Republics and successive British governments.\(^{189}\)

Nuttall and Michaels argued that the country’s colonial and apartheid powers fixated “on race, or more particularly on racial supremacy and racial victimhood as a determinant of identity”.\(^{190}\) For Molema, victimhood strongly determined African identity under colonialism. Some communities barely survived the nineteenth century’s human and natural disasters. Astute survival strategies were required.\(^{191}\) Believing that African resilience depended on missionary assistance, this devout man held that evangelisation and education were humankind’s most moral alternative, the only true preservation from ignorance.

\[\text{even those who deny the divinity of Christ, but grant His identity as an historical truth, agree that for its moral teaching, as shown in the life of Christ, the Christian religion far nonplusses many other religions, more ancient and more recent, and holds place with the best conceptions of moral law.}\] \(^{192}\)

This statement revealed the spirituality guiding the Molema’s history. The Bantu’s index revealed much about its author’s guiding principles: “god”, rather than gold, and “missionaries” rather than mining and “education” rather than economics, indicate that he wrote socio-cultural rather than economic history. It was hardly predestination that this African Christian studied in Glasgow in the early twentieth century. The “imperialism of benevolence” forged the missionary links that took him there. Scots missionaries were both his spiritual guides and his historical sources. His religion and humanism linked him to imperialism’s social mission — a network of missionary, philanthropic and sociopolitical connections across the colonial world:

\[\text{virtually from the beginning this “imperialism of benevolence” was also allied with a strong sense of duty and obligation. Non-European societies were widely seen as poor; ignorant, backward and unprogressive, if not corrupt and degraded, the more so as Europe’s own material wealth and technological sophistication rapidly grew. The feeling that Europeans... were destined to, pass on the seeds and fruits of their success — their laws, institutions learning and pre-eminent the Christian religion — was married to the belief that the merits of Europeans ways were self-evident and that their transmission was universally advantageous.}\] \(^{193}\)

In revering Christian imperialism’s benevolence, Molema established the ethical base for The Bantu’s New Testament. Devotion to the Gospel inspired his treatise on Christianity’s growth among African people and his attacks on the Union government’s exploitative land, labour, education and franchise policies. These staunch beliefs built his critique of segregation, which he judged a betrayal of Christian morality.\(^{194}\) The Comaroffs called Molema one of the missionaries’ “most successful alumni”.\(^{195}\) Molema counted himself as much a part of the evangelical tradition, the faith that Robert Moffat imported, as of Serolong culture.\(^{196}\) It was a three-generation syncretic Wesleyan-Rolong tradition, stretching from his grandfather, Chief Molema, to his father and mother (both devout Methodists) and himself, fortified by the inputs of Healdtown and Lovedale. As an adult, he strove to imbue his children, Warada and Lesedi, and his brothers’ with the same Christian commitment. In the Stadt


\(^{191}\) Man-made disasters that Molema included the wars of MmaNthathisi, Mzilikazi, and Shaka, Boer and British invasions and land-thefts. (See supra, pp.59-60). The 1896/7 rinderpest and East Coast Fever were the natural disasters. For Molema’s comments on rinderpest, see supra, p.169. For Tswana and highveld reactions to the rinderpest, see Kevin Shillington, “Irrigation, Agriculture and the State: The Harts Valley in Historical Perspective”. In Beinart et al, 1986: 326-27.


\(^{194}\) In “The [Natives] Land Bill”, TsalaBT, 07 June 1913, Major Kgoatlie of Thaba 'Nchu, censured white MPs for calling themselves Christians “(The ‘Christian’ nation as they call themselves)”, but discriminating against African fellow citizens.

\(^{195}\) Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997: 118.

\(^{196}\) Also Jeal (1973: 42) on the translation.
Church, he was a formidable preacher, soft-spoken, yet intensely reflective, rather than a “fire-brand”. Biblical allegory shaped the Doctor’s thinking and filled his political addresses; it formed Molema’s daily idiom.¹⁹⁷

Metaphorically, that Rolong matrix, delineated in The Bantu’s first half, formed an Old Testament, his own life’s prehistory. He respected it as Christians revere the Bible’s first testament: a precursor to the supreme revelation. The Bantu’s “New Testament” rendered the work of his other ancestors, the missionaries who educated him and shaped his religious outlook — and nineteenth-century political and religious culture.¹⁹⁸

This genealogy extended back to the founding missionaries he had not met, from far-off Ormiston, Blantyre, Paisley, Morayshire, and Edinburgh. Their non-Tswana, non-Xhosa became inscribed into the Frontier’s bloody history: Moffat, Philip, Livingstone, Govan, Mackenzie, and Stewart. Into Africa, they carried the “Word” religious and secular, which migrated beyond the spiritual world into a multitude of temporal mansions: culture, education, farming and healing being but four.¹⁹⁹ Though he dwelt physically at Maratiwa and Motsosa, his soul and intellect dwelt in the house of David — Dr David Livingstone.

The Bantu’s New Testament contextualised the epic labours of his Christian forebears. Their story had shaped his own, which he narrated in veiled form, as an autoethnography of the Present.²⁰⁰ Neither dateline nor decade marked the divide between “past” and “present”. Converts entered the “present” through several portals: a changing mindset, shifting power-base, new language, new livelihoods and a new set of clothes.

A struggle between “light” and “dark” constituted the governing allegory through which Molema related “The Present”, playing the same role as in the Judeo-Christian Bible. Although the first light-dark images came from the Bible’s Old Testament, they constituted the African convert’s Christian awakening: in Genesis’ powerful opening allegory Earth, heaven, sea and darkness were the first effects of creation.²⁰¹ Then came descriptive language, for God said “Let there be light”, and there was. With it came vision and judgement: God saw the light and deemed it good, before dividing it from darkness.²⁰² This inaugural separation meant the creation of consciousness and knowledge. To colonised Christians, it posed the fundamental choice: to remain in the “darkness” of traditional belief, or to follow enlightened missionary teaching. In the New Testament, “light” more obviously becomes a new covenant, the promise of God’s faith in mankind; it stands not only for the acceptance of faith, and for truth or “enlightenment”.

In Molema’s missionary forebears’ hands, the Bible was a potent medium: its text disseminated the works of God, while its many subtexts, spiritual and material, placed under African eyes the alluring

¹⁹⁷ Molema, 1951: 57-58. Warada Molema Interview, 1992: Dr Molema’s daughter, Warada, explained that her parents had children later in life: “I was what the Dutch call a laatlammetjie, very laat. They really didn’t think they’d have babies”. Leloba Molema Interview, 1992. Prof Molema contrasted the hellfire and brimstone delivery of a certain Bophutatswana preacher with Dr Molema’s restrained, intellectual style. Bantu World, 29 Aug 1953, SM Molema, “Separate and Inferior” confirmed his love of Biblical register in attacking apartheid, “Now from the secret top of Oreb or of Sinai, the plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ has come to shed light on the encircling gloom”.

¹⁹⁸ Leloba Molema Interview, 1991: she stressed the Scottish missionaries’ role in Modiri Molema’s life, and the Calvinist work ethic she believed he acquired at Lovedale: “…he had a great respect for the missionaries who educated him”.

¹⁹⁹ Hewson (1959: v.1, 55) described the effects of missionary intervention in African farming methods: “[t]he missionary’s plough share was ripping up not only the virgin soil of the mission fields, but also the fallow ground of Bantu economics, Bantu agriculture and Bantu social custom. That is why the seed to be sown was of such great importance”.

²⁰⁰ “The Present” is the title of Part III.

²⁰¹ The Holy Bible: in the New Testament, Luke 11: 34: “The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, the whole body is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness”. Centrally, in John 8: 12, Jesus announced “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”. In Romans (2: 21) those who become “vain in their imaginations” have “their foolish hearts darkened”. Cf supra, p.268 fn.241.

²⁰² Genesis, 1: 3-4.
paraphernalia of secular capitalism. The Evangelical Movement, which would inspire many foreign missionary societies, took root in eighteenth-century England, building on the previous two centuries’ nonconformist Christian challenges to the established church. Powerful men and women supported the religious revival named after John Wesley, the Oxford divine and itinerant reformer, who aspired to purge the established church of its corrupting influences. Simplifying Anglican doctrinal panoply, he created an evangelical incantation that correct Biblical instruction could reclaim all sinners:

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“All men need to be saved
All men can be saved
All men can know that they are saved
All men can be saved to the uttermost.”
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He differed from Anglican High Church observance in insisting on adherents’ social commitment: “‘[t]he Bible knows nothing of solitary religion. There is no holiness but social holiness’.” Universal salvation distinguished Wesleyanism from Presbyterianism, that other major influence on Molema. Divine love made it possible for all to choose, through their devout observance, to pursue salvation. Wesley argued that the doctrine of predestination might lead its followers to abandon Christian morality, since only the Elect (already chosen for salvation) would receive grace. One of Wesley’s verses against slavery in the Americas proclaimed Methodism’s social gospel, with its promise of universal salvation:

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“Let all the Heathens know thy name
From idols to the living God
The dark Americans convert
And shine in every pagan heart.”
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All non-Christians, by extension, could attain grace by practising their faith. Years after Wesley’s death, the scope of his verse expanded, as his nonconformist doctrines were preached to the inhabitants of Britain’s growing Empire.

This link between evangelism, philanthropy and altruism inspired the first missionaries entering southern Africa in the early 1800s. From the outset, they affronted white settlers who believed “the natives” were barely human, and at best, untrustworthy. The missionaries were often trapped between the rival aims and desires of their “target” African communities, white settlers, and the Cape and British Governments. Many Nonconformists took the part of otherwise voiceless African communities. In the divided colonial situation, they were “marked men and were soon drawn into the thick of the dispute”. Like the administration and other missionary societies, they competed “to gain control over black populations”.


205 Wakefield, 2003: 24-25.


208 Molema, 1920: 214. Molema’s main source on the various missions, Stewart (1903), analysed the attitudes of almost all southern African mission societies towards Africans.

Those who survived relied on physical stamina, zeal and a powerful religious discourse. William Shaw, Healdtown’s founder and the Cape’s General Superintendent of Methodist Missions, reiterated that any country whose population was mired in heathen darkness and pollution was vulnerable. He battled to bridge the widening chasm between Frontier settlers and Xhosa, lamenting: “I cannot perceive that true philanthropy requires me to blacken my white friends for the purpose of making my black friends white”. The labels “heathen” and “darkness” identified the objects of conversion.

Many missionaries feared that white frontiersmen dwelt in more spiritual darkness than any indigenous community’s. Missionaries stood alone in educating Africans intellectually and practically, as consecutive Cape Governments refused adequate funding for black education. After 1910, the Union Government continued the four colonial education departments’ tradition of underfunding. Molema accused the new government of hindering black advancement: “[p]ractically speaking, the entire education of the Bantu is in the hands of the missionaries”. The Native Affairs Commission upheld this claim: “the Government provides Government schools for Europeans and Asiatics [but] they do not provide them for the aboriginal inhabitants of the country”. By its own admission, Union Government policy continued pre-Union deficiencies: “native education in South Africa is, and always has been, a missionary undertaking, supported more or less adequately by State funds, and supervised more or less efficiently by State officials.” Wesleyans and Scottish Presbyterians, he considered, made the largest contribution to African education and had always “done much for the education of the Bantu”.

An international array of Missionary Societies lighted scores of African lives, he stressed. His history of the Present introduced the missionary genealogy vital to his own life. In potted accounts of each Society’s struggles in Africa’s inhospitable “heathen and savage lands”, he pitted missionary altruism against state and settler obduracy. Translating the Gospel’s language into several vernaculars, they imitated Christ’s Sermon on the Mount: “‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to all men’”. They owed loyalty to a power above states or princes, or as Stewart put it, “loyalty and love to Jesus Christ”. Pitying converts was not their primary motive. Rather, missionaries sought to aid them spiritually and politically.

Self-sacrifice was true Christian heroism: “...no greater praise can be accorded any man than he denies himself for the good of others”. Hyperbolically, he contended that anyone would praise such “altruistic motives [as] the highest pinnacle of human nobility”. Taking some leaps of logic, he concluded that Christianity was “worthy of the highest respect among all sane people”. His remarks on the “heathen and savage lands” that missionaries risked their lives to convert might not sway all postcolonial readers, but illustrated the extent to which he believed himself part of the missionary tradition.

He seemed untroubled that missionary principles inhabited the same discursive terrain as imperial policy. Colonial advance often promoted missionary projects, and vice versa. Besides, African

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211 Hewson, 1959: v.1, 58, Shaw, p.152.
212 Sue Krige, ‘“Trustees” and Agents of the State”? Missions and the Formation of Policy towards African education, 1910-1920”. In *SAHJ*, 1999 (40), 74-83.
215 Molema (1920: 216-17) gave the 1917 Methodist Conference Returns for total church membership as 536,419. He appended numbers of churches, day schools, ministers, industrial and training institutions, and pupils.
216 Molema (1920: 202-03) cited St Mark’s Gospel, 16: 15.
218 In the earlier quotation, Molema (1920: 202) paraphrased John 15:13 “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”, adding “...altruistic motives and practices are respected all the world over and regarded as the highest pinnacle of human nobility”. This footnotes applies to the whole paragraph.
communities often selected missionary allies to intercede for them with intransigent colonial authorities. Yet, these alliances could estrange African Christians from the cultural and political needs of non-Christians.219

Molema’s “New Testament” cultivated a new narrative attitude towards precolonial African society. Missionary convictions about Africa’s primitive ungodliness were inscribed into authorial point of view. This deliberate reappraisal through Christian eyes may have estranged some African traditionalists and nationalists in later year, because he invited readers to reconstruct precolonial Africa as “Other”. However, he gained enormous moral authority by providing an African Christian critique of the exploitation of Africans, particularly by colonial and post-Union Christians.220

His innovative account of missionary entry into Cape history in the 1700s and 1800s dealt with Dutch and British Settlers only in their impact on African, Khoisan and Slave communities. Dutch and then “Boer” governments were singularly racist in ignoring their black subjects’ spiritual needs. Under the DEIC, the first missionary and worst case involved Moravian Church of Saxony’s George Schmidt (1743). The DEIC swiftly expelled him for promoting the “rights of the Hottentots as human beings....of course, the greatest affront to the Dutch”, who thought the Khoi mere creatures (“Schepsels”).221 That term expressed the Dutch tendency to treat people of another colour and lifestyle as a “lower” species. “Of course” interjected his criticism of the professedly-Christian Dutch. Their repeated denials of black human rights incurred his censure throughout his writing career. The Bantu’s Chapter XXII cited cases of Boer oppression around the country to corroborate his generalisation.222

Only after the DEIC’s departure (1795) did a larger evangelical presence arrive under the LMS’s aegis. These remarkable men fought to bring the Cape’s underclasses humane treatment. Three of Molema’s missionary heroes had medical training and all but one represented here was Scottish.223 Among the first missionaries allowed to evangelise the Cape from 1799 was Johannes van der Kemp (the non-Scot), the builder of Bethelsdorp near Uitenhage on the Eastern Frontier. Like Schmidt a radical, he protested against rampant governmental and settler abuse of slaves and Khoikhoi employees.224 Molema lauded Van der Kemp’s indomitably ethical protests against Cape local authorities:

“Sir, my commission is to preach the Gospel to every creature, and I will preach the Gospel to every one who chooses to hear me. God has sent me, not to put chains upon the legs of Hottentots and Kaffirs, but to preach liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison doors to them that are bound”.

219 Hobsbawm (1987: 71): “[w]hether trade followed the flag may still be debated, but there is not doubt at all that colonial conquest opened the way for effective missionary action”. Molema, 1920: 307.

220 Cf. supra, pp.271ff & 288ff, for discussion of his Africanist focus.


222 As segregationist policies expanded, African intellectuals explored the history of African-Boer cooperation and antagonism, eg. Plaatje’s The Cape Argus, 04 March 1924, “The case of the Baralong: Tribe’s relations with the Voortrekkers”. See Molema’s (1966: 139-41) description of Boer cruelty at the Siege of Tigele, and Christopher Bethell’s brutal murder. “Black” here includes Africans, Khoikhoi and San. Cf. supra, pp.239ff, 284ff. Molema (1966: 162): he implicated the “Boers” in the dispossession of African land throughout the country, being most personally affected by the longstanding Boer-Tshidi land-war.

223 Molema 1920: 214. Davenport (1991: 35-37): France invaded the Netherlands, whose exiled ruler asked Britain to govern the Cape (1795). The Treaty of Amiens (1803–1806) returned the Cape to the Batavian Republic (Holland). But, when Napoleon and his habitual foes resumed war (1806), Britain retook the Cape. The London Convention (1814) awarded Britain the Cape in exchange for covering the Netherlands’ £6m debt to other European powers. (Also Freund, 1989: 324-25). See Molema (1920: unnumbered page after Title Page) for The Bantu’s dedication to Scotland, cited supra, p.229.


225 Molema (1920: 203-04) gave no source for this quotation, but was citing a dialogue between Colonel Collins, commissioner for the frontier districts and Van der Kemp. Stewart’s Day Dawn in the Dark Continent, Molema’s chief
The fetters described were physical and spiritual, and his fearless words embodied the bravery missionaries needed for their long battles against obdurate authorities. Van der Kemp’s was the first voice of the Church Militant in Molema’s narrative of the long fight between the Cape’s temporal and spiritual rulers: for Africa’s redemption from pre-Christian worship and colonial exploitation.

Molema’s salvation of missionaries Philip, Moffat, Livingstone and Stewart from Settler Historians’ calumnies had an historiographical significance that his critics, Saunders and Smith, overlooked. It marked a departure from Theal and Cory’s influence, and anticipated Macmillan’s rehabilitation of Philip. Macmillan only gained access to the Philip Papers in 1920, the year of The Bantu’s publication. Molema had no such access, but decided to contradict Settler Historians’ representation of Philip on the basis of Stewart, Livingstone and JS Moffat’s works.

Dr John Philip (1775-1851), the LMS Superintendent of the Cape stations (1819-1851) raised a louder, more effectual voice than Van der Kemp’s against the Cape administration: “[h]e was not long there before the inhumanity with which the Hottentots were treated by the colonists struck him as barbarous, unlawful, and unchristian”. He is perhaps best remembered for his defence of Ordinance 50, which countered the legal restraints on “Coloured” people’s freedom of movement and employment. Striving to improve the Khoisan and slaves’ lot, he became embroiled in conflicts between Settlers and their main source of labour.

Rising from humble origins, Philip was ordained a Scottish Congregationalist minister, but struggled to gain university recognition: Glasgow University only awarded doctorates of divinity to Church of Scotland members. The LMS intervened, securing him an honorary DD from Princeton University. His faith, working-class origins and classical learning gave him a democratic belief in the equality of all human beings. That, and his indomitable attacks on injustice, made him a scourge of the autocratic Cape administration, and apostle of its liberalisation.

The LMS, whose efforts Molema declared “...unsurpassed by that of any other society”, sent Philip to run its South African operations. He became the “quintessential ‘political missionary’”, challenging the Cape’s rulers inside its borders and recruiting powerful support within the British government to his cause. Many have doubted whether his was truly an anti-slavery crusade, and have questioned Philip’s attempt to further the LMS’s (and his own) interests. In the long term, his promotion of the principle of wage (rather than slave) labour, perhaps unintentionally supported the proponents of merchant and agrarian capital.

His “many” critics (government, press, Boer emigrants and other settlers) directed “opprobrious epithets” at the “‘meddling’” Philip for exceeding his missionary office. JS Moffat, Robert’s son and

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227 Molema, 1920: 204. Mostert (1992: 511): Philip’s origins were less humble than Moffat’s. Born at Kirkaldy, Fife (1775), his father was a skilled handloom weaver. Well-educated at home, he then clerked for a Dundee spinning mill. He joined the Scottish Congregationalist Church, which preached a spiritual and social gospel, following both Wesley and Tom Paine.


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biographer, called Philip “the best-hated man in the Colony — hated that is by those who were not friends of the natives”. Mostert maintained, a century later, that Philip had, 

...made evangelicalism the most powerful intrusive force upon events in the Cape Colony for the next twenty years at least, as he acted the part of vigilant moral watchdog and interpreter of South African affairs for British public opinion.”

Molema gave Philip’s great rival, another non-medical man in his missionary-tradition, much attention. In 1843, while visiting the LMS in London, Moffat successfully defended the principle of independence for his mission station, against Philip’s centralising intentions. Robert Moffat (1795-1883) of Kuruman was not a Philip devotee. Both were members of the same missionary society, and shared the aim of converting Africans to Christianity and improving their treatment by settlers and government, but hostility marred their “domestic” interactions. In 1838, Moffat went to London to present his Sethlaping translation of the New Testament to the LMS, and met Livingstone, his future son-in-law. The “old hand” urged the novice to join his evangelical work. In London and Cape Town, the horrified Livingstone realised Philip and Moffat’s mutual scorn. Tension between veteran and neophyte, who favoured Philip’s approach to training indigenous catechists, mounted unbearably.

Few conflicts over missionary policy marred Molema’s account! His sources were hagiographical: Wells’s life of Stewart and JS Moffat’s chronicle of his parents and Livingstone’s Missionary Travels omitted most of this friction. Molema thus avoided his heroes’ personal and political ambitions. Instead, he turned their religious commitment into textual emblems of ethical opposition to racialism.

His protagonists all embodied the virtues of “calling”, “service” and “duty”. Moffat especially figured as a zealot converting, through faith and fervour, the Thlaping’s “densest darkness imaginable” and “pandemonium” into the “luminous centre of Christian activity”: Kuruman, first mission station among the Tswana. Livingstone received yet more reverent treatment:

[The best-known name in the annals of African explorations and missions is that of David Livingstone, who may fitly be called the Apostle to the Bantu people, for what Saint Paul was to the Europeans in the first century of the Christian era, what Saint Patrick was to the Irish in the fifth century, and what Saint Columba was to the Scotch in the sixth century, that Livingstone was to the Bantu of South and Central Africa…]

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233 Mostert, 1992: 123.
234 Macmillan (1975: 166): Moffat’s defence led to Philip’s being discredited in the LMS. Molema (2020: 205): Moffat was “born of pious Scotch parents at Ormiston” [today on Edinburgh’s eastern border], and was a gardener before joining the LMS. “Domestic” was Macmillan’s (1929: 192 fn.1) term. He revealed that “[t]he great Robert Moffat sulked in his tent rather than co-operate as effectively as the times needed with his ‘superintendent’ Dr Philip”.
235 Jeal’s robust biography (1973: 32-36): Moffat resented the “senile”, “autocratic” Philip’s claims to authority over Transorangia missions; Philip accused Moffat of troublemaking. Whereas Philip believed Griqua teachers could perform conversions; Moffat disagreed, and Livingstone backed Philip. See Livingstone’s letter (13 May 1841) to Mr Cecil. In 1843, while visiting the LMS in London, Moffat successfully defended the principle of independence for his mission station, against Philip’s centralising intentions. Robert Moffat (1795-1883) of Kuruman was not a Philip devotee. Both were members of the same missionary society, and shared the aim of converting Africans to Christianity and improving their treatment by settlers and government, but hostility marred their “domestic” interactions. In 1838, Moffat went to London to present his Sethlaping translation of the New Testament to the LMS, and met Livingstone, his future son-in-law. The “old hand” urged the novice to join his evangelical work. In London and Cape Town, the horrified Livingstone realised Philip and Moffat’s mutual scorn. Tension between veteran and neophyte, who favoured Philip’s approach to training indigenous catechists, mounted unbearably.
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238 Stressing Tlhaping ungodliness, Molema (1920: 205) cited Milton’s Paradise Lost [I: 756-57, p.87-88]: “pandemonium”, meaning chaotic and cacophonous, was the “place of all the demons”, the “high capital of Satan and all his peers”. Plaatje (1916b: 2-3) mentioned Moffat’s “heroic tenacity of will” in translating the Bible.
239 Molema’s (1920: 206) praise-word “apostle” echoed Sechuana Proverbs, in which Plaatje (1916b: 2-3) called Moffat the “apostle to the Bechuana” for his translation of the Bible, for which he had re-created Setswana as a written language.
Molema took care to invoke the saints whom Protestant and Catholic Scots readers would have known. He merely outlined Livingstone’s life, aiming to portray the missionary’s religious purpose in Africa, and avoiding comment on his character (often autocratic, fairly fanatical) or relations with others (deeply conflicted). Molema dubbed him an Apostle, the successor to saints who had overcome the defiance of rugged, woad-daubed Picts and druid-venerating Celts to spread Christianity. He wished to present Africa as a knowable place, the seat of African Christianity.

Livingstone’s exploits received appreciable space. Describing his God-fearing Blantyre upbringing and passion for medicine, religion, geography, demography, and anthropology, Molema seemed to unlock elements of an earlier self. He admired Livingstone’s rise from humble origins to principled opposition to Boer freebooters and the Slave Trade. He toyed with “Victorian explorer” myths about “the greatest man of his generation” (Florence Nightingale’s summation), but showed Livingstone’s leadership and ability to interact with African statesmen. Extolling the missionary’s Christian virtues of humility and sacrifice, Molema also honoured his descriptive achievements, as one of the first to document Central Africa.

Such reverence typified a bugbear of Livingstone-scholarship (termed “Livingstone idolatry” by Shepperson), which Jeal’s biography countered. New primary material became available in the 1960s, enabling Jeal to build a more complex portrait of Livingstone. He unmasked the mythic hero as an “Apostle” who made “but one convert, who subsequently lapsed”, and whose explorations were “partially marred by his discovery that Portuguese and Arab traders had already reached the centre of the continent”. His “failures” as husband, father, and advocate of British imperialism were startling. Yet, he contributed tremendously to altering the way in which “Europeans viewed Africans and Africa” and the missions.

Livingstone’s self-sacrifice in Africa had a formidable impact on Molema. This, Shepperson confirmed: whereas Philip was the political missionary, the motor of Livingstone’s life was faith:

[to me the religious impulse was the basic factor in David Livingstone’s life: a religious impulse which few people seem to share to-day; yet a religious impulse which was not a calculated cover for secular ambition but a central and essential element in him. Everything else...revolved around it in [his] life, making the debate on whether [he] was a missionary first or an explorer and geographer first irrelevant.

Molema, perhaps a Livingstone ‘idolater’ reached the same conclusion as Shepperson (without the benefit of additional sources): that the most impressive aspect of Livingstone’s work in Africa was religious dedication. Thus, Molema revealed that faith was the kernel of his existence.

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241 Livingstone’s *Missionary Travels in Africa* (1857) was an influential source for *The Bantu*. Shepperson (1973: 5) stressed the autobiographical nature of Livingstone’s text. Perhaps its very personal tone cemented Molema’s strong connection to its author.
243 Shepperson (1973: 1) hailed Livingstone’s dual (if contradictory) roles as “a forerunner both of European imperialism in Africa and of African nationalism...” and quoted President Kaunda’s speech (May Day 1973, Chirundu) to mark the Livingstone Centenary.
244 Jeal, 1973: xii, 1-2.
245 Shepperson (1973: 21) cited Livingstone’s 1852 paper, “Missionary Sacrifices”: “[i]s God not preparing the world for missions which will embrace the whole of Adam’s family?...God has been preparing the world for something glorious. And that something, we conjecture, will be a fuller development of the missionary idea and work. There will yet be a glorious consummation of Christianity. The last fifty years have accomplished wonders....”. In WG Blaikie, 1880. *The Personal Life of David Livingstone*. (London), p.395.
246 If his written works alone did not confirm Molema’s religious beliefs, then his family and friends do, in all the Interviews conducted with them. See bibliography for complete list. Molema (1920: 206-09) seemed most moved by Livingstone’s denial that his great labours were a “sacrifice” (208).
Stewart, Molema’s next subject, was widely seen as Livingstone’s heir. He wielded posthumous influence during Modiri’s Lovedale years. His books were important sources for The Bantu. Wells, another source for The Bantu, believed that Stewart had inherited Livingstone’s apostolic mantle and vision. Molema believed Stewart’s role prophetic. He saved Lovedale from mediocrity under Govan, making it the Cape’s premier missionary institution. Later, as Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, he supported WP Schreiner and allied liberals in defence of African rights. His self-denial and dedication to Lovedale moved Molema. Stewart’s death, he eulogised, “cast a gloom over the Bantu, throughout the length and breadth of Southern Africa. They now call themselves orphans, their dear Somgxada (as they called the doctor) was no more”. With Stewart’s death, Molema’s “lesson” on great missionary personalities ended.

Shifting focus from “great men”, Molema briefly surveyed the theology and effectiveness of noted Missionary Societies. His language, praising missionaries’ “wonderful zeal” and “activity”, revealed his own immersion in the evangelical worldview. That the Wesleyans’ history received most attention gestured towards The Bantu’s submerged autoethnographic core. Nor could he resist highlighting the Dutch Reformed Church’s apparent hypocrisy — “perhaps, of all the European religious bodies in South Africa, the one that has done least for the Bantu...”. In mitigation he added, that some men of conscience (Andrew Murray, Jan Hofmeyr) had devised missionary programmes for Africans. State endorsement of segregation in Dutch Reformed Churches brought him out fighting:

[n]In fact the Dutch Reformed Church has “maintained an indifferent, if not adverse, attitude to the Christianising of the natives,” and recently it has debarred, by Act of Parliament, all people of “non-European descent” from its membership.

All Missionary Societies undertook to improve Africans’ capabilities and opportunities, he asserted, except the DRC. The cited Act was the Dutch Reform Church Act (1911), “introduced on the opening day of the Union Parliament’s first session, it excluded coloured persons from membership of the church in any province other than the Cape.”

**The Prophets and the Law — Missionaries versus State in Molema’s History:**

These adversarial forces, missionary enterprise and South African native policy formed the overarching theme of Part III. His narrative angrily pitted government neglect of African needs against missionary investment in their progress, in an often incredulous tone. Had Africans so offended the Empire that it should abandon them to the Botha government’s untender mercies? Africans had shown exemplary loyalty to the Empire in the South African and First World Wars, he avowed. African political maturity and willingness to govern their own affairs was evident in the Bantu Congress’ formation.

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247 Stewart, 1903: 96, 286. Wells, 1909: 152, 222, 279. Wells (1919: 52, 124): Stewart was so inspired by Livingstone’s works, after Livingstone’s death (1873), he founded a mission station in his name, Livingstonia in Nyasaland. Wells likened the two missionaries’ relationship to that between two Old Testament prophets, Stewart was: “...a true Elisha on whom the inspiring mantle of Elijah had fallen...”.

248 Molema (1920: 210-14): Livingstonia and Blantyre (Malawi), and Blythswood (Eastern Cape) all owed Stewart their origins.

249 Molema (1920: 216-17) outlined Wesleyan history from Barnabas Shaw’s arrival, through the Frontier Wars, the founding of Healdtown, Bensonvale, Clarkebury and expansion of the Conference north of the Orange and Vaal Rivers. He resisted any temptation to include his grandfather’s impressive record as the Wesleyans’ first black evangelist. Instead, he gave a detailed statistical breakdown of Methodist church-members, evangelists, schools and scholars.

250 Molema, 1920: 219. Stewart, 1903: 261-64. Lewsen (1982: 355): the Dutch Reform Church Act (1911) united the four provinces’ DRC churches, but the so-called “black” clause (which Botha promoted) meant, “no Coloured or African member of the DRC in the Cape could transfer his membership to a similar church if he moved to another province”. Cf. supra, p.253.


252 Tsala**BT**, 17 May 1913, “The Native Land Bill”: Plaatje also protested African loyalty to the South African state. Tsala**BT** ran many articles on “Native Loyalty”, such as 12 Dec 1914: “[t]he fact is that the Natives of South Africa would not willingly exchange British rule for any other.”

253 See Chapter XXV. Molema used the generic term “Bantu Congress”, perhaps thinking “South African Natives National
Official neglect of African needs was castigated in five areas: "civilisation", education, "native policy", labour, and race relations. Expressing more angry righteousness than in his "Old Testament", he waded in. These chapters’ clarity, and the breadth of his theoretical reading gave “race” a very different exposition to Theal’s. To Molema, South Africa’s mounting racialisation was a running sore, an abscess rotting its moral hinterland. As a medical doctor, he could not heal the body politic, so, as an historian, analysed its decay.

Almost all his sources, save Du Bois and Plaatje, believed that race created foreordained cultural and political distinctions, which Molema thought excessive. He believed that modern industry and imperial policies now transforming the west were creating a progressive civilisation, which could benefit the empire’s citizens, black and white. Conceding that individual British officers might have displayed conduct unbecoming in the imperial arena, he still held that the Empire did more good than harm to all its citizens:

In South Africa, as India, and, in fact, as in all colonies, the good that Britain did for the natives far outbalanced the evil....The humane policy of Great Britain towards them has won [Africans' ] regard for her. In that way have they been impressed by the British, and so they have shown it in word and deed. One after another of the native tribes has voluntarily appealed to Great Britain for protection.254

“Voluntarily” overstated the ways in which African polities had been incorporated into British South Africa. Molema’s conclusions were influenced by Tshidi encounters with the Boers and subsequent appeals for British protection. He asserted that African communities had chosen British colonisation as the logical alternative to Boer tyranny. Interestingly, as his own text showed, neither the Zulu nor the Matebele had “voluntarily” appealed for British colonisation.255 The Bantu’s protests were not against the Empire, but against local government(s), whose racial policies opposed the notion of equality that many African intellectuals believed the Empire offered its citizens.

In the period after 1910, Empire no longer played a “levelling” role in local race relations. Palpable inequalities between whites and blacks persisted. The majority of Africans lived in comparative “barbarism”, lacked education and skills, he stated. Education and appropriate employment would gradually enable all South Africans to contribute to a common society and, in return, access its amenities equally. As with all his arguments, he applied the African utilitarian test: such a society would best serve the needs of the greatest number. His reading of John Stuart Mill enabled him to discern forms of community-based “tribal” utilitarianism at the core of African society.256

Molema was slightly disingenuous in claiming that the Great War explained The Bantu’s approach; current South African politics continually accentuated many theoretical arguments underpinning racial discrimination. The dominant issue of contemporary politics was clearly segregation, in his view, and here again, missionaries had played a key role in resisting state policy and facilitating the emergence of an African elite. This educated class of modern leaders was the intellectual and political equals of middle-class whites, and thus had every right to share their political rights and privileges. This small but significant African class owed its education to missionaries’ unceasing efforts, and not to the government. His praise of missionary efforts was, in effect, an inverted attack on the government’s neglect of African education:

Congress” too long, confusing (or militant?) for readers to appreciate.

254 Molema, 1920: 360.
255 In fairness, Molema (1920: 82-89) did not equate Rhodes’s seizure of Matebeleland with British colonisation. He skillfully depicted several layers of colonial expropriation in the region; “[t]here is, indeed, a ‘Matabeleland’ on the map, but that is no more than a geographical expression, an obsolete name for the country which was once the Mashonas [sic], was wrenched from them by the Matabele, and again wrenched from the Matabele by the Chartered Company” (p.89).
256 Molema (1920:194, 196-201) cited Gibbon and Green. See Molema (1920: 116, 130, 152) on Utilitarianism He included Mill’s Utilitarianism (1861) and Principles of Political Economy (1848) in the Bibliography (see Appendix C).
Christianising was the missionary’s first calling, and “civilisation” and “enlightenment”, the means to acquiring it. Molema accepted missionary methodology completely:

[The master-aim of the missionary is to “save souls, by persuading men to admit Christ into their lives, and to give up their sins by living a Christlike life”... his main duty is to preach the Gospel, and see that it sinks deep and soaks into everyday life. To facilitate this, his first step is to train the intellect to render it the more susceptible to the sublime truths which he has to impart.]

His faith in both Christianity and imperialism enabled Molema to accept proselytisation unquestioningly, whereas his younger relatives, and postcolonial critics, view it rather differently today. For missionarines, the objects of their ministrations were not empty vessels. They acknowledged that Africans belonged to a culture completely “other” to their own, even terming it “barbarous”. Cultural historian, Crais identified Africans’ immersion in missionary values as religious and cultural, and discerned in it the reorganisation of cultural and physical space. Mission stations and the activities they undertook “...began to reshape the landscape”. His poststructuralist interpretation made the mission station, where two or more cultures met, a cross-cultural “text” open to great misreading. There, missionaries controlled the meaning and use of space, from the houses’ shape and size, to the building of chapels and introduction of “modern” agriculture. Spatial reorganisation accompanied a “reorganization of time”, which the ringing of bells regulated strictly.

If one applies his theory to precolonial Mafikeng, the Molema influence stands out as unique. Rather than the missionaries, it was they — Chief Molema particularly — who controlled the community’s political and spiritual space. As noted, his sons all built square houses following missionary specifications. Moreover, he held greater spiritual sway than white missionary, Webb. On most missionary-run stations, African practices that ignored the new values of time and space were branded “heathen” and ejected from the station. Such struggles had divided Montshiwa’s chiefdom during the 1850s, but it was the Christians who departed to establish their own settlement. The leading role Molema’s sons played in Mafikeng education and economic affairs showed an eagerness to control the “new” spaces missionisation and colonisation were creating. Of the Chief’s sons, Silas, the teacher, especially, was a local man performing the conversionary function that, on many mission stations, white westerners carried out. To an extent, this involved indigenising Wesleyan Methodism, and caused resentment among missionarines who, like Webb, thought white evangelicals better suited to the job.

Modiri continued this role as religious and cultural broker, by practising western medicine and preaching in church in Mafikeng until his death, over a century after the town’s founding. Modiri’s accounts of his faith, especially The Bantu, “Tsela Ya Damaseko” and “Yuropa le Jerusalema”

257 Molema (1920: 224) from Chapter XVII, “Civilisation of the Bantu”.
258 Molema (1920: 220) gave no source for this internal quotation. Cf. supra, p. 271 fn. 259.
259 Leloba Molema Interview, 1992: she alluded to the ambiguous relations between indigenous and colonial cultures, citing the SANNC an ostensibly modern, nationalist organisation, but comprised of people educated in the Victorian or Edwardian eras. Molema’s deeply moral Methodism was very much of that era. Molema (1920: 220) reiterated “barbarous”.
260 Crais, 1992: 102. Evans patronisingly (1911: 97) stated that the missionaries “have entered into the life of the people, have taught trades, encouraged thrift and industry, made them to build better houses and use furniture, and among the women have given instruction in house and laundry work and taught them some simple industries”.
262 WMMS, Bechuana, 316, 10 Oct 1873, Webb to General Secretaries: Webb attacked the indigenising of religious teaching: “[t]he [Methodist Missionary] Committee are under the impression that our cause here has hitherto worked well under the care of the native teachers, but nothing is further from the truth...”
manifested his identification with the missionaries. However, this intense involvement also led to The Bantu’s othering of non-Christian, undereducated Africans (as he regarded them).

The otherness was of the missionaries’ own construction. They termed it “barbarism”, and strove to wean Africans from it through literacy-training and Gospel morality. In Part III, Molema unwittingly dynamited his readers’ tracks by revoking his own argument that Africans were, in their own cultural terms, as “moral” as any other society. He now claimed that barbarians inhabited a “moral void”, a “mental vacuity”, until missionaries “imparted some spiritual truths” to fill this vacuum. Manual work and industrial training were the foundations of “sound character” in this missionary gospel. He argued that Africans must be “weaned from barbarism” as if it were a dependency not freely chosen. This Methodist emphasis on work was almost a religious behaviourism; the more one practised a behaviour, the more engrained it became. New “habits of industry” and “self-control” would Christianise and civilise them.

The latter verb was the means to achieving the former: “civilisation is not the primary aim of the missionary….His object is to Christianise, and he believes that in doing so he necessarily also civilises”. Here, Molema explained from the religious perspective, the relationship between culture and missionary endeavour that Hobsbawm had outlined. To Molema, civilisation was the means to religious enlightenment; that civilisation meant, in his day, imperial culture, also explained his insistence on imperialism’s benign role in Africa: it was the conduit to faith.

The missionary Mackenzie, whose career embodied both the Christianising and civilising processes, was Molema’s key source. Tagged the “missionary imperialist”, Mackenzie had spent two decades missionising the Tswana before he entered politics to appeal for a protectorate over Bechuanaland because “nothing else could save Africans from white settler rapacity”. Many critics of the missionaries mentioned large numbers of “lapsed” converts; Molema conceded some of these allegations. Yet, he countered, accusers seldom came near Lovedale, but reported fourth-hand rumours of regression as “fact”. Stewart calculated that only 4-5% of converts lapsed. Molema did not challenge this figure, confirming his faith in missionary infallibility.

Cultural translation supported his defence: European history affirmed that evangelisation was a long, arduous process: “it took no less than ten solid centuries to nominally Christianise Europe, minus Russia, Scandinavia, and Spain…an area roughly equal to the Congo Basin”. He risked alienating English readers by noting that their wilder ancestors had resisted conversion, being “an idle, indolent, thievish lot of scoundrels”. He reminded readers that just two centuries before, “[p]eople were burnt

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268 Molema (1920: 222) cited Mackenzie [1871: 342].

269 Molema (1920: 221-23) cited Stewart’s Lovedale Illustrated [Nd: Np], which refuted the claim of one Baron Hübner, in Through British Africa. (Probably, Joseph Graf von Hübner, 1886. Through the British Empire. [London: Murray].)

270 Molema (1920: 223-24) based both arguments on Norman Maclean’s 1913 comparison of the conversions of Africa and
on authority of their King’s writ *de heretico comburendo*. The English had used this edict against religious dissenters and “witches”, the last of whom had been burnt in 1712.\(^\text{271}\) Thus, African “barbarism” was not, he implied, completely Other; Europe and Africa merely moved in different timeframes and stages of civilisation.

Detractors attacked African reliance on the missionaries, but offered few alternatives. The South African state disregarded African education, the keystone of “civilisation”.\(^\text{272}\) Molema’s chapter on African education demonstrated a command of quantitative and qualitative sources, and a rhetorical poise heralding his political career. He evoked modern democracy’s founding principles in the phrase: “fat taxes...are paid by the Bantu into the Public Treasury”; in return, government support of black education was “nominal”.\(^\text{273}\)

Such privation affected even him and Silas, despite Lovedale and Healdtown’s being elite mission schools; most others were far worse off. Molema paid minute attention to empirical detail in censuring government education policy, particularly underspending on Africans.\(^\text{275}\) Although his analysis separated the educated classes from the “barbarian” or non-educated, this passage showed his compassion towards those suffering the cynical neglect of African education.

His protests joined a vocal Cape chorus. During Colonial Secretary Chamberlain’s 1903 postwar tour, the Cape’s South African Native Congress had added another petition to the mound submitted. The SANC blamed the “parlous conditions of education in South Africa” on the “anomalous attitude of former Ministers under Responsible Government towards Native Education”. The SANC, of which WP Schreiner was a powerful supporter, also accused “the retrograde influence of the Africander and British anti-Native party [of] hampering the education of the [black] people”. The Afrikander Bond’s “anti-Native” alliance, to whom “civilised” meant “white”, wanted Africans restricted to unskilled jobs. This agenda dominated Cape parliamentary politics after Union, keeping numbers of African and “Coloured” professionals low: 6,000 in 1904, with commercial workers numbering nearly four times as many.\(^\text{276}\)

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\(^\text{272}\) Molema (1920: 226, 232): “[p]ractically speaking, the entire education of the Bantu is in the hands of the missionaries”. He added (1920: 237) “...every educated member of the Bantu race, no matter how great or small his education may be, is directly or indirectly a product of the mission school”. He hailed Sir George Grey’s promotion of African education.

\(^\text{273}\) Molema (1920: 226, 230ff) called government support “extremely niggardly” (i.e. meanly parsimonious”, *OED*, 1980: I, 1924) and analysed the grants per province. Evans (1911: 97) also found education grants “niggardly”. “No taxation...” was coined by Rev Jonathon Mayhew (1720-66) of Boston who, like America’s other “founding fathers”, opposed the 1765 Stamp Act. This demanded revenue from the American Colonies but granted them no representation. Opposition to the Act was one cause of the American Revolution. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Mayhew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Mayhew)

\(^\text{274}\) Molema, 1920: 237.

\(^\text{275}\) Molema (1920: 227-30) supported his attack on government by quoting Evans (1911: 97): “...there are no Government schools, or a single institution in the whole country run solely by Government for the training of the natives in arts or industry”. See *supra*, pp.173-75, for analysis of these statistics.

\(^\text{276}\) Willan (1984: 113-14) mentioned Plaatje’s petition to Chamberlain proclaiming Tshidi loyalty to the Empire. Warwick (1983: 175-76) cited 1,400 Orange River Colony Africans’ petition to Chamberlain; the Seleka sent another, asking that ORC Africans receive the same rights as those in the Cape Colony. On Chamberlain’s tour, see *supra*, pp.141, 144-45. Molema, 1920: 231, 233, on which he cited the 1904 Census figures.
African education took a disastrous knock, Molema demonstrated, contrasting the ample white funding to the paltry shillings earmarked for blacks.277

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Table 14: State Funding per capita for White & Black Scholars Contrasted

Government statistics endorsed Molema’s table. Per capita spending on Africans stagnated over the next five years. By 1920, there was a national average of £1.2, with the 29,300 African pupils in Natal receiving £1.4. Cape and Transvaal pupils got £1.3, while the OFS lagged behind at £0.2! Black “first-class” schools, like Lovedale, obtained under a sixth of white schools’ funding.278 By 1922, government declared openly that their education policy was the chief instrument for achieving segregation:

[The development of a Government policy in the direction of segregation and local self-government has been indicated by the Native Affairs Act of 1920. Native education will be the chief factor in the successful accomplishment of these aims.279

The rest of the chapter analysed Lovedale as an African institution delivering education as outstanding as any leading white school. It was partly the school’s biography, partly an excerpt of his own history. Outside missionary circles, these schools were anathema. To many white employers of black labour, schooling ruined Africans for their “proper” calling: “menial”, poorly paid labour. Educated “natives”, Molema commented bitterly, were “tabooed all round to force [them] to unskilled work, and to discourage other natives from learning skilled industries, for by doing so they are encroaching on white province”.280

“Productive work” and “African idleness” were running themes of colonisation. As already shown, two Cape Superintendents-General of Education had devoted much energy to occupying “idle hands” and debating the nature of work most fitting for Africans. Colonists and colonised were sharply divided as to Africans’ aptitude and skills. The missionary philosophy of “training” did not suit the misanthropic majority of white settlers, who believed Africans fit only for “kafir work”, unskilled labour to which whites — even “poor whites”, the class created by industrialisation — would not stoop.281

As an ethnographer, Molema went some way to suggesting that the nature of “work” was defined differently in African societies: [a]ll people work to meet their several needs, and not for the mere abstract love of work”. However, as people’s needs increased, under colonialism, they “must struggle for existence”. He did not pursue the notion that “work” and “idleness” are culturally determined, yet defended Africans against charges that they were “lazy as a people”.282 His trenchant dismissal of the notion of the “idle native” has already been cited, along with its conclusion that “the native supports the whole economic fabric on his despised dusky back”.283 Its tone epitomised The Bantu’s later, outspoken

277 This table below is from Molema, 1920: 232.
280 Molema, 1920: 253. For Theal’s comment on ill-effects of mission education, see supra, p.253 fn.149. See Chapters Two & Three’s discussion of Healdtown and Lovedale.
281 Molema, 1920: 253. See supra, pp.111-12 on Dr Dale & p.180 on Dr Muir’s belief that Latin would not suit “idle natives”.
282 Molema, 1920: 254-55. The Comaroffs (1991: 141ff) discuss the terms that the Tswana use to define work for oneself and work for the colonists.
chapters. He used his position as an educated African to challenge racist commentators, including Dudley Kidd’s dubious remarks.284

Four sources, Drummond, SANAC, Livingstone and Johnston, supported his argument about the close ties between perceived “idleness” and low wages.285 SANAC upheld his views: “[t]he theory that the South African natives are hopelessly indolent may be dismissed as not being in accordance with facts”.286 Colonial capitalism could not survive without plentiful cheap labour, he argued; where Africans would not work for depressed wages, the state compelled them. The Cape’s Glen Grey Act forced them into wage-labour to pay state taxes, and Natal’s Native Code coerced them into Public Works. He believed that the base collusion between Empire and capitalism betrayed imperialism’s nobler motives. Participating in the “imperialism of benevolence” did not mean he backed the money-grubbing of economic imperialism.287

“*The Nature of Hatred between Black and White in South Africa*”:288

Molema left discussion of the politics of segregation until he had established his identification with liberal opinion (missionary and Cape Liberal) and had outlined the depths of anti-African settler prejudice. In addition, he appealed to the patriotic, pro-imperial sentiments that the Great War had generated. Entitling his chapter “Black and White in South Africa” was a brave undertaking for an African writer in 1920.

Behind the racial arithmetic he carefully outlined lay an unresolved equation: the relationship between the South African government and the Bantu. The inequities in the Union Government’s “native policy” prevented a solution. Combining emotionalism with acute analysis, he attacked the “compromise of Union” that elevated the former Boer Republics’ racial intolerance over Cape liberalism.289 The chicanery that had, almost overnight, robbed the Union Jack of its symbolism was lamentable. The Imperial Government had broken faith with its loyal African supporters by “…hand[ing] all South African affairs, including all power over natives, to the now entirely self-governing South Africa. This has removed from the native one sole just court of appeal, the fair and disinterested arbiter”290.

The flag’s allegorical meaning helped Molema expose the weaknesses of the “compromise” introduced to stop white delegates of all four colonies almost deserting the negotiating table over the “native franchise”. Having supported the South African Native Convention, which brought African negotiators together from 24-26 March 1909 to debate the proposed Union of South Africa, JT Jabavu damned the 1909 draft South Africa Act. Through it the franchise “…has been given with one hand and taken away

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284 See Appendix C, Molema’s sources, for Kidd’s works, as Molema (1920: 255) did not specify which he used.
285 Molema (1920: 254-56) cited Livingstone (presumably 1857): “I was so frequently asked when in England, ‘Would these Africans work for one?’ Yes, if you could pay them”. Also Johnston (no reference): “All things being equal, the Negro is as willing to work for salary as the Asiatic or the European”. Henry Drummond, *Tropical Africa*. [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1888], p.65: “In capacity the African is fit to work; in inclination he is willing to work; and in actual experiment he has done it”.
286 Molema (1920: 255) cited SANAC, 1905, p.255. This was implicit criticism of Rhodes, who played a major role in passing the law, and whom he had difficulty in assessing. Though he praised Rhodes elsewhere, he censured the exploitative aspects of Rhodes’s imperialism, and did not see all aspects of the magnate’s enterprise as consistently positive.
288 Molema (1920: 278): these are the closing words of Chapter XXII, “Black and White in South Africa”.
290 Molema (1920: 246-47) evoked the historical symbolism of the British flag and the “maternal care of the Imperial Government”, to which many Africans had appealed, and to which many African soldiers had rallied in Britain’s hour of need. See *TsalaBT*, 12 Dec 1914, “Native Loyalty”: stated that Africans “…esteem it a privilege to live under the British Flag. Their attitude is typical of that of the subject races all over the Empire. They may agitate sometimes for greater liberty …in a way which foreigners cannot understand, but at heart they are loyal, as has been abundantly proved during this crisis”.

with the other”. From his left, came Izwi Labantu’s claim that Cape delegates had plotted to betray African voters. This smart criticism had galvanised into action delegates (like Sauer) from seats where Africans voters preponderated. As conflict raged, the few liberal Cape negotiators and Bond critics protested volubly. In response, palliative new clauses were added to the Bill:

...a 15 percent electoral allowance (or loading) for all country constituencies, provision of a two-thirds majority of Cape members before the Cape nonracial franchise could be altered, and finally...the right of all Cape voters, irrespective of colour, to stand for the Union Parliament.

Natal delegates objected, and Smuts did not check the Transvaal outcry, hoping the nonracial franchise’s days were numbered. Concerned parties in the four colonies debated and disputed. Cape Prime Minister Merriman feared negotiations would collapse over the proposed clauses; he reluctantly urged their acceptance to mollify Cape liberals, but was politically mortified: “‘I do not see what reply we shall be able to give our party when they ask why we altered their majority into a minority’”.

The Act greatly shook the faith of African observers. Plaatje argued that JT Jabavu’s conservatism opposed the African majority’s best interests: some “‘...suspected when the Land Bill came before Parliament, Imvo and the Cape Times are hand in hand against our people....’”. Calling the Act “a replica of the treaty of Vereeniging”, less moderate AK Soga showed an acute grasp of political history: “‘[i]t is successful betrayal, for the Act has virtually disenfranchised the black man already even before the meeting of the Union Parliament, which will complete the crime by sole vote of the two assemblies....’”. More astutely than Jabavu, he added that black disfranchisement suited northern Afrikaners and Randlords, eager to get “a little of their own back” and regain power over the black labour market after the Bambatha Rebellion and South African War. When East London’s Daily Dispatch complained that Izwi’s “inflammatory tone and language [were] calculated to appeal to the worst passions of its readers”, Soga retaliated: Izwi could not possibly divide blacks and whites — the “‘South Africa Conspiracy Act’” had successfully done that.

Jabavu, Soga and Molema felt their initial trust in white South African and Imperial government negotiators’ good faith had been betrayed. WP Schreiner, lone white member of the nonracial delegation to the British Parliament, stated: “‘[t]he principles of justice...associated in our minds with Great Britain and her expansive policy are violated in the proposed Act of Union’”. Thus, the Union’s “5,000,000 coloured people” were unrepresented, and “1,500,000 white people have all the representation and the say.”

This Act, and later the NLA destroyed many Africans’ hopes of belonging to the British Empire. They lost, thereby, the protection of both South African state and British Crown. Together the two laws destroyed many Africans’ hopes of belonging permanently to the Empire. Africans lost all state protection, as the South African state offered no safety, much less the representation they sought.

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294 TsalaBT, 24 May 1913, [Plaatje’s] Leader. This was a salvo in the long conflict between the SANNC and Jabavu, who played an inscrutable political game in Cape and national politics, thus (the Leader argued) merely confusing the African public. Willan (1984: 166) stated, “Jabavu came out in favour of the NLA, the only African politician of any significance to do so”.
296 The first quotation is from Odendaal (1982: 217), citing Schreiner, quoted in The Times, 05 July 1909. Walshe (1970 & 1987: 22) and Odendaal (1982: 197ff, 211): the Coloured and Native Delegation to Britain included Rubusana, as SANC President, TM Mapikela of the Orange River Colony, Daniel Dwanya (Cape), JT Jabavu, Dr Abdurahman, Matt Fredericks and DJ Lenders of the APO, and Schreiner. The second quotation is from Molema, 1920: 246.
…God in the heavens alone knows what will become of the hapless, because voteless, natives, who are without a president, “without a king”, and with a governor-general [Viscount Gladstone] without constitutional functions, under task-masters whose national traditions are to enslave the dark races.  

Many loyal middle-class Africans bitterly resented imperial disengagement: “Imperial ideals”, he remonstrated, had been “trampled under foot”.  

Just as they had organised popular opposition around the Act of Union, three years later, similar “suspects” vociferously protested the coming Land Act. In retrospect, Plaatje, Jabavu, Soga and (four to five years later) Molema’s contributions exemplified the wider-ranging outrage of African intellectuals.  

London-trained solicitor, Alfred Mangena, another SANNC founder, told a packed public meeting at the St John’s Street Masonic Hall, Cape Town: “there was not one clause [in the Bill]...they could favour — every clause was bad”.  

These men questioned what had become of the Empire, which had helped their ancestors resist the Boers? Had the past forty years’ history meant nothing? The next April, Plaatje, Dube, Rubusana, Msane and Mapikela formed the SANNC’s first delegation to Britain to protest the NLA.  

While some sought direct responses from the Empire which (unlike the former Boer states) saw them as equals, others protested their anger more radically. Edward Said explained that the security the Empire offered its incorporated peoples was illusory, cushioned by ideological, literary, and economic forms:  

[t]o speak...of the “propaganda for an expanding empire [which] created illusions of security and false expectations that high returns would accrue to those who invested beyond its boundaries” is in effect to speak of an atmosphere created by both empire and novels, by racial theory and geographical speculation, by the concept of national identity and urban (or rural) routine.  

“Empire” appealed so ostentatiously to many African subjects, because it dangled the promise of an equality the local state denied. But the policy of indirect rule, which reduced its daily intervention in the lives of colonial citizens to mere symbolism, was Empire’s grand illusion. The concept of imperialism invoked in toto Britain’s theoretical responsibility to rule.  

Primarily, African leaders wished the Empire to gain more African representation in determining the dissonant “native policies” that the Treaty of Vereeniging had created of southern Africa’s disparate colonies and Boer Republics in 1902. The National Convention found it almost impossible to find immediate agreement on “native policy” and the franchise; it took until May 1909 to reach a compromise on the Cape African franchise. The Empire’s vocal support of Botha’s government and indifference to SANNC pleas for protection increased support for African Nationalism.  

Molema detailed the histories of the four “native policies”. After a three-phase historical outline of Cape history from non-intervention (early 1800s) to responsible government (1872), he praised its
policy as “the most liberal, logical, just and humane as compared with the Bantu policy of the other three States”. Yet, even this colony rated the “Bantu” as “people in their teens”. Molema partly agreed that they needed guidance in statesmanship, “education in arts and crafts, instruction in the use of political privileges, exercise of power, and self-government after the British representative system”.

Dubow observed,

Molema’s engagement in this discourse [the racial discourse of existing linguistic and anthropological literature] is ambiguous and it sits uneasily with his disavowal of racial hatred and his ultimate insistence on human progress and perfectibility as an “axiom and law of philosophical history”.

Apart from confirming his ambiguous racial and class identifications, this remark showed how Social Darwinist discourse dominated contemporary cultural logic across the political spectrum. Dubow cited the last paragraph of Molema’s outlook for the future: “Intellectual Possibilities”, noting the difficulties Molema faced in “extricat[ing] himself from the logic” of this literature. The quotation’s context further exposed Molema’s philosophical orientation. He argued that human progress never proceeds evenly:

...[i]t is a law of all scientific investigations to presume a uniformity and orderly sequence in the phenomena that are being observed, whether these be physical, chemical, or biological. It is a basic, a fundamental principle, an axiom and a law of philosophical history — in its inquiry into the social, moral, or intellectual evolution of man — to presuppose human progress and human perfectibility, throughout humanity, even though the visible progress may be haphazard, irregular, desultory, and zigzag; even though it may be full of failings and falterings. The underlying principle is — what one man can do, another can generally do also; what one nation can achieve, another nation can also achieve.

Although a natural science proposition underlay his argument, this scientist’s flaw was to consider the principles of scientific inquiry transferable to the social sciences. Molema (and several sources) thought that society, morality and intellect — especially the inevitability of human betterment or “progress” — obeyed “fundamental laws” of explication. Therein lay the rub. While he assumed the latter “law” needed no proving, it did. Yet, nations are not naturally occurring phenomena, but are ideologically constituted, or “imagined”, in Benedict Anderson’s term.

While Molema was arguing against the age’s prevailing racism, he had also succumbed to the myth of the nation

It may be hard (with the intervention of so much postcolonial theory) to accept that a century ago, a black intellectual thought these values and attachments to Empire best able to promote African freedom and prosperity. Molema did, like the SANNC, since the country’s new rulers denied Africans the promise of equality and dignity that imperial citizenship appeared to offer them — a promise that would prove illusory. They feared (correctly) that so-called “independence” from Britain would be on “aggressive” Afrikaner nationalist terms. Given this political background, he clung to the “scientific” notion of progress: if it were not merely possible, but inevitable, then Africans were as much entitled to political and social equality as anyone else: “what one nation can achieve, another nation can also achieve”. He also argued (contra Keane and Theal) against the assumption that Africans were “in their teens”; based on the “progress premise”, they could “mature”, with education and guidance.

Epigrammatic Mandell Creighton, Anglican bishop and historian, voiced Victorian notions of progress: “...we are bound to assume, as the scientific hypothesis upon which history has been written, a progress in human affairs”.

Like “progress”, said Hobsbawm, Victorians predicated the writing of

305 Molema, 1929: 240.
309 Molema (1920: 351) called white South African politics “aggressive nationalism”, not distinguishing between moderate SAP “South African” nationalism, and Hertzog’s more extreme Afrikaner nationalism. Indeed, he did not mention Hertzog, who had formed his Nationalist Party in 1914, the year of Molema’s departure for Glasgow.
history “scientifically”, on the notion of humanity’s forward movement. Social and natural sciences “...shared a basic framework of research and theory...in the form of evolutionism....The core of social science was the study of the ascent of man from a primitive state to the present, and the rational understanding of that present.” Depicting Africans’ trajectory from past to present, from “primitive” to progressive, was the route Molema took. Where he “erred”, he reflected the historical discipline’s current errors too.

Teleological faith in human progress suited Molema’s religious creed, which eighteenth-century anti-slavery reformers and evangelicals had helped shape, and which promoted bettering the soul through hard work. “Progress” was one aspect of the British “civilising mission” at the Cape, which (as Molema had noted) Sir George Grey had so effectively sponsored. Progress was also axiomatic to late nineteenth-century imperialism and underpinning the idea that the empire’s ruling races were “naturally” superior to colonial indigenes. In progress’s name, colonial economic systems were premised on the rationale that the allegedly “inferior” races’ cheap labour would fuel modern technologies extracting profit for local and metropolitan entrepreneurs. He thought worker exploitation in capitalism’s name defiled imperialism’s noble motives. Although he condemned forced labour, he appeared not to see the South African mining economy and missionary philanthropism as manifestations of imperialism. Ultimately, the former, in seeking to create an unskilled working class, was probably more vital to the imperial project than the latter.

Thus, Molema’s chief argument against segregation based on racial prejudice (“hatred”) and economic exploitation was that the inevitability of progress made it possible for Africans to escape the lowly roles into which segregation policies cast them. Returning to Africans’ treatment as a race, he argued that they were, “as a race...unknown in the history of the world’s progress”.

“Unanswerable sphinxes on the shore of science” — Molema and the Idea of the Modern:

Progress, though Molema revered it, and though it sat at the core of early twentieth-century Modernism, often resisted scientific and sociological definition, as Du Bois suggested. Modernism was an international “avant garde” movement ostensibly away from tradition. In South Africa, “in or about ...1910”, to rephrase Virginia Woolf’s famous words, “human character did not change.” The Bantu’s last chapters argued for the possibility of “progress” among African people but maintained that the country’s whites were very averse to change. A gloom hangs over these chapters, as he faced this prospect: white intransigence had made it possible for only a few Africans to progress; the majority had yet to fulfill their potential. With race hatred a forceful impediment to progress, the future looked bleak indeed. Any fears he had about returning to South Africa would be realised in 1927 when, as Plaatje wrote, “one Native doctor at Mafeking”, who gave “much trouble to certain Europeans by persistently curing sick white people”, would induce the provincial administrator to pass an ordinance segregating

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312 Molema (1920: 258) claimed that those who favoured labour, especially in Natal, believed Africans owed it to the British, who protected them “...from foreign invasion” to perform forced labour: “they are educated and civilised by British teachers and ruled by British laws”. He called the “deduction” that they “should be forced to work” in return, “a most lame and impotent conclusion”. “What profit there could be to “the capitalists and the British Empire?”, he inquired.

313 Beinart (1994: 44): the decline in indentured Indian labour by 1911 led Natal sugar farmers to employ “unskilled mill-workers who were often Zulu”, while cane-cutters were “long-distance migrants from the Transkei or Mozambique”.

314 Molema, 1920: 316.


316 Pace Woolf (1924: 320) cited supra, p.8.
the Cape’s health care. The ordinance would aim to prohibit “European patients from consulting Native doctors, and the latter [viz. Molema] from carrying out operations in our hospitals”. Whereas white and black Mafikeng doctors willingly treated patients regardless of colour, the ordinance would make it mandatory for “a popular Native doctor, with unimpeachable bedside manners, [to] refuse to attend when called to see a dying European…” 317

In 1927, Dr Molema found himself in the middle of a storm when the Victoria Hospital’s white nurses “went on strike, to the intense delight of Transvaal Nationalist members of Parliament, who telegraphed their congratulations to the nurses”. He sued them and “the hospital board for discriminating against his patients”, gave them a fortnight to pay costs. Transvaal nationalists gave generously to the nurses’ defence to prevent them paying “a bill of costs incurred while ‘upholding South African principles’” 318.

This deeply unpleasant clash in 1927 does not, of course, account for the tone of The Bantu’s latter chapters, but does indicate that his worst fears for South African society were to be amply realised. Just seven years after his return, racist actions were being hailed as “South African principles”.

In addition, this microcosm of local racism signified the divided nature of modernity in South Africa. For the white ruling class, it meant their hegemonic dominance of a capitalist economy based on highly coerced cheap black labour. It also meant the denial of opportunity to educated blacks as far as possible. For the black petty bourgeoisie and the organised black working class, modernity meant living under these conditions, but seeking to achieve their vision of a nonracial society in increasingly vociferous ways. 319

In some respects, South Africa’s Modernism resembled that emerging globally, and expressing the ways in which capitalism was rooting itself at various periods in the early twentieth century, in countries around the world. As a specific cultural movement, it was related to but should not be confused with ongoing modernisation, an economic process. In its contradictory modes, Modernism, linked imperialism and capitalism at the level of the cultural. While some practitioners made it an elitist movement, confined to the “high” arts, technological modernism had a direct impact on the culture of daily life. 320

In other respects, local Modernism, particularly in African communities, differed (though not entirely) from often class-bound European concerns with art and aesthetics. 321 Molema was very much a modernist in that he critiqued local traditions, African and Afrikaner. At the same time his views were largely the product of his missionary education, a source of modernising ideas in the southern African context. By participating in the twin disciplines of history and ethnography, he began a rare, early assessment and reinterpretation of the sources and conditions of modernising change in African society. For him, these sources included Christianity, Cape liberalism (the ‘civilising mission’), trade and industrialisation. 322

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318 Plaatje, 1927, “Native doctors”, pp.352-57. As editor, Willan added that courts ordered the nurses to work under Molema and pay his legal costs: “[t]he local white community in Mafeking then set up a fund to help the nurses pay their costs.”
320 Tony Pinkney, “Introduction”. In Williams, 1989: 18: “[t]hat was capitalism, not Futurism or Surrealism, that successfully integrated life and art in a new phase in which the commodity no longer feared culture because it had already incorporated it, was more aesthetic signifier than humdrum use-value”.
321 By this, one means that African modernism was not necessarily as concerned as European Modernism to create “high art” (witness WB Yeats, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf). African modernism included the aesthetics of daily life: western architecture, dress styles and education were favoured. In addition, conscious modernists moved in multilingual circles.
322 Comaroff & Comaroff (1991: 15) termed ethnography and history “the undeniable progeny of modernism”. Comaroff & Comaroff (1997: 6, 11 & especially 22): “[c]olonialism was as much involved in making the metropole, and the identities and ideologies of colonizers, as it was in (re)making peripheries and colonial subjects...colonies were typically locales in which the ways and means of modernity — themselves often insecure, precarious, and contested — were subjected to
His modernism also embraced an African analogue of the modernising nationalist movement that took root in Europe from the mid-nineteenth century. Christian nationalism accorded well with his religious and political sentiments; its philosophy relied on a secular rendition of the religious concept of providence. All peoples, he believed — like many young politically active intellectuals in Europe and its colonial dependencies — were bound on a prescribed journey, an inevitable destiny towards nationhood, a road on which writers like Plaatje and Du Bois guided them. The war in which Europe was now embroiled had begun when a young Serbian believed he was expressing the aspirations of nationalists throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire by assassinating their heir to its throne.

In the twentieth-century colonial world, nationalism became a powerful political and philosophical engine of modernisation, providing new modes of identification for individuals beyond tribe and religious denomination. A compelling exponent of nationalist historiography was ex-clergyman turned French historian, Ernst Renan, who had claimed that:

“...a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. Man, Gentlemen, does not improvise. The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory...this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea…”

Renan’s enunciation of the past’s influence upon the present, paralleled aspects of Molema’s own project, although there is no evidence of his reading Renan. The above passage likened the development of the nation to human progress through life; the nation even had a mechanism for retaining its past, a “memory”, as individuals did. The collective memory contained the ancestors’ heroic deeds. This aspect of nationalism appealed greatly to Molema and black South African writers, who began narrativising the African past to save it from forgetting, or from the distortions of missionaries, travellers and settler historians. While he was deeply involved with nationalist politics (1920-1965), Molema also added to the community memory in Moroka and Montshiwa. The Bantu began this process by portraying peaceable chiefs as role models; he definitely considered Tshaka and Moselekatse anti-heroes. He also considered that several white missionaries and white statesmen had contributed to the building of an idea of African nationhood.

He struggled to pursue a nationalist argument in the face of the negative opinions that several of his sources advanced. Many, like Benjamin Kidd, believed that Britain held the key to Africans’ future which,

...is dependent on the future relationship of the British Empire with its African subjects, or...the improvement of the economic and social conditions of the Bantu, like the success of British civilisation, will bear a direct ratio to the integrity and humanity of British colonial policy.

experimentation and then reimported for domestic use”.

323 Dubow (1987: 80) noted that “important African figures like Jabavu, Thema and Plaatje” drew on “the powerful[ly] symbolic tradition” of Cape liberalism. Molema (1920: 305-06) criticised Jabavu’s conservatism; in 1920, he may not have encountered Thema’s by then plentiful journalism.


326 See discussion of the African Yearly Register’s nationalist role, supra, pp.243, 286.

Because of such arguments, he added, “some Bantu are hopeful of their future…and the amelioration of their condition”. Kidd seemed more optimistic than those wishing to preserve all-white colonial development. CH Pearson, ex-Education Minister for Victoria, a proponent of Australia’s federation supported the exclusion of “coloured” people, who would undermine Australia’s western “civilisation”:

[Western nations] were struggling among ourselves for supremacy in a world which we thought of as destined to belong to the Aryan races and to the Christian faith; to the letters and arts, and charm of social manners, which we have inherited from the best times of the past. We shall wake to find ourselves elbowed and hustled, and perhaps even thrust aside, by peoples whom we looked down upon as servile, and thought of as bound always to minister to our needs.

Pearson’s advocacy of the “White Australia” doctrine may have eluded Molema; the writer promoted Australia’s white citizens (usually the colonial analogues of white South Africans) from Asian competition. Pearson lamented that “[t]he break up of the Roman Empire has shown that splendid political organisation may be destroyed by the concert of inferior or less highly-developed ones”.

While balancing the critics’ often-cynical predictions about African potential, Molema argued that a large section of Africans felt positive about the future. He believed that all nations could, with equal opportunity, become civilised. His arguments for nationalism suggested that hereditary or racial inferiority could be overcome. His arguments were anthropological, showing where the roots of his nationalism lay.

His asked vainly, “What are the prospects of the Bantu?” The scientific authors he had read, including Huxley, Weismann, Spencer, Kidd and Pearson, made the question “more difficult to answer”:

This rhetorical question from Scottish poet Thomas Campbell’s “The Pleasures of Hope” expressed Molema’s desperation as an intellectual nearing the end of his expository and critical study. To an extent, his people disappointed him, as he explained, but largely, it was scientific method, which he had studied for six years, that disillusioned him: “[n]either capacity nor incapacity have been shown conclusively to be characteristic of the backward races, or, more plainly, of the African race”.

328 Molema, 1920: 346.
329 Molema (1920: 346) cited CH Pearson, *National Life and Character*, pp.93-95. Pearson (1830-1894) served as Professor of History at King’s College, London University, before migrating to Melbourne, Australia and entering political life. He vociferously opposed the introduction of Chinese labour to Australia in politics and in *National Life and Character* (1894).
331 Molema (1920: 348) cited Thomas Campbell (1777-1844), a Glasgow-born Romantic poet, and a founder of University College, London. His very popular long poem, “The Pleasures of Hope” (1799) (from *The Poetical Works of Thomas Campbell* [London: Frederick Warne, 1929] p.45, ll.318-19) was the work of an impassioned young man, inspired by adverse experiences in Edinburgh and by the age’s Revolutionary devotion to liberty.
332 Molema, 1920: 328.
clearly hoped, even given his reliance on Keane, Theal and Evans, that his ethnographic sources would be more enlightened.333

He reminded those historians and commentators, like Weale, who persistently underestimated the contribution of Africans to the world, that slavery had helped to make “Africa an outcast” and was largely responsible for the continent’s long history of disorganisation. Economic and political distress, rather than biological and hereditary traits, accounted for Africans’ not reaching the “civilisation” and personal achievement of western races.334 As Dubow observed, Molema attempted, if no always successfully, to break free of contemporary discourse.335

Molema dismissed some ethnographic racism with measured anger as “...the current dogmatisms on the improvability or otherwise of the Negro race”, and called Bryce and Keane’s published truths: “curious hypotheses”. They proved nothing about the rate at which mankind’s professedly “superior” and “inferior” races “advanced” or “stagnated”. Though Molema kicked at obstructions within the discourse, he never blamed the notion of progress and its evolutionist context for this racism. In another perplexing accommodation, he advised a gradualist optimism for the future. Africans should work steadily towards advancement, “[t]o expect that what has been brought about by centuries of steady application in one race — the European can be effected but a few years’ training in another race — the African — is, to say the least of it, rash”.336 Nationhood could only be achieved incrementally. He articulated the early African Nationalism, both Christian and humanist that Du Bois and West African nationalists J Casely Hayford (1866-1930) and Edward Blyden (1832-1912) expounded: visionary, angry, eloquent and middle-class.337

His tone mirrored the passion of many contemporary SANNC leaders. Indeed, much of the elite’s outrage found expression in nationalist rhetoric rather than action. Radical action was more likely the response of the elite’s left-wing, who struck alliances with the black working class. Molema rationed his anger carefully for stylistic effect, in contrast to the volcanic Selope Thema. Thema’s attack on such notions of racial “superiority” and “inferiority” suggested that levels of Social Darwinism prevailed among the African elite, although some criticised the more extreme eugenic theories.338 War metaphors abounded in the African press after 1910, as Plaatje’s “war” headlines on segregation and women’s passes showed.339

333 Molema (1920: 333) cited Keane, Africa (v.2, p.12): “for the true negro is of himself incapable of upward development, and without miscegenation, cannot even be raised to the somewhat higher stage of culture represented by the Mohammedan Arabs of North Africa. Molema (1920: 332) cited Evans (1915: 98), whose attitude towards Africans (while less offensive than Keane’s) damned them with faint praise; “"...to-day there is not a calling in which the Negro is not represented by more of fewer members of his race, and in some he has been very successful, but not uniformly so””. On Weale, see supra, p.262.
334 Molema (1920: 331): “[t]he Degradation and oppression of centuries — these have left effects which cannot be eradicated by a few years of freedom — yet not freedom either for the economic emancipation of the Negro and Bantu is yet to be”. Cf. supra, p.262, on Weale.
335 Dubow, 1995: 73.
336 Molema (1920: 334): the preceding quotation is also from this page.
338 See Starfield (1988: 26-28) for the radicalisation of the Transvaal Native Congress [TNC] leaders’ rhetoric. See Willan (1984: 250-51) on the estrangement between Congress’s left-and right-wing accelerated (1917-1920). As labor militancy mounted (1917-20), Thema attacked eugenic notions of race in Congress’s radical newspaper, Abantu Batho (Feb 1920, “Within the Ambit”. In Starfield, 1988:18): “[t]he Caucasian has no Divine right or mandate from heaven, to keep us in slavery or subjection. We have a distinct place...in God’s Scheme of Creation. Consequently we cannot allow ourselves to be exploited for the enrichment of the European Capitalists without invoking the wrath of Heaven upon us.”
339 Depicting segregation as a “war” was editorial practice at Plaatje’s Tsala. The comparison captured the institutionalised violence of this land invasion. TsalaBT, 18 Oct 1913, “Correspondence: The War of Extermination”. Also TsalaBT, 30 March 1912 and TsalaBT, 10 May 1913, “The War of Extermination” (leader).
Believing that racial difference did not automatically imply one group’s inherent inferiority to another, Molema argued that a race’s condition depended on history and environment — access to natural, political and cultural resources like land, freedom, education and technology’. Again, the present war supplied his example: contesting the idea that “the backward races are not worth saving”, he followed Du Bois’s assertion that “[s]uch an assumption is the arrogance of people irreverent towards time, and ignorant of the deeds of men”. Germans had struggled for over a millennium to reach their current eminence. Dogmatisms about racial backwardness would have prevented their further advance. Du Bois concluded that sociology was deficient in understanding “the meaning of progress and the meaning of ‘swift’ and ‘slow’ in human doings, and the limits of human perfectibility are veiled, unanswerable sphinxes on the shore of science”.

Most Africans “progressed” more slowly, he argued, lacking the resources that Germany and Britain (two current world powers who had emerged from obscurity) enjoyed. From this basis, he derived his belief in equality of opportunity, the foundation of his approach to nationalism. White policy-makers disagreed. In 1913, the Union’s first Act of territorial segregation was forced through the House, despite “liberal” MPs’ foreboding, and created “a Union dominated by the spirit of the Middle Ages so characteristic of South African Republicanism”. Even intervention by “…philanthropists, Imperialists, missionaries [and] Bantu deputations” did not deter legislators. The NLA was “steamrollered into the statute book against the bitterest opposition of the best brains of both Houses”. The Boers, Molema avowed, bequeathed two types of bigotry to the new state: the old republican “native policy”, and a quasi-religious “‘divine mission’” to exploit the Bantu”. In the Union Parliament, justice is disregarded, conscience stifled, Imperial ideals trampled under foot; the new Government in these enlightened days must put the dark days of the Republican régime to shame in the policy of repression.

Botha’s government continued its land programme, impervious to criticism. Molema’s brief account omitted intra-cabinet strife at the time and the 1912 defeat of Hertzog’s Squatters’ Bill. After his defection (to form the National Party in 1914), Cape liberal Sauer had to rush a new Land Bill onto the statute book. It was “the most cruel Bill ever put before Parliament, and...calculated to reduce 5,000,000 Bantu and coloured people to the verge of slavery”. Moreover, black people in the Civil Service, Railways and Post Office were being ousted by “inexperienced Europeans, and especially Boer [public] servants”. Using The Bantu’s ethical foundations of conscience, morality and justice to attack the NLA, Molema (like Plaatje) recognised that MPs concerned with the “Native Affairs” portfolio, who still held “British ideas of Political Morality” were soon replaced by Republicans “lest the country should be Anglicized”. The NLA embodied the demolition of “Imperial” ideals, to both writers a positive force in colonial government.

The Act was the ultimate act of colonisation in criminalising the sale or lease of land outside specific areas to Africans. It aimed to benefit white agriculture: firstly, by evicting Africans landowners and sharecroppers who ploughed and raised stock outside Scheduled Areas and secondly, reducing self-sufficient African farmers to wage-labourers. Molema noted a Free State MP’s words: ‘it would be possible for farmers to accumulate on their land as many natives as they could get, so long as they...

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340 Molema (1920: 334) based his ideas on Du Bois, p.262. See also Molema’s evocation of the antecedents of modern Britain and Germany in “Two Striking Parallels”, at the end of his section on “The Bantu Past” (chapter XV, pp.196-201).
341 The first two quotations are from Molema (1920: 248, 251) and the second, from Plaatje (1916a & 1982: 24).
343 Plaatje (1916a: 21-22): both houses of Parliament passed the Native Land Bill in 1913. The Governor-General signed it on 16 June, and it was gazetted on 19 June 1913, thenceforth becoming law as the Natives Land Act, no 27 of 1913.
344 Molema (1920: 248): by “coloured”, he often meant African as well, whereas he used “Cape Africander” for people of mixed race. Plaatje (1916a & 1982: 24), Molema’s main source for this section, noted “[t]heoretically...the 4,500,000 natives may ‘buy land’ in only one-eighteenth part of the Union, leaving the remaining seventeen parts for the 1 million whites”. Native Life recorded Plaatje’s personal research into the NLA’s effects on African communities throughout the country.
could use them as servants". African landholding and land-purchase were drastically restricted to 7.3% of the Union, designated for native use in the appended Schedule. Although the NLA’s provisions were temporarily suspended in all provinces save the OFS, many feared that its universal extension was imminent.

Even under suspension, the Act’s intentions would enhance white ascendancy, Molema argued. He condemned its threat to enslave Africans in ways that outdid the American slave trade, under which millions of people were snatched from the lands of their birth and transported to toil in foreign lands. In South Africa, “…we have a nominally free people in their native land worse off for land than their once slave brethren in a foreign land.”

Some seventy years on, Keegan contextualised Molema and Plaatje’s horror, in stating that the NLA was declaratory: it announced the government’s segregation plans. Yet, the struggle for rural space and labour power was fought on the land and not in parliament. Together, the 1913 NLA, 1936 Natives Trust and Land Act and, most decisively, advanced agricultural technology like the tractor, helped to proletarianise sharecroppers and labour tenants by 1945.

The Bantu represented the NLA as an attempt to neutralise African political and economic power, yet initially the SANNC leaders reacted with rhetorical anger but outward politeness in petitioning the British government to intervene in Africans’ support. Despite the best efforts of the Congress Deputation of 1914 to the British government, the War’s outbreak blunted the Imperial Government’s attention to the African cause. Perhaps Molema’s wartime loyalty to Britain made him mitigate its culpability for segregation, which could be traced to its support of white political development and post-Union renunciation of responsibility for African after 1902. Instead, he heaped all blame onto the Union government, which was “…more than anything else an oligarchy, with a privileged few and oppressed many.”

One of Molema’s chief sources on segregation after 1910, Plaatje, stressed the depth of white ethnic cleavage along Afrikaner-English lines, reproducing a Division List taken during the NLA’s passage through parliamentary committees. The Bill’s supporters doubled its opponents. The “Pro’s” nearly all had Afrikaans names; five English-speakers were either Natalian or had Afrikaans-speaking constituencies. The “Cons” were Cape Liberals, Labour Party or further left (like Bill Andrews). Perhaps Molema oversimplified the ethnic polarisation around the Act; the power-struggle was actually about political survival in the new Union parliament, as Plaatje understood. He focused on the

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346 Molema (1920: 249) cited Section 5 (1) of the Natives Land Act. The italics are his. The NLA scheduled strict numbers of acres per head per province.

347 Plaatje (1916a & 1982: 61): the Act’s official title was “Natives Land Act, Act number 27 of 1913”. Molema (1920: 249-50): the scheduled number of acres per head in each province in terms of the NLA were: Cape, 8; Natal, 6; Transvaal, 1½, OFS, ⅓.

348 In “The Sharecropping economy, African class formation and the 1913 Natives Land Act in the highveld maize belt” (in Marks & Rathbone, 1982: 202-08), Keegan stated that the Act’s immediate effect was “a spate of evictions”, mostly by farmers whose tenants’ stock used too much of their land or whose tenants resisted becoming labour tenants. “Thus, while the capitalising farmers probably used the law for the ultimatums and evictions that were such a feature of the period, it was as much pressure on the land which swung the balance their way as the law itself.” Walsh (1987: 45): in Thomson and Stillwell v Kama (1916), the Appellate Division declared the NLA ultra vires in the Cape as it infringed Cape Africans’ property rights.

349 Molema, 1920: 250. Molema calculated, by dividing the number of Whites (+1,500,000) into the African population (+5,000,000), that whites could hold 50 times the amount of land now allowed Africans.

350 Keegan (1986: 201): the NLA was also partly intended to furnish mineowners with cheaper black labour.


anomalous role of Sauer (MP for the largely black Aliwal North since the 1870s), who felt compelled to pilot the Bill through debates.354 Furthermore, he introduced harsher amendments, and cancelled the Bill’s “milder provisions”. With deadpan sarcasm, Plaatje contended that Sauer’s provision had outdone Hertzog’s failed 1912 Lands Bill, and that Hertzogites “…certainly owe[d] an apology to Mr Sauer for the present Minister has gone a good deal further than the member of Smithfield”.355

Molema did not cite the “unhappy” Sauer directly, but quoted an unnamed “liberal member of… Parliament”, whom he must have known was CH Haggar, MP for Roodepoort, named in Plaatje’s Native Life.356 Perhaps Molema did not know Haggar’s ambiguous history, which illustrated South Africa’s racially divided working-class politics. In apparently opposing the Bill (although his name was not on the Division List), Haggar dismissed the notion that whites could rightfully exploit black labourers: “as hewers of wood and drawers of water …[whites] had no more divine right to the labour of the black people than they had to the labour of the white”.357 Proposed policies to control African land and labour were “a policy of Tantalus. There were those who said that if the natives would not submit to dictation, they would be wiped out”.358 English-born Haggar’s politics were paradoxical: elected on a white Labour Party ticket, initially in Natal, he had unsuccessfully proposed segregating the workforce along both race and gender lines. After Union, he usually represented white working-class interests during repeated strikes yet, Molema remarked, made liberal statements against the Natives Land Bill.359 His Classical reference could not have been more apt: Tantalus, king of Phrygia, dared to test the Olympian gods’ divinity by serving them the body of his own son. Detecting the trick, Zeus had Tantalus eternally confined waist-deep in an Underworld lake, where he was tantaлизed by being unable to eat and drink the fruit and the water he saw. Molema appreciated the analogy. The NLA placed Africans in a living hell; though surrounded by their own country’s land, they had lost the right to farm or even live on 92.7% of it.360

While rather naïvely assuming that any white MP opposing the Bill supported the African cause, Molema declared that the Bill’s foes had “…little or no effect on the Union Parliament. Justice is

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354 Thompson (1960: 114, 503): former Cape Progressive Party member. Jacobus Wilhelmsua Sauer (1850-1913), educated at the English-speaking South African College, was Minister of Justice and Native Affairs (1912-13). According to SANAC (1903-05, v.IV, ans.45,075-7), he had urged the nonracial franchise’s extension throughout South Africa. Thompson (1960: 486-87, Census of 7 May 1911, UG 32 (1912), & p.473 fn.23): in Sauer’s Aliwal North constituency, the African vote was 21.9% when he was returned unopposed in the first post-Union election, 15 Sep 1910. The African percentage of voters was the second highest in the Cape for an unopposed Nationalist. Most other unopposed candidates in constituencies with high proportions of African voters were Unionists. Namaqualand and Aliwal (Sauer’s constituency) each had a percentage of African voters above 20%, and bucked this trend, by returning Nationalists unopposed. Odendaal (1984: 238) stated that African voters were pleased by the inclusion of Sauer in the first Union cabinet.

355 TsalaBT, 10 May 1913, “The War of Extermination”. Hertzog was MP for Smithfield. Willan (1984: 156, 162): Plaatje later argued that Sauer feared that but for him, the Act would have been even harsher. Plaatje believed the cabinet sold out Sauer just as they had the African population, by inducing him to betray his principles in backing the Act. TsalaBT, “Sub Rosa” (20 Aug & 09 Aug 1913, “Natives and the Government”) thought the old republics, the Act’s real instigators, would “rejoice” over Sauer’s death (24 July): “[w]e have all along felt that Mr Sauer thought he would screen the Natives with his broad and powerful shoulders between them and the fire; but the latter made a short business of Mr Sauer, and it is now raging amongst the Natives”.

356 Lewsen (1982: 359) noted Sauer’s obvious unhappiness on introducing the Natives Lands Bill into parliament in May 1913. Plaatje (1916a & 1982: 74-75) cited CH Haggar’s speech from Hansard debates before the NLA was passed.

357 Simons & Simons (1983: 97, 103): a PhD from East Anglia, Haggar’s “liberal” stance came just four years after he had proposed a Factories Bill in the Natal Parliament that would have segregated the workforce along race and gender lines.

358 Molema, 1920: 248, Thompson (1960: 460, 474-75): Haggar was a Durban MP, before becoming Independent Labour MP for Roodepoort in Sep 1910. In pre-Union constitutional negotiations, he had proposed some liberal amendments: that existing franchise conditions be entrenched, and that black candidates be allowed to stand for Parliament.

359 Simons & Simons (1983: 169-70): after the violent 1913 White Mineworkers’ Strike, Haggar and other Labourites opposed the SAP’s Indemnity Bill to legalise the deportation of 9 strikers. Smuts withdrew the Bill and allowed the deportees to return.

disregarded, conscience stifled Imperial ideals trampled under foot”.361 With full government sanction, Sauer’s Bill was unstoppable; as Plaatje discerned, they were “legislating for an electorate, at the expense of another section of the population which was without direct representation in Parliament”.362 His words echoed the sense of injustice that Seme had expressed in 1911, shortly after the first South African election, when it was patently clear that Africans were excluded from the Union:

“[w]e have discovered that in the land of their birth, Africans are treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water. The white people of this country have formed what is known as the Union of South Africa — a union in which we have no voice in the making of laws and no part in their administration. We have called you therefore to this Conference so that we can together devise ways and means of forming our national union for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges”.363

“Our national union” anticipated the SANNC’s formation less than three months later, which he, Plaatje, Silas Molema and many others, hoped would be a parliament for black South Africans.364

“Intellectual Possibilities or Impossibilities” —

What Molema told the African Races Association:365

In writing The Bantu Past and Present, Molema built on his address to the Glasgow and Edinburgh peer-group, the African Races Association in December 1917. Speaking to friends from four colonies and South Africa, he articulated ideas, based on considerable scientific and ethnographic reading, about the future of black South Africans.366 The Bantu is the evidence that suggests that the ensuing debate stimulated him to continue his research.

Deliberations on contemporary race theory and the creation of a white power bloc led Molema into one of The Bantu’s most controversial chapters: “Intellectual Possibilities or Impossibilities”. On street corners, in farmhouses and city homes, in government circles and in newspapers across racial boundaries, racial oppression was (and remains, nearly a century on) a fiery topic, and more contentious when its analyst was a black man. In 1917, it required unusual temerity for an African to identify and criticise government prejudice. Molema handled race theory warily, redefining its parameters and presenting a battery of scholarly opinions. The Bantu provided more background to the race issue than his Address had furnished.

African marginalisation became particularly marked during the South African War. English- and Dutch-speaking soldiers claimed they were fighting a “white man’s war”, and that black people should stay out of it. This Molema refuted with autobiographical information: he had been in the Mafikeng Stadt during the Siege, and his father had lead the Rolong Guard to defend the town several times.

[i]t is not generally known, beyond the shores of South Africa, that the South African War of 1899-1902 was not fought exclusively between the Boers and the British, but that…very many Bantu people…participated in it, fighting side-by-side with the British forces…winning battles and relieving besieged towns.367

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363 Drum, July 1953. In Walshe, 1987: 34. Seme also stated (Walshe, 1987: 33): “[w]e are one people. These divisions, these jealousies are the cause of all our woes and of all our backwardness and ignorance today”, Imvo, 24 Oct 1911. The oft-used phrase, “hewers of wood”, is from Deuteronomy 29:11 and Joshua 9: 21, 23 & 27.
364 Walshe, 1987: 33-37. Willan, 1984: 150-55. Molema, Johns Interview, 1964: “[a]s far back as 1914, the fact that they were a congress of the people appealed to the rank and file. They thought it would become a parliament of the black man. Congress taught people to read, gave them a desire to search the papers and find out what government was doing for the Black man. When there was a congress meeting the people came in big crowd”.
365 Molema (1920: 322): this is Chapter XXVII’s title, the first of Part IV’s 4 chapters on the Bantu’ future. At least two of his sources, Evans (1911: 310ff) and Bryce (1899: 453ff) followed a trend in making valedictory predictions about future race relations.
366 See supra, pp.218-19. GUA, R8/5/38/2, No.382, Matriculation Records, 1917-18, H-M, show that he was in his 4th year of medical studies, and lodging at 10 Alexandra St, Partick, where, it must be assumed, he prepared some of The Bantu.
Molema’s own experience of the South African War enabled him to provide an historical interpretation of black participation that eluded most professional historians until the 1980s, when reinterpretations of the “all-white” war, such as Peter Warwick and Brian Willan’s works appeared.\(^\text{368}\)

The Kgatla, Rolong, Ngwaketse, “Cape Boy Contingent”, Mfengu, Mozambicans and “Zambesi natives” received mention for aiding the British. However, he did not mention the Rapulana’s collaboration with the Boers, a startling omission, given Silas’s role in exposing Abraham Motuba.\(^\text{369}\)

Perhaps, writing as a guest of the British and with the Empire again engulfed in war, he expunged these rogue Rolong relatives to emphasise African loyalty to the British. He became one of the first historians to expose the early-twentieth-century white definition of “race conflict” as,

1. Struggles between Boer and Briton.
2. Struggle between Black and White.

The first part of the problem does not concern us in this work, except in so far as it influences the second part. In any case it was always comparatively negligible, and further, by the recent Union of the South African colonies, Boer and Briton have at last merged their political differences to work together as like one nation as their dissimilar temperaments can allow and their common interests demand.\(^\text{370}\)

In focusing on African history, he shifted the meaning of South African “race conflict” from definition 1 to definition 2. Indeed, Boer and Briton had foregone their prior discord to form a strategic postwar white alliance against Africans. He subtly depicted race conflict as certainly socio-political and economic, but also involving complex class fractures within black and white communities. Such detail was needed, as commentators in Britain often underplayed and misconstrued the worsening nature of racial antagonism:

...those who have lived in South Africa or the Southern States of America know the facts. Those who have visited these places have been forcibly struck by the evidence of racial feeling. There is, in all walks of life, a complete separation of the blacks and the whites. The latter hold together, and do not admit into their midst anyone who is not of their colour and race, and resist to the last any attempt whatsoever. This exclusiveness is in conformity and obedience to a sentiment which has been variously denominated race prejudice, race hostility…colour hatred....\(^\text{371}\)

Molema believed that racial was feeling born out of one race’s desire to dominate another. Africans’ numerical preponderance — outnumbering whites by 5 to 1 — fuelled white fear and loathing, south of the Zambesi. Thus, South Africa (and presumably Rhodesia) was really “a black man’s country”. In a vital insight, he explained the complexity of implementing territorial segregation:

[i]he blacks and the whites do not necessarily occupy different parts of the country. The one race is not entirely rural nor the other entirely urban, but the two come into contact both in town and country.\(^\text{372}\)

Very bitterly, he described how government, with the white population’s collaboration, was creating ideological space between the races: all public facilities and services, starting with “lavatories or similar places”, were racially designated.\(^\text{373}\)


\(^{369}\) Molema (1920: 279-88) cited Charles Bell’s tribute to the Tshidi, including Saane’s assistance, but strangely omitted the Rapulana and their Boer allies capture of Saane. His source was Plaatje, 1916a & 1982: 273-94. See supra, pp.140-41.

\(^{370}\) Molema, 1920: 259.

\(^{371}\) Molema (1920: 259, 263 & 260, the quotation) urged readers to doubt travellers’ reports minimising the country’s “bitter” race prejudice. On p.261, he cited Bryce, p.442, [1899: 351] to support this mistrust, and Violet Markham (1900: Np), who identified a “physical repulsion” between “…whites to the semi-civilised blacks who live among them”.

\(^{372}\) Molema (1920: 262): there were 7,500,000 people, with blacks numbering 6,000,000 and whites “only” 1,500,000. Thompson (1960: 150-51, 269ff): a clause of the Draft Constitution would have enabled it to join the Union after 1910, but its status remained unresolved. Davenport (1991: 250-51): Southern Rhodesia’s white population attracted Smuts’s faltering SAP, as a buffer against Hertzog’s Nationalists. After a referendum in 1923, Southern Rhodesia voted for self-government.

\(^{373}\) Molema, 1920: 265.
Emergent prejudice in public institutions betrayed their racialisation. South African justice was notionally “blind”, as in Britain and other colonies, but not “colour blind”. Some unbiased judges existed, but judgement by one’s peers was a racial impossibility: no black judges and juries existed, though some black lawyers still practised.374 More seriously, “[t]he weight attached to the evidence of a black man against the white is much less than that of white against black”.375 As to interpreters, whose ranks had included Plaatje and Isaiah M’belle, most black Cape Civil Servants were “swept out...and replaced by whites” by 1918. M’belle fortunately kept his post until 1915. Once a senior black civil servant, his dismissal symbolised the state’s onslaught on the elite, who struggled thenceforth to earn a living and preserve their status.376

The press became a racial battlefield, as Molema, whose father had co-owned Koranta ea Becoana with Plaatje, outlined. While African newspapers reviled the savagery of Afrikaner attacks on Africans, white-owned papers ran headlines screaming “black peril” that stoked hysteria over alleged black sexual assaults on white women.377 Black editors, seeking to identify the real racial aggressors, retorted “white peril”, meaning white assaults on black women. In 1904, Plaatje had slated whites hypocrites who denounced “outrages by Natives on White women”, but overlooked “their white confederates”.378 Molema wrote bitingly that the few blacks actually found to have committed such attacks received worse punishment than white men who routinely got away with abusing black women.379 Such were the ugly media wars at home.

Innocent daily activities in Britain, like walking on pavements and taking trams, were racially-charged in South Africa. “White” trams, cabs, and hotels regularly ejected Blacks. Churches even restricted access to God: blacks and whites had to sit on separate pews or in separate buildings. Ironically, Molema noted, the black servant in a white home performed daily acts implying great intimacy:

he may move amongst them as much as he likes, he may handle their food and their children, enter the same compartments, and sit side by side with them. He may do all this, but he must be a servant.380

Racism also created selective moral blindness over a white man’s marriage to a black woman deranged public and press, “...but illicit intercourse, even permanent concubinage, will pass unnoticed”.381 Fearing “miscegenation”, most whites accepted popular eugenic notions that “interbreeding” would

374 On the judicial system’s racial bias see MPP A979 Db2, Plaatje, “The Essential Interpreter”, also in Willan, 1996: 50-60. Whether Molema read this manuscript, based on Plaatje’s court experiences, is unknown.
375 Walshe (1987: 31-36): the return of 4 lawyers from studies abroad inspired the SANNC’s formation: Alfred Mangena and George Montsioa, Lincoln’s Inn barristers, RW Msimang, also English-trained, and prime mover, Pixley ka I. Seme, Columbia and Oxford graduate. MPP A979 Aa2.30, 18 Jan 1911, George Montsioa, MaF, to STM.
378 Cf. TsalaBC, 21 Aug 1911, “On ‘Black Peril’”. Missionary J Tom Brown, Kuruman, denied the existence of “black peril”. TsalaBT (21 Feb 1914, “Alleged White Peril”) attacked Reuters new agency for reporting on “well-behaved whites and the criminal blacks....But the same ‘Reuter’ has but a remote acquaintance with the criminal recalcitrant whites and an absolute estrangement with the law-abiding blacks....To-day we are told of a Mosita white man...accused of ravishing a little black girl, aged 9 years,...the latter is lying ill at the Mafe king Hospital; but the ubiquitous ‘Reuter’ knows nothing of the accusation”. TsalaBT, [date illeg] Apr 1904, “The Social Pest” reported on the Rand Pioneers’ meeting (30 March 1904). For Plaatje’s angry rhetoric, also see TsalaBC, 07 Oct, “The white peril” & 16 Sep 1911, “White Peril”.
379 Molema (1920: 266, 311) claimed contentiously that white women who were assaulted might be to blame for the attacks.
381 Molema (1920: 267) cited Evans, 1911: [Np]. TsalaBT, 17 May 1913, “The Native Land Bill”. Plaatje argued that black men had never sought out white women, “but the white man sought the black girls and women and the mischief began.”
weaken the race. White novelist Sarah Gertrude Millin expounded: “[t]he Griqua type of half-caste...is lower than the Kaffir”. Many white intellectuals named her South Africa’s premier interwar writer, a sign that the “horror” surrounding miscegenation was judged normal at this time.

Molema did not believe such a racial hierarchy immutable, but held environment and ideology responsible for creating and maintaining racial differences. Differential access to education created a broad intellectual divide between whites and blacks. Chapter XXII fine-tuned this argument, depicting vast distances between educated and non-educated black people as class division. Non-educated, “uncivilised” blacks formed a lower urban and rural working class, and often fell victim to partial education and acculturation:

[t]he Bantu may be divided into two great classes, namely the tribal or uncivilised, and the detribalised or civilised. The former of these...by far the larger section, live for the most part in the country districts in very much the same way as all the Bantu lived before the advent of Europeans. The detribalised Bantu live in, or near, urban districts, and adopt, more or less, the European ways of living....These urban Bantu are in all stages of civilisation; some are hardly civilised, some only half-civilised, and others fully civilised. They are subject to municipal control; most of them have had elementary education, some have had good education, and some others have had industrial training and are able to work as skilled labourers.

In his view, white domination initiated the inevitable decline of “tribal” culture and community.

...the tribal collectivism of the Bantu, with its beliefs, its superstitions, customs, and traditions, was a safeguard to the morals of the people. Partial civilisation means decentralisation, the dawn of individualism, and a shattering of ancient beliefs and superstitions. They are shattered, but not replaced by any new beliefs. Customs and traditions are despised and rejected, but no new customs and traditions are acquired, or can be acquired. The new individual is a spiritual and moral void. Outwardly, indeed, he may don a civilised appearance — European clothing, European language, European ideas, European manners and live in European houses....And what is the reason for all this? The metamorphosing Bantu themselves don’t know and don’t care. Hardly on the threshold of civilisation, they consider themselves already changed beings — and changed indeed they are, but only for the worse.

Sentences 2, 3 and 4 conveyed Molema’s belief that colonisation was largely destructive for the colonised. Colonisation was a layered process, affecting land, body and culture, while replacing and displacing pre-existing cultures. These three crucial sentences described how colonial settlement broke (he used two forms of “shatter”) the older society (“ancient” African tribal community structure). Where education followed (one culture replacing another), civilisation or full colonisation occurred. He apparently found this makeover satisfactory. However, when civilisation was “partial”, shattered cultures were displaced, not replaced by an emptiness, a “spiritual and moral void”. The semi-colonised individual suffered a confused identity, although “he may don a civilised appearance”. Partial colonisation thoroughly disorganised the older culture, leaving a new veneer, without substance, and a largely dispirited, demoralised people.

There were two “great” classes of Africans: “tribal” or “uncivilised” and “detrabalised” or “civilised”. The first group was overwhelmingly rural, living under their chiefs, much as had their precolonial forebears. The second group had moved beyond the influence of the tribal core unit, to live in or near urban centres. Many were Christians, with varying degrees of education, and spoke several languages:

382 Dubow (1995: 17): some early twentieth-century theorists believed miscegenation “dysgenic” (as opposed to “eugenic”), others (eg. Keane, see supra, pp.300, 308, 314-17, 339, 344) “claimed that it promoted “hybrid vigour”.
384 See Molema, 1920: Chapter XIX.
386 Molema, 1920: 308.
“some are hardly civilised, some only half-civilised, and others fully civilised. They are subject to urban control”. Evans and Bryce may have been his sources here, though Molema did not support the former’s segregationist conclusions. Both expatiated on the differences between “tribal” and “semi-civilized or non-tribal natives” with seeming erudition. Bryce stated clearly that “people of colour may be divided into two classes” and commented on the often negative effects of European lifestyles upon the “semi-civilized”.

Molema distanced himself and the educated class to which he and the elite belonged from the larger “tribal” or “semi-tribalised” classes, terms he associated with minimal assimilation into the “civilised” community. His description of these two “lesser” or “lower” orders may register, in the 1994 era, as elitist, but also relate to the elite’s struggle to establish themselves as a new, nationalist leadership of the African community. Even in 1915, his second year of study, he told Silas, “[a]s for my countrymen, it is with the Lord’s help that will enable me to help them physically, materially and spiritually. My obligation here, I am prepared to do fully, the Lord being my helper”. In 1920, he outlined more concrete plans for building a nursing home, improving the Stadt’s sanitation and training nurses.

In fairness, the contemporary segregationist discourse (“tribal” and “detribalised”) had a substantive legal meaning, denoting the legal system under which Africans lived. “Tribal” Africans lived under African law — the “Native Code”, whereas urban-dwellers and educated, property-owning, enfranchised Africans were “exempt” from Native Law, and not required to bear passes. He criticised these institutionalised forms of racism, but showed how they were entrenched in post-Union legislation. Besides, he argued, whites did not behave uniformly towards Africans: he argued that “…the Boers, as a nation” lagged behind the British kinsmen intellectually and educationally, and displayed far more prejudice towards Africans.

In admitting his elite status, Molema indicated his autoethnographical liminality. This defined and confined his position as a writer, also showing his acute understanding of the workings of power and powerlessness among Africans. Yet, he seemed less aware of the way his privilege might limit his claim to represent all black people. His comment on the distance between educated Africans and the larger less-educated classes compels one to reevaluate his initial claims to represent them as “a member of the race”. That said, his narrative had several purposes: firstly, to establish that Christian, educated Africans were the moral and intellectual equals of whites who shared such attributes. Secondly, he argued that undereducated Africans could, if given the opportunity, achieve equal status: race would not prevent them. Thirdly, he declared that the white government exercised its power to deny Africans their rights to equal treatment. Consequently, he stated, many Africans would express their grievances racially, through African nationalism.
It is perplexing that Molema devoted so little space to the African nationalist organisation which then most represented the elite’s ideals and ambitions: the SANNC. He dubbed it the “Bantu National Congress”, stating that he found the full title unfortunate. Possibly, he dealt fleetingly with Congress, sidestepping its critical attitude to Britain’s withdrawal of responsibility for Africans. This slender chapter on African representation included a section on the African press. Here, he attacked Jabavu’s conservatism, but dwelt briefly on progressive journalists, like Plaatje and the Abantu Batho collective.

Perhaps the explanation lies in genre. Although, The Bantu was a “history and ethnography”, its scope was broader. It belonged to the “auto-” or “life” genres, being not “straight” autobiography, but generically complex. In terms of The Bantu’s autoethnographic intent, Molema may have felt that he was, as author, drawing too near to his own life and the activities of his close friends. While alluding to associates among the elite, he wrote distantly, omitting family involvement that might have invoked a personal pronoun. He may also have wished to maintain the impersonal and ‘neutral’ distance of scientific discourse.

He was more concerned to stress African commitment to the Empire during World War I, than to discuss the wellspring of African nationalist anger against the retreating Empire. As the epigraph to his chapter on “Bantu in the European War”, he quoted a key speech from Shakespeare’s most patriotic play, Henry V. Henry, the new king seeking to prove his leadership to his men before the Battle of Harfleur, musters them with the rousing “Once more into the breach, dear friends, once more/Or close the wall up with our English dead!”.

He appended a telling line from the disguised King’s talk with his men on the eve of Agincourt, about subjects’ duties to their rulers: “Every subject’s duty is the king’s”. Molema used this speech to stress that Britain “…is the head of a large household, the mother of many children…of all hues and habitations. When once she decided to go to war, these joined her in a true filial manner”. Several vociferous local protests in Britain, like the Suffragettes and the Irish Home Rule agitation, had subsided with war’s declaration. His approval of these movements’ retreat for the duration may explain why he downplayed the state of African Nationalism at home. Local issues should give place to the Imperial need.

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393 A later article suggested that his dislike of the Congress’ long name may have made him use the generic name in The Bantu. UNISA, ANC Papers, AD2186/N, [1943] “Thoughts and Reflections on the African National Congress”, p.3-4: “[t]here were just two unfortunate things about the Congress of those days. The first was its horrible name…” South African Native National Congress’, an example of inferiority complex and slavish psychology disguised under a tautological absurdity. Imagine…the British Parliament being called the British Native National Parliament”.


395 On autoethnography, see supra, pp.230, 256, 260, 277, 303, 313, 323, 330, 352.

396 William Shakespeare, 1599, The Life of King Henry the Fifth, p.553. Act III, i, ll.1-8. This speech’s last line is often cited as the epitome of patriotism: “Cry ‘God for Harry! England and saint George!’”. See Bibliography for publication details.


398 Molema, 1920: 293-94.
Even a European war was not without racial conflict: the British Empire’s “coloured” subjects, especially Indians, arrived in numbers and contributed financially. France’s North African troops had many African troops engaged in the lengthy Battle of Verdun. Black West Indian troops had also fought on the Western Front. Meantime, soldiers from Britain’s other African colonies (Gold Coast, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) defended Togo and Cameroon against the Germans and later moved to defend East Africa. Molema emphasised that these were black soldiers fighting on the Empire’s behalf. Two Rhodesian Native Contingents saw service in “German East Africa” [Tanzania].

Chief Griffith of the Sotho wrote to King George V, invoking the precept that “every subject’s duty is the king’s”. Other southern African communities had offered money and men to the army, yet “white South Africa was inexorable”. To the white authorities, this was “a white man’s war” and “the fact that thousands of coal black sons of Africa were fighting side by side with the Allies at the front had no weight”.

The war in Europe might have been an opportunity for black South Africans to gain a measure of equality by fighting alongside whites. The government happily received the African contributions, but would not let them bear arms. Molema quoted a classic example of racial logic from the *East Rand Express*:

> [t]he Empire must uphold the example that a coloured man must not raise his hand against a white man if there is to be any law or order in either India, Africa, or any part of the Empire where the white man rules over a large concourse of coloured people.

Plaatje, Molema’s main source on black wartime deployment, included copious government rejections of black and “Coloured” assistance in the fighting. Of particular interest was Dr Rubusana of the SANNC’s supposedly militant Eastern Cape branch. Having just returned from Europe (he had also served on the 1914 Deputation), he volunteered to assemble 5,000 black soldiers to serve in East Africa. The Secretary of Defence politely referred him to the 1912 South African Defence Act: “the Government does not intend to avail itself of the services, in a combatant capacity, of citizens not of European descent in the present hostilities”. Molema did not mention Rubusana’s name, but cited government’s answer.

Blacks and “Coloureds” could only serve in the armed forces if the South African racial hierarchy were preserved. Thus, they were allowed to express “their loyalty in a practical manner”, Molema wrote euphemistically. They would be servants to the white troops, in non-combatant roles. A Native Labour Contingent [NLC] of 23,000-24,000 men was shipped to Europe, where they built trenches, railways and communication lines and performed other heavy wartime duties. Despite their non-combatant role, many of the NLC died like common soldiers. In a tragedy still commemorated today, over 600 recruits aboard the Mendi drowned off the Isle of Wight, when rammed by a French steamer.

**Even more than in his chapter on the South African War, Molema wrote impassionately of African participation in the Empire’s defence. To him it represented the loyalty of his countrymen, who would rather be ruled from London than from Pretoria. After many protestations of his own, in the chapter, he**

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399 Molema (1920: 296-97): the other black communities he named were the Tlhaping, who gave 200 cattle to provision the South African government for the British troops. Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Tswana were apparently ready to enlist. Ngwato Chief Khama donated nearly £1,000 and “late Chief Lewanika of Barotseland gave £200”. The South African government refused the services of the Cape Coloured Corps. He obtained these details from Plaatje, 1916a & 1982: 312.


401 Plaatje (1916a & 1982: 303-04) cited letters from WB Rubusana, East London, to Rt Hon, the Minister of Native Affairs [undated] and HMB Bourne, Secretary for Defence, Pta, to Dr WB Rubusana, 2 Nov 1914.


threw down his gage rhetorically: “Such is the practical manner in which the Bantu have expressed their loyalty to the British Empire. Will the British recognise that loyalty in a practical manner?”

There is a tension in The Bantu that relates to his initial statement: “[t]he Great War is quoted to explain everything”.

He may have hoped it would capture war-bound readers’ attention. In the chapter dealing with African participation in the conflict, this theme was apt: he used it to illustrate the South African government’s stubborn adherence to racial segregation in contrast with African loyalty to the Empire. Yet, the War patently did not explain everything, especially the rise of nationalism among the black elite, and their mounting criticism of the Empire that had abandoned Africans to the segregationists. This tension led Molema, a nationalist himself, to underplay the extent of nationalist anger, and to direct all resentment at the South African government. Rather than portray nationalism as a form of opposition to colonisation, he let the British off the hook and blamed the Boers.

In introducing the “Bantu Congress”, he attributed its founding to British intervention:

This excerpt encapsulated Congress’s desire to transform conflict between African ethnic groups into cooperation. “Civilisation” harked back to Rhodes’ 1898 election campaign slogan: “equal rights for all civilised people south of the Zambesi”, a blatant attempt to woo Cape African votes. The term “civilised” mitigated the negative connotations that contemporary whites associated with being African. It implied assimilation into western codes of behaviour. By reiterating Rhodes’s slogan, Molema suggested that he (and other African voters) could tolerate a society segregated on class rather than racial lines! Once incorporated into the “civilised” and enfranchised class, one enjoyed certain rights that white civilians — however prejudiced — could not remove. He did note, however, that “the colour sentiment against these civilised blacks…is greater than it is against the uncivilised”.

The nationalist movement’s growth indicated how even enfranchised Africans felt increasingly racially disadvantaged. A strong nationalist movement would help to overcome the tribal divisions that enabled governments to divide and rule African people. For this reason, Seme’s vision of an overarching body to conciliate all African communities’ political needs against the unified white state gained popularity. “Tribal” division only rendered the Union government more powerful.

In 1913, Plaatje had been more outspoken: “[t]ribalism and clan[n]ishness is melting away under the heat of our bungling misgovernment, and a bond of sympathy and co-operation is being automatically weaved amongst the coloured races of South Africa”. Thema also depicted the SANNC as a melting-pot for mutually-suspicious “tribes”. But, five years after 1912, he feared that the radical Abantu Batho faction might shatter this hard-won unity. Like Molema, he used analogy, branding Shaka a misguided conqueror who had only divided the “tribes”:

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404 Molema, 1920: 301.
407 Molema (1920: 241, 275-76) characterised the educated class and the re-doubled racism directed at them by whites.
409 Plaatje (23 Dec 1913, “Along the Colour Line”. In Plaatje, 1996: 168) described Dube, the Zulu SANNC president as being enthusiastically welcomed by all South Africa’s people, even the “Cape Afrikanders [‘Coloureds’]”. 
Now [i.e. a century on]...Tshaka has appeared in the form of the Abantu Batho and co...[who]...in their endeavor to do good for the people, have succeeded only in destroying and disorganizing the people’s...endeavor to unite all the tribes of the Bantu race....

Closely involved in this intense political period, Thema wrote this at the same period that Molema was praising the SANNC’s moderation! Morally correct positions had short political lives, he lamented:

The Congress is not aggressive in spirit nor militant in practice. It is the reverse. It inculcates loyalty to the rulers. It believes in moderation. But moderate steps fail in South Africa, and the Bantu Congress was in 1914, after trying all moderate steps and constitutional means, obliged to send a deputation to England to appeal for Imperial protection against the Natives Land Act, 1913, which they considered was calculated to reduce them to serfdom.

Looking back over this period in 1964, Molema stated that until Dr Xuma’s presidency (1940-49), Congress had been “just a talking body”. Yet, it had helped to spread political literacy in black communities and expanded the political base its founders had first established.

Plaatje continued to see the Empire as a benign power, ultimately serving its subjects’ best interests by offering them greater opportunities for freedom and progress than would the Union government. Molema, however, belonged to the rising generation. He returned home in 1921, armed with a new profession and hosts of ideas for bettering his community’s health. How long it would take his fellow Africans to transform the moderate, Plaatje-like “line” that he too had endorsed in The Bantu remained to be seen. “The Great War” and prolonged wartime paper shortages delayed The Bantu’s publication by over two years. He had completed The Bantu in 1917, just as the industrial unrest in South Africa, and the shift from “older-style” nationalist politics to working-class organisation began. Where he did voice radical opinions, he directed his rhetorical anger at white (usually Boer) South Africans. From a tactical point of view, he wished to maintain reader confidence, not disturbing that relationship with too much contemporary emotion. Ultimately, though intellectually active within his cohort of ARA colleagues, he was politically inactive, feeling distanced from South African daily politics. He had chosen to tackle the representation of South Africa in academic discourse. This was why he had, initially decided to write a study analysing and explaining the African past and present. Partly to help his Glasgow comrades explore their African extraction, partly to educate British and South African readers about African history, and partly for himself, Modiri, needed to re-create the comfort of the familiar as a stranger in a strange land.

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410 Thema (28 Apr 1917. “Letter to the Editors of Abantu Batho and Ilanga lase Natal”) called the two factions the “-ites” and claimed they were breaking down along ethnic lines.