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# Basner and Mopeli-Paulus's 'The world and the cattle': in the written historiography of the 1950 Witzieshoek Reserve Rebellion, riot, revolt, unrest, disturbance, tragedy, trouble, turbulence, terrible story, incident, battle, calamity, clash, climax, lamentable occurrence, outbreak of passions, startling explosion, stain on our reputation, friction, fight, affray, unhappy affair

**Jones, Hannah**

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**UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND**

## HISTORY WORKSHOP

BASNER AND MOPELI-PAULUS'S **THE WORLD AND THE CATTLE**
IN THE WRITTEN HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE 1950
WITZIESHOEK RESERVE REBELLION, RIOT, REVOLT, UNREST,
DISTURBANCE, TRAGEDY, TROUBLE, TURBULENCE, TERRIBLE,
STORY, INCIDENT, BATTLE, CALAMITY, CLASH, CLIMAX, LAMENTABLE
OCCURRENCE, OUTBREAK OF PASSIONS, STARTLING EXPLOSION, STAIN ON
OUR REPUTATION, FRICTION, FIGHT, AFFRAY, UNHAPPY AFFAIR

Hannah Jones
African Literature
University of the Witwatersrand

AFRICANA

BASNER AND MOPELI-PAULUS'S THE WORLD AND THE CATTLE IN THE WRITTEN HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE 1950 WITZIESHOEK RESERVE REBELLION, RIOT, REVOLT, UNREST, DISTURBANCE, TRAGEDY, TROUBLE, TURBULENCE, TERRIBLE STORY, INCIDENT, BATTLE, CALAMITY, CLASH, CLIMAX, LAMENTABLE OCCURRENCE, OUTBREAK OF PASSIONS, STARTLING EXPLOSIOIN, STAIN ON OUR REPUTATION, FRICTION, FIGHT, AFFRAY, UNHAPPY AFFAIR[1]

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"Seeing is believing," claims the narrator of The World and the Cattle: the Story of a Man and a Small South African Tribe.[2] A.S. Mopeli-Paulus authored this text, his 'autobiography', in conjunction with Miriam Gordon Basner in the mid-1950's. The text contains an extended narrative of the 27 November, 1950 Witzieshoek Rebellion submerged within the life story of Mopeli-Paulus. As the 'I' of The World and the Cattle, 'Mopeli-Paulus' declares the personal nature of his account of the Rebellion to achieve narrative authority; he was there, he 'saw' what happened, or so his personal stance proclaims. However, what did 'Mopeli-Paulus' 'see' of the Rebellion, the events that led up to it and its aftermath? More importantly, what have others ascribed to 'his' witness and testimony put forth in this 'autobiography', be those others--government officials, his co-author, Rebellion historians, and even, in this case, Drum magazine? The place of The World and

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[1]These terms are from the following sources in the order of their appearance in this title. The list is by no means comprehensive or thoroughly cross-referenced. For "rebellion" see Sean Moroney, "The 1950 Witzieshoek Rebellion", Africa Perspective, 3,1976, and also Tom Lodge, "Resistance in the Countryside", Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945 (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983), p. 273; for "riot" see The Rand Daily Mail, 9 December, 1950; for "revolt" see Baruch Hirson, "Rural Revolt in South Africa: 1937-1951", South Africa Today (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1978), and also D.A. Kotze, "The Witzieshoek Revolt 1940-1950", African Studies Journal, 41,1,1982; for "unrest" see The Cape Argus, 1 November, 1950; for "disturbance" see The Friend of the Free State, 2 November, 1950, and see also The Rand Daily Mail, 30 November, 1950; for "tragedy" see The Friend of the Free State, 29 November, 1950; for "trouble" see The Friend of the Free State, 2, 14, and 29 November, 1950; for "turbulence" see The Cape Argus, 11 November, 1950; for "terrible story" see The Cape Argus, 6 December, 1950; for "incident" see The Natal Witness, 5 December, 1950; for "battle" see The Natal Witness, 5 December, 1950; for "calamity" see The Eastern Province Hearld, 29 November, 1950; for "clash" see The Cape Times, 11 November, 1950, and also The Natal Mercury, 11 January, 1951; for "climax" see the Report of the Commission of Enquiry Into the Disturbances in the Witzieshoek Native Reserve, Union of South Africa, 1951, U.G. 26-'51, p. 26; for "lamentable occurrence" see The Eastern Province Hearld, 29 November, 1950; for "outbreak of passions" see The Cape Argus, 29 November, 1950; for "startling explosion" see The Natal Witness, 29 November, 1950; for "stain on our reputation" see Paramount Chief Charles Mopeli speaking upon H.F. Verwoerd's visit to Witzieshoek, The Star (?), 6 October, 1954; for "friction" see The Friend of the Free State, 11 November, 1950; for "fight" see The Rand Daily Mail, 28 November, 1950; for "affray" see The Friend of the Free State, 29 November, 1950; for "unhappy affair" see The Natal Witness, 5 December, 1950.

[2]M. Basner and A.S. Mopeli-Paulus, The World and the Cattle: the Story of a Man and a Small South African Tribe (1954?), unpublished manuscript, University of the Witwatersrand Archives, p. 3.

the Cattle version in relation to its numerous, third-person counterparts is complicated not only by its declaration of first-person 'witness', but also by its co-authored provenance and the ways in which authors who have drawn on the account in the text have ignored its multiple authorship. 'Seeing' then, becomes more bemusing than believing: in understanding not just what 'Mopeli-Paulus' saw or didn't see, but also and more importantly in how such 'witness' is narrated--within the text and within other texts that draw on it as a 'source' for narrating other versions of the Witzieshoek Rebellion.[3]

## The Vociferous Voice in Various Versions

Whatever happened in Witzieshoek in 1950, written versions other than Mopeli-Paulus and Basner's, abound, each with its own proclamations and silences about who was involved, why tensions developed and how they culminated. In a fight between Reserve residents and police on November 27 of that year, sixteen people were killed, or fifteen or fourteen depending upon the version reviewed.[4] Such a discrepancy bluntly challenges the notion of 'fact'. In addition, the rhetorically wide road between "rebellion" and "unhappy affair" is well paved and yet poorly travelled. Most versions are cut-and-paste, cause-and-effect histories, that grow with the finding of, as yet, unused source material. Each one builds on or brutalizes past accounts, in the endless competition to shout down its predecessors' versions of what actually happened. But whose version shouts the loudest?

And the winner is...the state. Undoubtedly, official versions get ventriloquised the most often, even through the narratives of writers who strive to contest the state's versions. Privileged often is the 1951 Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witzieshoek Native Reserve.[5] The other is the Bloemfontein Supreme Court trial record for Rex v. Letibe--a trial that lasted from April through September, 1951 in which seventy-

[3]Witzieshoek became a Basotho 'Native Reserve' in 1867 when President Brand of the Orange Free State 'gave' it to Paulus Mopeli. It is located against the Mont aux Source mountain range in the north eastern part of the Free State. Witzieshoek became the semi-independent 'homeland' of Qwaqwa in 1974. Its 'homeland' structures are dissloving as a result of the April, 1994 national elections in South Africa as it rejoins South Africa as part of the Free State Province.

[4]According to Basner and Mopeli-Paulus's The World and the Cattle, sixteen were killed, p. 162. The Friend of the Free State of 29 November, 1950 reported that fifteen people had been killed; and The Rand Daily Mail of 29 November, 1950 reported that fourteen were killed. The one point on which all agree is that two of the dead were policemen, the rest, Witzieshoek residents.

[5]Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witzieshoek Native Reserve, Union of South Africa, 1951, U.G. 26-'51.

nine Witzieshoek residents were convicted of public violence and of attending an illegal meeting. Because the court record is such a lengthy one, the Commission of Enquiry report is the more frequently invoked 'source'.

"In modern South African historiography, commission reports are grist to the mill of academic surplus," observes Adam Ashforth.[6] Often commission report versions are also transmitted via newspaper articles about their proceedings which, in turn, are often relied upon as autonomous and 'primary' historical sources. Sean Moroney's 1976 article, "The 1950 Witzieshoek Rebellion" relies among other sources, on the Commission of Enquiry report and newspaper articles. In his 1978 article, "Rural Revolt in South Africa: 1937-1951", Baruch Hirson invokes the enquiry report and Sean Moroney. The same two sources are the foundation for Tom Lodge's 1983 account in Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945. And then there is D.A. Kotze's 1982 article, "The Witzieshoek Revolt 1940-1950". Kotze conducted interviews with police and Witzieshoek residents who had been involved in the conflict, fought through archival collections and even read the 1000-page long trial record. He also relies heavily on Hirson's article. And the Commission of Enquiry report. Another unwitting but most vocal mouth piece for the state's by-line is a United Nations Commission's Report on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa, produced in 1953.[7]

Both Hirson and Lodge draw on The World and the Cattle. Hirson wrote a review of it in the Southern African Review of Books in 1988. And Lodge uses The World and the Cattle to shape his account, but only as a fact-checker against the official record and to fill out untold facets of the alleged whole story.[8]

And yet the story's holes are never filled. How difficult it is to pinpoint when an event began and when it ended, or even, as those

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[6]Adam Ashforth, The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 10.

[7]See Sean Moroney, The 1950 Witzieshoek Rebellion", Africa Perspective, 3,1976; Baruch Hirson, "Rural Revolt in South Africa: 1937-1950", South Africa Today (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1978); Tom Lodge, "Resistance in the Countryside", Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945 (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983); D.A. Kotze, "The Witzieshoek Revolt 1940-1950", African Studies Journal, 41,1,1982; Report of the United Nations Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa, Eighth Session, No. 16:A/2505 & A/2505 Add.1, (New York, 1953), pp. 88-89.

[8]On the issue of narrative wholeness, see Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 10: "Every narrative, however seemingly 'full' is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out; this is as true of imaginary narratives as it is of realistic ones." This issue of fullness is reiterated on p. 24.

numerous names of the November 27 happenings at Witzieshoek attest, how to begin to describe one. As Louis Mink has asserted, events are not the data for historical accounts. Descriptions of events--via the "real ensemble of interrelationships"[9] between them--are defined, invented, by the narratives in which they are located.[10] And the construction of narrative is a highly subjective enterprize[11] whose purpose, according to Hayden White, is to "moralize judgements".[12] From a "riot" to an "unhappy affair", indeed.

The Commission of Enquiry moralizes judgements about the Witzieshoek happenings, and then the successive versions moralize about the state's moralizing, or its lack of morality. But they do so in different ways and with different narrative voices. The newspapers re-enforce the state version in their 'objective' reporting of the state-controlled proceedings of the Commission of Enquiry and the subsequent Supreme Court trial. The reporters often repeat verbatim what the testifiers, prompted by official questions, have said. They also tend to mirror the chronological sequencing of the questioning and the proceedings, from hour to hour, day to day, month to month, again re-enforcing a structural framework dictated by the enquiry or court staff.[13]

Like the newspaper reporters, the enquiry authors regard 'objectivity' as a rhetorical tool that enables them to send the sub-

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[9]Louis O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument", in Canary and Kozicki (eds.), The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1978), p. 144.

[10]Louis O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument", p. 147.

[11]As Hayden White echoes Mink: "The value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary." "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", p. 24.

[12]Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", p. 24.

[13]See Teun A. van Dijk, "Structures of News in the Press", in van Dijk (ed.), Discourse and Communication: New Approaches to the Analysis of Mass Media Discourse and Communication (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), p. 78. See also, Eric Rosenthal, Today's News Today: the Story of the Argus Company (Johannesburg: Argus Printing and Publishing Co., 1956), p. 283. Van Dijk comments on the "preformulat[ion]" of news for reporters by "state and corporate institutions". Rosenthal echoes van Dijk within the South African context and during the era of the Rebellion; he observes how the South African government uses the South African Press Association (Sapa) "for the nationwide distribution of information".

The Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witzieshoek Native Reserve, the actual fight between Reserve residents and the police and the Supreme Court trial were covered extensively in numerous South African newspapers. There are over two hundred articles from 1950-54 in the Witzieshoek file of the clippings collection compiled by the South African Institute of Race Relations, University of the Witwatersrand Archives.

jectivity (ideology) of their version underground and persuade with subtlety or with a blatant overtness that begs for challenge. In 'exposing' the state's bias in its own reporting, these historians, Moroney, Hirson, Lodge, Kotze, and the U.N. Commission in this case, seek to create counter versions, more 'truthful' ones. They regard themselves to be more objective (less subjective?) story-tellers than the state, but peculiarly, they construct their accounts while still relying heavily on the Commission of Enquiry report as a primary source of these truths. To some degree, therefore, they re-enforce the version that they are trying to challenge or 'correct'.

'Mopeli', Moshoeshoe (and Miriam?) in The World and the Cattle

But seeking out the definitive version of the Rebellion, is in James Young's estimation, a rather fruitless exercise:

> Once we acknolwedge the structural incapacity in narrative to document anything beyond its own activity as construction, it may even be critically irrepsonsible to insist that...[such] narrative actually establish the documentary evidence to which it aspires.[14]

Basner and Mopeli-Paulus's The World and the Cattle "document[s]... its own activity as construction" via "the documentary evidence to which it aspires" to establish about the Rebellion--in a host of complex ways. The central aim of the text, in addressing an English-reading audience, is to depoliticize the resistance of the Witzieshoek residents to Native Affairs Department-implemented environmental 'betterment' schemes. These schemes, imposed by the NAD starting in the late 1930's, included land restriction and re-distribution for farming and for cattle grazing, as well the most unpopular 'betterment' regulation: cattle culling. The World and the Cattle asserts that the Reserve residents resisted these measures, not as aggressors, but as negotiator-defenders of the Basotho 'way of life'. Not only are their daily agrarian practices upset, the cheiftaincy has been completely undermined and replaced by the NAD, argues the text. In Witzieshoek in the late 1940's a power struggle ensued between two Mopelis there: the paramount chief Charles Mopeli and his uncle, Paulus Howell Mopeli. Paulus Howell Mopeli was a vehement resistor to 'betterment' edicts and made claims that chief Charles, by not resisting, had capitulated to the state. Worse, Chief Charles failed to present the grievances of the Witzieshoek people regarding 'betterment' to the state, asserted his rival.

[14]James Young, Writing and Re-writing the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 18.

The narrator, 'Mopeli-Paulus' of The World and the Cattle sides with neither; 'he' strives to present the political predicaments faced by both factions in Witzieshoek as a result of the NAD presence there. Their negotiation-defense response, asserts the text, is not only 'understandable' but also, and more importantly, historically inspired. The text invokes the famous Mosotho Chief Moshoeshoe as the archetype--of leadership and of how this leadership should be narrated. Relying on popular notions of Moshoeshoe-as-diplomat,[15] Basner and Mopeli-Paulus write:

> Although many battles were still fought after the trek to Thaba Bosiu, Moshoeshoe never boasted nor attacked others. Only when he was attacked and diplomacy failed would he fight back, as he did when Wepener, commander of the Boer army, came against him.[16]

According to The World and the Cattle, the Witzieshoek residents try to use the state mechanisms open to them--consultation with local NAD officials, the courts, their Native Senator, even requesting a commission of enquiry (which is initially denied them) to contest[17] 'betterment'. "Only when attacked and diplomacy [has] failed [do the Witzieshoek residents] fight back".

At the same time, such assertions are being narrated within the life story of Mopeli-Paulus, by the narrator he and Basner have constructed of him. Again, Moshoeshoe is invoked. For starters, Mopeli-Paulus is his great-grand nephew. This royal Basotho heritage is one of many qualities attributed to the narrator to give him the authority to tell the story of his "small South African tribe". Another quality is the experience the narrator boasts he has acquired in the world beyond Witzieshoek: at boarding school in Lesotho, at Edendale and Wits, in Johannesburg as a mining clerk, and as a member of the Cape Coloured military corps during World War II travelling through north Africa. If 'Mopeli-Paulus' is constantly leaving Witzieshoek, he is forever returning. In the first half of the text, 'Mopeli-Paulus' portrays these travels with guilt and a sense of abandoning 'his' people in the Reserve. However these sentiments dissipate in the second half of the text devoted entirely to the Rebellion: the events that led up

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[15]See for example, John E. Bardill and James H. Cobbe, Lesotho Dilemmas of Dependence in Southern Africa (London: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 1-18; and S.B. Burman, Chiefdom Politics and Alien Law: Basutoland Under Cape Rule, 1987-1884 (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1981), chapters 1-3. Of course, the 'negotiator-defender' Moshoeshoe's foil is the archetypal 'aggressor', the famous Zulu Chief Chaka.

[16]M. Basner and A.S.Mopeli-Paulus, The World and the Cattle: the Story of a Man and a Small South African Tribe (1954?), unpublished manuscript, University of the Witwatersrand Archives, p. 3.

[17]Basner and Mopeli-Paulus, The World and the Cattle, pp. 112-125.

to it, the fight, and its extended aftermath. Ultimately, the text relies on a departure-return trope to authorize its narrator as an artist, an artist who is also a chief. And these identities are inscribed within the Basotho tradition constructed.

Namoha is the name of the village in Witzieshoek where the fight between the police and the Reserve residents took place. Namoha is Sesotho for "keep away from me". Far from keeping them apart, the authors of The World and the Cattle, link the emergence of Mopeli-Paulus-the-artist rhetorically to the narrative of the Rebellion. And the link is geographic; it all happens at Namoha. Mopeli-Paulus the narrator recalls a cool crisp morning in Witzieshoek when he watched a young girl, Matsiliso, singing a song in a mealie field to scare hungry birds from preying on the crop. The incident compelled him to start writing, first music, then praise poems, "the usual poetic form of the Basotho".[18] This usual poetic form of the Basotho carries with it numerous roles: entertainer, historian, celebrator and critic. 'Mopeli-Paulus' will become all of these as his artistic birth foreshadows:

> Each morning and evening, on my way to and from school [where he is teaching], I now stopped for a moment to look for Matsiliso, until the time of the harvest, when she ceased chasing the birds. Even Ritchie [his horse] waited of his own accord for her, while I recalled to my mind the morning she inspired me to become a writer. I did not know that this place, Namoha, would one day, many years later, remind me not of poetry, but of bullets, and of stones thrown against bullets.[19]

And there you have it. Mopeli-Paulus as artist, as artist within a praise poetry tradition. This lends the narrator the historical backing to be the authoritative, official and inspired historiographer of the 1950 Witzieshoek Rebellion. It also roots him in a place, Keep Away From Me. This place encourages him to depart in order to develop his talent as a writer, a talent that will be crucial to his fulfilling his chiefly duty to serve his people. Defenseless people. He will defend them against bullets ultimately as chronicler of their mistreatment by the South African government, and that chronicle will emerge within the telling of his own life story. In one rhetorical flourish, the 'autobiography' justifies itself and collapses the numerous personal and public contradictions of its protagonist-narrator, Mopeli-Paulus. The runaway chief who repeatedly shirks his public responsiblities in pursuit of his own selfish fulfillemnt is on solid terms with Moshoeshoe. It is as a writer that Mopeli-Paulus finds his feet within Basotho 'tradition' and justification for serving it by

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[18]Basner and Mopeli-Paulus, The World and the Cattle, p. 47.

[19]Basner and Mopeli-Paulus, The World and the Cattle, p. 47.

moving outside.

Insider and outsider, 'Mopeli-Paulus' is thus both in The World and the Cattle. Mopeli-Paulus and Basner rely on these contradictory identities, again, as a means of authorizing their narrator, particularly in telling tales of and about the Rebellion. 'Mopeli-Paulus' is both a participator in and an observer of events of the Rebellion period. With the cultural clout of a praise poet, the narrator employs a tone of voice that vascillates between these two stances. As an observer, his style has an anthropological or journalistic ring to it. When the narrator speaks as a participant, he is more personal and emotional.

These narrative strategies come to light in the following quotations. Mopeli-Paulus and a number of Witzieshoek residents are in the Harrismith gaol, awaiting trial shortly after the Rebellion. In response to Mopeli-Paulus's plea for better treatment for the group, the head gaoler responds:

> 'You [Mopeli-Paulus] have failed to show any powers as a chief--otherwise Witzieshoek wouldn't be in the mess it's in. It's through you people in gaol here--you leaders of the Lingangele--that the white police lost their lives.'[20]

To this unsuccessful plea, the narrator muses:

> I went from his office with a bleeding heart, thinking of my people; thinking that we were all here for a crime which no man who has love for his country could feel shame to be gaoled for. Yes...the law was there, and had to be respected...but what could the poor Mosotho do, having stood for so many years crying for help from those superior to him, and hearing the answer, 'Shut your eyes; wipe your tears; you cry for nothing'? He had joined in a gathering the law said should not be there; he had used sticks and stones against bullets...My heart bled, and I sighed for each man awaiting trial with the answer ready on his lips to the question, 'Why are you in gaol?'--: 'I am in gaol for cattle. I was shot down by the white man because I would not let my cattle be culled.' To an outsider, this may seem odd, but to a Mosotho, it is the strongest plea. For cattle, he is quite prepared to die.[21]

'Mopeli-Paulus's' strongest plea is to have the crediblitiy as both an 'insider' and an 'outsider' narrator. As the 'insider', he "bleeds" throughout the above quoted passage for 'his' people whose actions, he explains, are rooted in a "love for [their] country". His role as spokesperson on behalf of his people--while he is in

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[20]Basner and Mopeli-Paulus, The World and the Cattle, p. 143.

[21]Basner and Mopeli-Paulus, The World and the Cattle, pp. 143-144.

jail and as narrator for this text--is echoed in the constant and complex shifts in narration that take place in the above quotation. From 'I' to 'we' to 'he', the narrator wears three hats. First, he narrates his own life story, as well as that of his 'nation's'. The narrator's I-we shifts root him firmly within first-person narrative territory, underscoring the constant movement in the text between supposed singular and plural recollection. The narrator speaks for himself and for his community.

Second, while 'Mopeli-Paulus' mediates between number, the narrator also does so between grammatical person and this mediation transforms his voice altogether. Here the mediation is between the 'outsider' audience and its 'other', the Mosotho, referred to in the third-person, singular 'he'. The narrator becomes the omniscient observer here, justifying the seeming "odd[ness]" (of the individual and yet collective) Mosotho's behaviour to the audience. The narrator's allegiance to the audience here does not weaken his identity as a Mosotho. On the contrary, it re-enforces it; he asserts his narrative authority to speak to the audience about 'his people' precisely because of his distanced insight into their 'they-ness'.

If the narrator speaks about the gaoler, himself, his people and those people, he also speaks through them. The authors' (Mopeli-Paulus and Basner's) use of quotations here introduces yet more voices into the text. Unless Mopeli-Paulus had paper and pen with him at all times during the events recounted, the quotations are recalled or imagined. Others are projected onto anyone. An example of such projection is the "question, 'Why are you in gaol?'" In the response the 'I' of "I am in gaol for cattle..." refers simultaneously to the first-person narrator 'Mopeli-Paulus', speaking about himself, and to that third person 'he' Mosotho, speaking about himself. Also quoted are state voices, those of the gaoler and of an unnamed state authority who booms, "Shut your eyes; dry your tears; you cry for nothing.'"

In the actual account of the Rebellion in The World and the Cattle, Mopeli-Paulus the narrator cries not at all. Machake Mabote, a woman whom he quotes extensively, must bear the burden of narrating the actual fight between Witzieshoek residents and police that took place at Namoha village on 27 November, 1950. But before the attack, in keeping with their Moshoeshoe inspired response to conflict, the people of Witzieshoek and their leaders tried tirelessly to negotiate with the government, throughout the 1940's, argues The World and the Cattle. 'Mopeli-Paulus' narrates the initial arrival of the first Assistant Native Commissioner in Witzieshoek, the fondness of residents for him and the lengths that they went to to co-operate with him. While both the NAD and the residents agree that there are environmental problems in the Reserve, tensions arise regarding solutions to them: the NAD wants to cattle cull and restrict land use for farming and grazing; the residents of Witzieshoek want more land. This rift causes trust to

erode, and the narrator to shift to the third-person 'they' when referring to the residents, a rhetorical tactic used anytime the text becomes remotely critical of the government in this half of the autobiography:

> Slowly, the tribe came to realise that the Native Trust, which they had hoped was for their good, had done nothing but take their Reserve away from them. They put two and two together and concluded that the good things the Trust had done for the soil were just put there to lead them into a trap. All they now saw ruling them was an official Board of Management, which had become responsible for local government in the Reserve, on which Chief Charles had no say, though he was called Paramount Chief over us all.[22]

Another tactic used within the text to distance the narrator (and its authors) from being overt criticizers of the government is in the narration of the actual Rebellion. As already stated, 'Mopeli-Paulus' doesn't take on that task, 'he' quotes Machake Mabote's version. As is recounted in The World and the Cattle, 'Mopeli-Paulus' and hundreds of other Reserve residents went to Namoha to a meeting. In attendance were Paulus Howell Mopeli and his retinue, their attorney, Hyman Basner, and hundreds of Reserve residents, Mopeli-Paulus being one. The purpose of the meeting was to decide whether Paulus Howell Mopeli and three of his followers would testify before the Commission of Enquiry or not. (They had apparently already been sworn in to testify the day before.) They decided to testify, and left with Basner. At this point Mopeli-Paulus left as well. Then four mounted police arrived to deliver subpoenas to Paulus Howell Mopeli and his retinue and this was when the fight broke out. (Also, the week before, meetings had been outlawed in the Reserve.)

Because Mopeli-Paulus had left the pitso and returned to his home village of Monotsa when the fight broke out, he heard more than he saw:

> When I heard a sound of gunfire, coming from Namoha..[I] ran hastily in that direction. As I approached the village, I heard the whistle of stengun bullets, and saw people running toward the mountainside--horses scattering in all directions, and goats scrambling in the rocks. I saw the smoke of fired guns. The sound of shots was soon over.[23]

But, as the narrator has asserted earlier in the text, seeing, not hearing, is believing. Mopeli-Paulus missed 'witnessing' the violent confrontation that took place in his absence, the

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[22]Basner and Mopeli-Paulus, The World and the Cattle, p. 112-113.

[23]Basner and Mopeli-Paulus, The World and the Cattle, p. 128.

confrontation that has been the source of so much historical attention and scrutiny:

> What happened in that short while was later told [to] me by many people and was described many times at the trial which followed, but I shall give it in the words of a woman Machake Mabote, whom I have known from childhood. She is an ordinary Christian tribeswoman of middle age, rather stout, and strong from weeding in the fields, and has had no education.[24]

In this male-driven narrative, a woman tells the crux of the tale, a stout and uneducated woman at that.[25] There is no indication in the text of how the account was put together. The narrator does acknowledge, however, that he heard many versions of the event in many different conversations and contexts. What questions were asked of Machake Mabote? Did the interviewer write as she spoke or from memory of what she said, invent the direct quotations? Is her version an amalgamation of versions heard by Mopeli-Paulus and Basner at the trial and ascribed to Machake Mabote? To what degree did questions by the defense and prosecution at the trial influence this account, as well as numerous personal discussions Mopeli-Paulus and Miriam Basner must have had with Reserve residents and other Mopelis about it? They must also have read various newspaper accounts of the ongoing turmoil and violence, and finally the Commission of Enquiry report, long before writing The World and the Cattle.

Nevertheless, submerged within the life story of and narrated by Mopeli-Paulus is this "ordinary Christian tribeswoman's" account of what happened. The distance between Mopeli-Paulus the narrator and the quoted speaker, enables the preservation of his distanced, 'objective' reporter stance. It also protects him (and Basner) from being completely responsible for the account; their narrator is a mere teller of what was told. At the same time, that teller conveys a 'commoner's' version; Machake Mabote assumes the voice of the community here.

## 'The Tribesman's Point of View'?

Baruch Hirson has deemed The World and the Cattle to be invaluable as a source of information about the Rebellion because it contains "the authors [sic.] eye-witness account of what happened in

[24]Basner and Mopeli-Paulus, The World and the Cattle, pp. 128-129.

[25]Machake Mabote was one of the seventy-nine residents tried before the Supreme Court and eventually convicted. For newspaper coverage of her trial testimony, in which she is referred to as Elsina Mobote (sic.), see "Witzieshoek Woman Says Police Shot Her Four Times", The Star, 8 September, 1951.

Witzieshoek, both before and during the riot of 1951 [sic.]".[26] While he later acknowledges that the clash is narrated by Mabote via 'Mopeli-Paulus', Hirson nevertheless reiterates of Mopeli-Paulus himself:

> This section [on the Rebellion] is unique in providing an account of someone who was present throughout the action, and was able to state the tribesmen's point of view. Mopeli claims that he was an innocent bystander, who had gone to the fields [the pitso at Namoha] to prevent any conflict and his story rings true.[27]

For Hirson seeing the text is believing. He upholds 'Mopeli-Paulus's' insider-outsider narration; the narrator is the insider "tribesmen" who is nevertheless, the outsider, "innocent bystander". If this narrative strategy rings true for Hirson, his formulation of the authorship of this text rings a bit hollow. Hirson does acknowledge Miriam Basner as a co-author of The World and the Cattle, but he fails to examine her role (and Mabote's) in shaping this "tribesmen's point of view". Tom Lodge, in shaping his account of the Rebellion in Black Politics in South African Since 1945, draws on The World and the Cattle also with the intention of acquiring this supposed point of view, but he acknowledges Miriam Basner not at all. Mopeli-Paulus is attributed with sole authorship of the manuscript.[28]

However, if The World and the Cattle is Mopeli-Paulus's 'autobiography', it is, to some extent also that of Miriam Basner.[29] Of course, Basner and Mopeli-Paulus had personal and differing motivations for producing The World and the Cattle. Miriam

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[26]Baruch Hirson, "Charles Hooper's Brief Authority (1960)", Southern African Review of Books (Spring, 1988), p. 20.

[27]Baruch Hirson, "Charles Hooper's Brief Authority (1960)", p. 20.

[28]Tom Lodge, "Resistance in the Countryside", Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945 (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), p. 269-273 and p. 292, footnote number thirty-four.

[29]For assertions about the extent to which all writing is autobiographical, see David Atwell, "On the Question of Autobiography: Interview with J.M. Coetzee", Current Writing, 3,1,91, p. 117; G. Thomas Couser, "Black Elk Speaks With Forked Tongue", p. 80; and Ira B. Nadel, "The Biographer's Secret", p. 25. The latter two articles are both found in Olney (ed.), Studies in Autobiography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

For comment on the muted presence of the co-author in autobiography and the questions such a presence raises see Judith Coullie, "'Not Quite Fiction': The Challenges of Post-structuralism to the Reading of Contemporary South African Autobiography", Current Writing, 3,1,91, pp. 4-5; G. Thomas Couser, "Black Elk Speaks With Forked Tongue", pp. 74-74, 79; John Edgar Wideman, "Malcolm X: The Art of Autobiography", in Wood (ed.), Malcolm X: In Our Own Image (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 103-107.

Basner's shadowy presence as co-author mirrors her own role in the Rebellion. She and her husband, Hyman Basner, had for years been champions of the people of Witzieshoek, particularly in their resistance to 'betterment'. Hyman Basner was their Native Senator from 1943-1947 and their attorney, before and after his time in the Senate. He represented residents in cases they brought against the Native Affairs Department (to contest the 1936 Native Trust and Land Bill) in the early 1940's. He later served as legal counsel to them before a 1950-51 government enquiry into "disturbances" in Witzieshoek and then before the South African Supreme Court during the lengthy 1951, post-Rebellion trial. Hyman Basner worked against a government whose racial policies he vehemently opposed, by working within it. The government response: he was characterized as a communist agitator and influential instigator of the Witzieshoek Rebellion. Such an indictment eventually caught up with him. He and his family fled South Africa in the wake of the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960, and ended up in exile in England. Thus, Hyman Basner had strong motivations for wanting to tell his 'side of the story' concerning the Rebellion. He did so through Miriam Basner and she did so through Mopeli-Paulus.[30]

But this chain of narration was ignored by Drum magazine. It published excerpts of The World and the Cattle in 1954-55, again, attributing sole authorship of the manuscript to Mopeli-Paulus. Drum brags of having "exclusive serial rights [to] this outstanding book", excerpts of the

> autobiography of the internationally known African writer A.S. Mopeli-Paulus...[who]...rocketed to fame last year as co-author, with Peter Lanham, of the sensational best seller Blanket Boy's Moon, which was acclaimed by the world's Press.[31]

This introduction is framed by two profile photographs of Mopeli-Paulus. One of him in a coat and tie, wearing dark sunglasses looks across the page at the other of him, looking back, wearing a Basotho hat and blanket. Of course, there is no photograph of Miriam Basner or even mention of her as co-author of The World and the Cattle. Drum, like Lodge and to some extent, Hirson, chose Mopeli-Paulus as the author in serving its own editorial needs. An easy way out.

"A much easier matter", is how Miriam Basner refers to her collaboration with Mopeil-Paulus on The World and the Cattle:

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[30]For more detailed biographical information on Hyman Basner, see Miriam Basner, Am I an African?: the Political Memoirs of H.M. Basner (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993).

[31]Drum, December, 1954.

> I'm pretty sure that we were both in Johannesburg [in 1956][32] when the idea came of writing it and that it was mine. After all, we'd just been published [with their co-authored novel, Turn to the Dark], and, in addition, had strong emotional reasons for recording the whole tale of the W'[itzies]hoek tragedy. [Hyman] Bas[ner] alone, and later I with him, had been drawn into the whole land-scene in S.A. both politically and personally, and, in a sense, the W'hoek events [the 1950 Commission of Enquiry, Rebellion, and Supreme Court trial] were the most painful epitome of that scene. At another level, Mopeli wished to record his own younger life, whilst I found interest in his experience from being a conventionally-trained social anthropologist and having had my own--and totally different--experience of the war years [World War II]...to his.[33]

Basner's comment that the co-authorship of this manuscript is straightforward is overshadowed by her introduction of Hyman Basner as another, if indirect, co-author of The World in the following observation:

> Looking back at the thing nowadays, the W'hoek revolt part--when dealing with public events--reveals stylistically and to an almost embarassing extent, the knowledge and politically interpretative approach that [Hyman] Bas[ner] had acquired. Mopeli certainly accepted B.'s analysis of the scene, despite, as he himself makes clear, being a conservative who became involved in it against his own instincts and historical perceptions.[34]

So much for The World and the Cattle reflecting "the tribesmen's point of view", or its having two authors. It had three, and yet The World and the Cattle in Drum is attributed solely to Mopeli-Paulus. While Drum smoothed away any ambiguities the authorship of the manuscript might have presented, Anthony Sampson, the then editor of Drum, claims that he smelled a rat. Excerpt selection was delegated to someone else on the staff. Nevertheless, of the manuscript, Sampson writes:

> I remember being rather sceptical as to how far it was really written by him, and how far it was invented by Miriam Basner; somehow I didn't find the style very convincing.[35]

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[32]As stated earlier, excerpts of The World and the Cattle were published in Drum in 1954-55; the text must have been penned prior to 1956.

[33]Letter from Miriam Basner to Hannah Jones, 1 October, 1993.

[34]Letter from Miriam Basner to Hannah Jones, 1 October, 1993.

[35]Letter from Anthony Sampson to Hannah Jones, 19 July, 1993.

Then why did Drum omit Miriam Basner's role as co-author? The magazine was embarked on its own identity inventions. The excerpts Drum editors selected emphasize Mopeli-Paulus's experiences outside of the Reserve. The first is about his coming to Johannebsurg, the second focuses on his World War II experiences, and the third, his time in Pretoria Central Prison (after his conviction for his alleged participation in the Rebellion).[36] The Witzieshoek Rebellion is mentioned in a brief italicized paragraph in a four paragraph introduction to the prison excerpt. Mopeli-Paulus is thus constructed as a Mosotho 'out in the world' who has escaped the confines of the countryside. This 'urbanized native' strolls through the pages of Drum, telling bits and pieces of his multiple-authored life story, telling it as Drum has chosen him to. Drum thus joins the queue of authors who have 'made' this text, in this case, by making it their own. The World and the Cattle: the Story of a Man and a Small South African Tribe conforms to Drum's packaging of 'the African man'. As for the 'tribe', it has backward rural baggage, baggage that is useful to Drum only in the contrast it provides for the projection of Mopeli-Paulus as a 'modern', 'urbanized', street-wise male.

From 'tribesman' to 'urbanized native', the 'Mopeli-Paulus' of The World and the Cattle and the authorship of that text are shaped as much by our academic or editorial needs, as they are by the complex political and highly appropriative aesthetic strategies of the manuscript's co-authors. Couser asserts with caution to co-authors and to critics that "we compulsively seek to understand [a] narrative by inscribing it within our own history--indeed it may be the only way we can grant its reality".[37] He follow this somewhat uncelelbratory assertion about the process of our "under-stand[ing]...narrative" with a sinister remark about co-authored 'autobiography':

> If...autobiography is the literary equivalent of suicide--the taking of one's life in prose--and biography is the literary equivalent of murder--character assassination in print...then collaborative autobiography is a kind of literary mercy-killing, in which one party agrees to have his or her life taken by a sympathetic other. But with literary as with literal euthanasia, it is not clear who is being merciful to whom. And when the already complicated act involves members of different, and historically hostile, races, then the transaction becomes especially perilous.[38]

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[36]See Drum, "I Go to the Reef", December, 1954; "I Go to War", January, 1955; "I Go to Jail", February, 1955.

[37]G. Thomas Couser, "Black Elk Speaks With Forked Tongue", p. 76.

[38]G. Thomas Couser, "Black Elk Speaks with Forked Tongue", p.85.

Or a scholarly paradise. Far from symbolising a literary mercy-killing of any sort, The World and the Cattle, because of its co-authored provenance, represents multiple births, births that challenge anew boundaries of academic disciplines, of literary genres, between individual and collective subject positions. The co-authorship of The World and the Cattle pushes to the fore the place of authorization, in authoring texts and in interpreting them. It challenges the role of the individual--as author, as interpreter, as historical actor.

Hannah Jones

Johannesburg
July, 1994