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T.D. Mveli Skota and the making and unmaking
of a Black Elite

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In 1977, a South African historian, Tim Couzens, visited the widow of T.D. Mveli Skota at her home in Pimville, on the eastern edge of Soweto. Couzens was one among a procession of historians who had visited Skota in the last years of his life, and he came now to collect any surviving papers. Zilpah Skota directed him to a few tattered and rain-soaked papers in an open cabinet in her backyard. She had intended to throw the papers away, she said, because she needed the cabinet to store coal.¹

The papers are the flotsam of a life. They include correspondence from Skota's decade as General-Secretary of the African National Congress; pamphlets from the All-Africa Convention, of which Skota was an executive member; papers pertaining to the publication of his classic *African Yearly Register*; documents describing resistance to the destruction of Pimville; a few personal letters; and an endless collection of bills and accounts which he was often unable to pay.

With decade long gaps, the papers do not in themselves provide enough material for a biography of Skota. Perhaps such a book will eventually be written. Both Couzens and Brian Willan have recently shown how much of an individual's life and thought can be reconstructed through a combination of academic doggedness and personal obsession. What follows reflects neither quality. Rather, it is an attempt to sift through what remains to illuminate some of the issues raised by one life which spanned almost ninety years of South African history. In particular, it seeks to use Skota's deteriorating fortunes as a window into the the de-classing of the black elite on the Rand in the twentieth century.²

¹ Among the historians who interviewed Skota late in his life were Couzens, Stanley Trapido, Gwendolen Carter, Thomas Karis, Brian Willan, and Paul Rich. My thanks to Professor Couzens for his assistance and encouragement in preparing this paper.

² See Couzens, *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo* (Johannesburg: 1985); and Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography* (London: 1984).

What makes the documents unusual is that they afford a glimpse of an elite in a simultaneous process of creation and collapse. As much as any individual, Skota articulated the terms which South Africa's black elite used to describe itself and its world. His *African Yearly Register*, which sold 12 000 copies in the early 1930s, was more than just a social register of 'progressive' Africans. It was the centerpiece of a lifelong effort to lend the black elite historical depth and a consciousness of its own reality and role. But consciousness alone does not a class make. Skota's own life suggests the inability of that elite to give itself any secure material reality. Buffeted by hostile government legislation, confined to impoverished, segregated locations, forever starved of capital, the elite was constantly compressed back into the classes beneath it. Skota's life story exhibits these contrary processes. It is this which gives it its historical relevance, and its poignancy.³

In historiographical terms, the exercise seeks to make three related contributions. First, rehearsing details of Skota's myriad business ventures and misadventures may suggest broader changes in the nature of accumulation among the urban middle classes, particularly in response to segregation. Secondly, the evidence assembled here suggests that blanket statements about the black elite being 'bought off' or used as 'an agent of social control' need some refinement. If Skota is any indication, many of the elite were amenable to purchase, but neither the state nor capital seems to have evinced much interest in the needs (or possibilities) of a black middle class. Finally, the paper supplies some empirical grist to the debate on the consciousness of the black elite. It is a truism that the elite's economic proximity to the black lower classes created possibilities for 'downward identification' and 'radicalisation'. This paper offers no dissent to that contention. It does argue, however, that the

³ Skota, T.D. Mwel, *The African Yearly Register: Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's Who) of the Black Folks in Africa* (Johannesburg, 1930), hereafter designated *Register*

narrowing economic gap between the elite and the classes beneath it spawned a contrary process as well. De-classing created among the elite a need for mechanisms which maintained social distance, which emphasized status within the racial caste. To pick one homely example: Skota invested much of his income -- often *more* than his income -- on stationery. An elaborate new letterhead heralded each turning in his career, a letterhead which advertised the respectability of the sender as much as the new enterprise itself.

This final point has a further implication. Skota's life demonstrates that the black elite's sense of itself as a group distinct from the African 'masses' did not strictly depend on superior wealth or a particular class position. One purpose of this paper is to identify more precisely the lineaments of the black elite -- to illuminate the styles and symbols and language which allowed a very fluid group to cohere and maintain a sense of its own distinctiveness in the face of its economic evisceration.⁴

II

Any study of Skota must begin with the *African Yearly Register*. First published in 1930, it was an amalgam of historical primer, political handbook, and social register. With over 370 sketches of African chiefs, professionals, businessmen, and political leaders, the *Register* has become a staple source for historians. Its contributors included many of

⁴ Throughout this paper I have used the term 'elite' in place of the more problematic 'petty bourgeoisie'. While the latter term has become the vogue in South African studies, it tends to homogenise an elite which was remarkably disparate in class terms, ranging as it did from doctors and lawyers to more humble store clerks. Strictly speaking, few of the black elite were actually members of the petty bourgeoisie. My thanks, in this context, to Peter Delius.

the foremost members of South Africa's black elite in the early 20th century: Solomon Plaatje, Charlotte Maxeke, George Champion, Josiah Gumede, H.I.E. Dhlomo. The book reflected a self-conscious attempt by Skota and his contributors to define the nature and role of the black elite; it strove to instil in an otherwise disparate group of educated, Christian Africans a sense of collective identity and mission. The first printing sold 6 000 copies, earning the attention of most of the country's major European newspapers. The *Rand Daily Mail* called it 'a fascinating, factful, instructive, pathetic and often amusing volume'; Kimberley's *Diamond Fields Advertiser* predicted the book would 'hearten the native' and 'impress on European opinion the "urge" for education' among the natives. A year later, a second, low cost edition of 6 000 was printed at the behest of Plaatje and Reverend Rubusana, who hoped that at 7/6 per copy the book would be accessible to the African masses. The contrast between the two editions encapsulates what was perhaps the central pre-occupations of Skota's life: to carve out for 'progressive' Africans an intermediate position between European opinion and the black lower classes.⁸

Skota's was an eclectic, sometimes facile mind, and his book drew on disparate intellectual sources. It was deeply Christian. It was steeped in Cape liberalism, evidenced particularly in the notion of the 'civilised' African's stewardship for his benighted brethren. It bore the imprint of black American political thought: The book's subtitle (*Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's Who) of Black Folks in Africa*) deliberately echoed DuBois; while its Pan-African scope and emphasis on race pride revealed the impact on Skota of

⁸ For others involved in preparing the book, see Skota's Preface to the *Register*. The reviews quoted appeared in the *Rand Daily Mail* on 30 October, 1931, and in the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* on 10 November, 1931. The role of Plaatje and Rubusana in securing a reprinting of the book is described by Skota in a letter to Paul Mosaka, dated 1 October, 1960 in box Ab of the Skota Papers (hereafter SKOTA). The papers are housed at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Garveyism. All of these influences, discussed below, fell within the rubric of what Skota termed 'progressive values.' Yet what was most immediately striking about the *African Yearly Register* was Skota's attempt to reconcile such values to African tradition -- to find sanctions within the African past for ostensibly contradictory ideas. He did so, on one hand, by establishing the chiefly lineages of many of his 'progressive' subjects; and on the other, by offering a revised interpretation of tradition. Thus Shaka was portrayed not as a 'cruel king', but as a 'King, judge and administrator ... a philosopher, a poet and a musician ... a Minister of Foreign Affairs ... [and] Political Agent ... [who] also engaged in research work.' In short, Tshaka was the prototype of the educated, de-tribalised elite. The paradoxical effect of this re-interpretation, as Tim Couzens has pointed out, was that the emergence of this elite appeared not to betray tradition but to fulfil it. Skota and his comrades were not changelings but (in H.I.E. Dhlomo's pregnant phrase) the 'New Africans.'⁶

The phrase captured the central tension in Skota's thought. The *Yearly Register* left no doubt that Skota viewed Christianity and Western education as progressive and desirable. Nonetheless, he believed that traditional ethnic identity provided the individual with a crucial historical grounding. He tended, in the fashion of many white liberals of the day, to ascribe the ills of the black community -- crime, alcoholism, juvenile delinquency -- to a loss of that identity, to the erosion of 'African Culture.' (The erosion of 'tribal restraints' in the liberals' vernacular.) 'The moment the race as a whole discards its culture,' he wrote, 'it at once breaks its backbone and may be crippled for all time.' He constantly spoke of the need to rekindle 'race consciousness', to re-discover 'the African soul', to escape from a racial 'inferiority complex.' As a first step, he advocated discarding the colonial word

⁶ See Couzens, *The New African*, especially chapter 1; *Register*, pp. 101-103.

'native', offering in its place 'African', for Skota a wonderfully elastic and allusive phrase. It conveyed an heroic past, an undifferentiated racial identity, an essentially unitary culture that was in all ways 'best, highest and noblest.'⁷

Ironically, Skota drew much of his 'Africanist' perspective from black American thought. A well-thumbed 1923 edition of *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* can still be found among his papers. While he evinced little interest in black American emigration, the book clearly had a profound impact on him. He underlined passages on the importance of racial self-confidence, ambition, and organisation, and on the need to reclaim Africa's 'beautiful history.' Ultimately, he absorbed most of the central tenets of Garveyism: a belief in the importance of race pride; conviction in the essential unity of African culture and experience; and finally, a commitment to African 'redemption', with all its conceptual layers.⁸

The word redemption permeated Skota's writing. It was an ambiguous word, simultaneously conveying the need to awaken and to re-awaken. The ambiguity mirrored Skota's ambivalence about the past. At one moment he spoke of the need for Africans to return to a world that was organic and noble; at the next, he celebrated the impact of Christianity and education in awakening Africa from its lethargy and bringing 'civilisation' to the 'barbarous.' The paradox does not seem to have troubled him; he evidently felt no compulsion to choose between cultures. Indeed, the defining feature of the 'New Africans' in the *Yearly Register* was their facility

⁷ The quotations are drawn from articles in *The African Leader*, a short-lived newspaper edited by Skota. See 21 May, 28 May, 11 June, 19 November, 10 December, 1932. The most complete set of the paper is found at the Johannesburg Public Library.

⁸ About two dozen of Skota's books are collected with the Skota papers. For an explicit statement of Skota's belief that all African peoples possessed essentially one culture, see *The African Leader*, 28 May, 1932.

in two worlds. They were Africans, of putative royal blood, yet they had shed traditional garb for the high Victorian collar, the top hat and the walking stick. In short, they bridged the chasm of colonial society, preserving that which was redeemable in the African past while inculcating the values and styles of the modern world.

The product of such a synthesis was sometimes incongruous. Skota, for example, was fascinated by traditional medicine. While his book celebrated the achievements of European-trained doctors like A.B. Xuma and Modiri Molema, he himself dabbled with traditional remedies, including *dagga* smoking. Afraid that such remedies would be forgotten, he sought to establish an *Isambane* African Medicine Research Institute, to enrol all herbalists and *sangomas* in a society to study and preserve traditional medical knowledge. Characteristically, however, Skota clothed the idea in all the accoutrements of the modern age -- a Constitution, board of directors, and a liason office to 'keep the Government informed of the Activities of the Institute.'

The need to synthesize old and new was even more urgent in the case of religion. Skota was a devout Christian; he knew the Bible well. Yet traditional religion lay at the core of the culture he struggled to preserve. To reconcile the two, he resorted to portraying traditional religion as a kind of incipient Christianity. Hence the following sketch of Moshoeshoe, primitive Christian, in the *African Yearly Register*: 'Moshesh was not a heathen as has been the common belief of even historians. He had a religion and prayed to some being twice a day ... for the Africans had a *Qamata* or *Nodimo* (God) long before the advent of the White man.' He read various books and papers on the theme, all exploring similarities between Christian and 'African' cosmologies -- the belief in a unitary God, in the survival of personality after death, the ela-

⁹ The prospectus for the Institute can be found in SKOTA, Box Fd.

vation of an intermediate group of saints or ancestors. At the same time, he emphasised the need 'to present Christ in the African way', rather than the Christ which 'the whiteman has painted', a Christ who 'condemned everything social, moral and economic which is of African origin.' He argued, for example, that the biblical admonition to feed and succour strangers in Matthew 25:35 could be used as an 'illustration of the sublimity and nobility of our [African] social system.' The problem, Skota believed, reflected prevailing religious imagery. Africans had been taught to 'visualise Christ as a whiteman and a white God whose sympathies are with those who act as the whites act, pray as the whites pray, and sacrifice as the whites sacrifice.' Throughout his life, Skota collected alternative icons -- a sketch of the apostles with a swarthy St. Paul; a newspaper photo of a statue of the Virgin Mary, the white paint peeling as if to reveal the dark skin beneath; posters of a black angel and a black Christ crucified.¹⁰

In his quest for a traditional Christianity, Skota returned always to the idea of Ethiopia. He knew and cherished the prophecy in Genesis: 'Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands to God.' Ethiopia, whether understood literally or as a metaphor for Africa, was central to the identity of the black Christian elite, for it represented an indigenous Christianity, a Christian pedigree independent of the colonial relationship. (This fact helps explain the rather surprising presence of the 'Emperor of Abyssinia' on the frontpiece of the *Yearly Register*.) When the Italians invaded Abyssinia a few years later, Skota and his colleagues followed the course of the fighting avidly in the black press. The war, three thousand miles to the North, menaced the Christian elite not only

¹⁰ *Register*, pp. 66-67. On similarities between Christian and African religions, see for example Skota's copy of Edwin W. Smith's *The Secret of the African* (London: 1943). Quotations are drawn from *The African Leader*, 18 June and 23 July, 1932. The posters and pictures referred to are scattered throughout the Skota collection.

because of its colonial overtones but because it represented an attack on a history which they had appropriated for themselves.¹¹

As in the case of medicine, Skota's search for a religious synthesis found institutional form. In the 1940s he established St. Ntsikana's Order of True Africans. Ntsikana, an 18th century Xhosa herdsman, was reputed to be the first black Christian in South Africa. According to legend, he was converted by divine revelation and had already begun proselytising when the first white missionaries arrived in the Eastern Cape. Ntsikana thus represented yet another independent Christian lineage, a lineage which inverted colonialism. This animus was less evident, however, in the Order itself, which was modelled on a European benevolent society. According to the draft Constitution, written by Skota, the Order would encourage 'Charity, Justice, Brotherhood and Fidelity'; provide a contingent fund for members in distress; and foster the study of 'the origin and genealogy of the African race.' The Constitution contained the clearest expression of Skota's struggle to wed two worlds. The 'objects' of the Order included, in sequence: '... to encourage all good tribal or national customs of the Africans ... to kill tribal friction ... to abandon and discourage all such customs as are detrimental to the best interest of the race ... to borrow from other civilisations what virtues may be lacking in our own ... [and] to discard, suppress and renounce all vices of western civilisation.' In a handwritten solicitation for the Order, Skota put the problem more starkly, if no less paradoxically: 'We are fast heading for ... disintegration, unless we seek our lost knowledge and return to the beaten track of cen-

¹¹ See the *Register*, p. vii and p. 269, where Skota traces Ethiopia's Christian lineage. On the preoccupation of the black middle class with the Italian invasion, see Skota's copy of *Ethiopia the Valiant* by William J.W. Roome (London: 1936), or any issue of *Umteteli wa Bantu* from the period.

turies, and from it mould our own tradition according to modern times.¹²

The function of the elite then, was to act as a kind of intellectual or cultural mediator -- to serve, quite literally, as an interpreter between two worlds. The conception reflected, in part, the actual positions which educated Africans had come to occupy in colonial society. Many of the individuals featured in the *African Yearly Register* were in fact interpreters. Most of the rest occupied a narrow range of professions -- they were clerks, teachers, ministers and journalists -- precisely mediating between dominant and subordinate cultures. Even the chiefs and the handful of black lawyers in the book occupied a kind of social middle ground.

What Skota's book revealed was the degree to which such interstitial positions were assumed to entail political leadership. The *Register* constantly rehearsed its subjects qualifications as 'spokesmen' and 'representatives' of the race. Such a characterisation suggests, in part, the persistence and internalisation of an older colonial tradition in which status ostensibly reflected 'civilisation' rather than race -- a tradition which accorded the 'civilised' African trusteeship over his 'raw' cousin. As Africans organised independent political institutions in the early 20th century, members of this 'civilised' elite considered it only natural that leadership should devolve upon them; the same dual facility which enabled them to interpret for their colonisers equipped them to represent the colonised. There was more than an element of condescension here, in this notion of political leadership as obligation and entitlement of the elite. As Tim Couzens has observed, the most frequent praise term in the highly formulaic 'Who's Who' section of the *Yearly Register* was 'interested in the welfare of his people.' (Both it

¹² For the draft Constitution, see SKOTA Box Ea. The quotation is taken from an undated, handwritten address in SKOTA Box Bc.

and the synecdoche 'progressive' appeared in forty-four of the sketches.) Elite women were invariably described as 'social workers.' The mark of success for such people lay in having 'earned the respect of both black and white.' And most telling of all was Skota's easy and often dismissive usage of 'the masses.'¹³

Implicit in such language was a certain political style. Inevitably, the leaders who subscribed to this code relied on the petition, the deputation, or other constitutional means of protest. It is now almost *de rigueur* among historians to deride such methods as 'middle class' and implicitly collaborationist. Although such a characterisation has some merit, it remains essentially vacuous in the absence of any analysis of *why* particular leaders elected to use such methods. Alleging that leaders 'clung' to constitutional tactics out of chronic 'naivete' makes the question disappear but it does not answer it. The *African Yearly Register* may supply part of the answer. What the book illustrates is the degree to which the elite's claim to leadership, indeed its sense of itself as a political group, rested precisely on its facility with such colonial rituals as the petition and deputation. This may have been collaboration, but it was of a peculiarly self-referential kind. Indeed, in Skota's case it almost appears as if mastery of the forms of constitutional protest ceased to be a political means and became an end in itself. The *Register* celebrated, for example, the 1913 and '19 Congress delegations to Britain in terms which scarcely hinted at their barren accomplishments. And well into the 1960s, Skota continued proudly to note that he had led 'a number of delegations' to government ministers, including General Hertzog -- delegations which had without exception proved fruitless.¹⁴

¹³ Couzens, *The New African*, p. 16.

¹⁴ An example of historians dismissing black leaders as naive can be found in Jack and Ray Simons' *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950* (Harmondsworth: 1969). On p. 429 they note that 'The conservatives [among whom they include Skota] ... never quite understood

Skota and the elite of his generation were obsessed with 'leadership'. They discussed it in endless articles in the black press, and when Skota started his own newspaper in 1931 he dubbed it *The African Leader*. Almost invariably, they equated political leadership with elite mediation. Unfortunately, both the state above them and the masses below them were often indifferent to their brokerage. Members of the elite constantly lamented 'the thankless conduct of some of our people', or the travails of 'trying to establish the sense[*of*] leadership among our people.' The masses' inability to discern their natural leaders, their susceptibility to the blandishments of charismatic rabble rousers, is a running refrain in the black press. Solomon Plastje wrote in 1926 of the masses being 'senselessly traduced by opportunists' and wondered aloud if Africans might 'deserve the repressive legislation already on the Senate book.' R.V. Selope Thema, in an article the same year on 'The Problem of Bantu Leadership' spoke for Skota and all his elite comrades when he denounced 'diviner' style leadership -- leadership which had 'become expert in Native psychology and in exploiting every grievance for the purpose of securing popularity.' Equally galling was the state's failure to recognise the function of the black elite. The government consistently refused to place in the hands of the black elite the material and political resources it needed to consolidate its position within the black community. D.D.T. Jabavu put the matter baldly: 'The more intelligent section of the Bantu stands in the position of intermediary interpreter between the Europeans and the backward Africans.' Its influence, he added, 'cannot wisely be ignored by the Government.' The statement, with its self-serving use of

their society or its power structure. They persisted in believing that liberation would come through reasoned argument, appeals to Christian ethics, and moderate constitutional protest.' Brian Willan supplies a necessary corrective, using the above statement as a starting point, in 'Sol Plastje, De Beers and an Old Tram Shed: Class Relations and Social Control in a South African Town', in the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, v. 4, No. 2, 1978, pp. 195-215. See Skota's biographical sketch of himself, ca. 1960, in SKOTA, Box Ad.

the criterion of 'intelligence', captured the black elite at its zenith; the final, almost pleading admonition, foreshadowed its gloaming.¹⁵

III

Skota himself was a distillation of the qualities he described in the *African Yearly Register*. His family came from the Eastern Cape. His father, Boyce Skota, was, according to the *Register*, of Hlubi royal descent. In 1866, Boyce and his brother Ndzimenda, both in their teens, were swept up in a wave of revivals conducted by an itinerant American evangelist and converted to Christianity. Ndzimende became a Wesleyan preacher and spent his life proselytising in Herschel District; Boyce enrolled at the Wesleyan school at Healdtown, where he qualified as a teacher. Over the next two decades Boyce Skota worked as teacher, court interpreter, and lay preacher -- a circuit which virtually defined the ambit of the educated, Christian African in the late 19th century Cape. While teaching in Alexandria, he married Lydia Gumede, daughter of John Tshangana Gumede and bearer of a similar elite, Christian pedigree. Somewhere around 1890, the couple joined the trek to the diamond fields. Trevor Dundas Mveli Skota was born a few months later.¹⁶

In Kimberley, the Skotas presumably settled in Fingo Location, which was, as Brian Willan has shown, the virtual cradle of South Africa's urban black middle class. Boyce Skota worked until his retirement at the

¹⁵ See D.D.T Jabavu to A.B. Xuma, 26 May, 1938, and Rev. J.A. Calata to Xuma, 18 August, 1938, both in the Xuma papers at the University of the Witwatersrand. Plaatzje's comment is from *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 19 June, 1926; Selope Thema's is from the same paper, 3 April, 1926. The final statement is from Jabavu's foreword to Rev. Allan Lea's *The Native Separatist Church Movement in South Africa* (Cape Town: 1926).

¹⁶ *Register*, pp. 256-8.

Kimberley Post Office, where he was soon joined by young Solomon Plaatje. He accumulated sufficient property to appear on the Cape voters' roll. Lydia settled in as a leader of the Wesleyan *manyano* and as a 'social worker and an important member of the community.' She was, the *Register* assured readers, 'respected by all who know her, both black and white.' Skota thus was born into Kimberley's elite, into a community bound by churches and cricket clubs, by debating societies and above all by music. (The visit of the McAdoo Singers from Hampton University in the year of Skota's birth introduced Kimberley to the American spiritual -- the first link in a chain of events that led to the introduction of the black American African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church into South Africa.) Forty years later, writing in the *Yearly Register*, Skota persisted in celebrating his subjects' piety, cricketing prowess or 'fine singing voice'. Read today, such details ring incongruously, but for Skota they were the ligatures of community.¹⁷

No evidence remains of Skota's early education. He probably attended De Beers' Lyndhurst Road School; he did not proceed beyond secondary school. Only in 1910 does he surface in his own right. That year, at the age of twenty, Skota came to Johannesburg. He went to work as a clerk at Crown Mines. Mine clerking represented one of the spaces opened for the educated African by South Africa's ongoing industrial revolution. Typically, it was an interstitial space, lying smack between white capital and black labour. While this sojourn on the Rand lasted only two years, it was undoubtedly a formative time for young Skota. In Johannesburg, he witnessed the opening of a lifelong onslaught against what he regarded as the entitlements of his class. The Act of Union, specifically the failure to extend a colour blind franchise to the old Republics, cut the

¹⁷ *Register*, p. 257 and ff.; Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*, chapter 2. On the visit of the McAdoo Singers, see Veit Erlmann, 'A Feeling of Prejudice: Orpheus M. McAdoo and the Virginia Singers in South Africa, 1890-1898', paper presented at the African Studies Institute Seminar at the University of the Witwatersrand, 25 August, 1986.

legs from beneath the emerging black middle class on the Rand. In the Cape, where propertied Africans wielded decisive power in a number of constituencies, the vote served to consolidate the position of the black elite. Voting lent substance to the claims of the propertied to act as trustees for all Africans; it also provided a weapon with which they could defend themselves against discriminatory legislation. In contrast, the emergent middle class on the Rand would remain far more vulnerable to state enactments, and its status *vis à vis* the black proletariat would remain more problematic.¹⁸

Skota was still in Johannesburg when the state published draft legislation for the Natives' Land Act. The impact of the Land Act on black class formation -- and on Skota -- can hardly be overstated. The Act restricted black land purchase to 7.3% of the area of South Africa. Virtually none of the scheduled land fell in the Transvaal. Unlike his counterparts in the Cape or even Natal, where reserve land was more plentiful, Skota never succeeded in gaining access to land. During his lifetime he engaged in various land-buying ventures, but ultimately his fortunes were confined to the city. It was also in the wake of the draft legislation that Skota had his first experience in national politics. His role in the formation of the Native Congress is obscure, but he did later claim to have helped Pixley Seme in launching *Abantu-Batho*, the Congress' quasi-official organ. He apparently worked as sub-editor of the paper, before returning to Kimberley in 1913. He carried Congress credentials back with him, and at some point in the next few years he was elected President of the Griqualand West and Bechuanaland Native National Congress.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Register*, p. 257.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 257.

Skota spent the next decade in Kimberley. Little can be gleaned about his life there. From 1913-19 he worked as an interpreter in the Griqualand West division of the Supreme Court. He was apparently anxious to improve himself. A 1915 letter from the Chicago Correspondence School of Law reveals an abortive attempt to read law. A letter a year later from the 'Dickson School of Memory', also of Chicago, urged him to finish his course in 'Memory Training', which, the letterhead assured him, was 'The Key to Success.' In 1918, he served on the executive of Plaatje's Kimberley 'Brotherhood', a movement transplanted from England which aimed in part at introducing principles of 'practical Christianity' and brotherhood into the world of industrial conflict. It seems plausible that Skota was one of the 'moderate natives' who, in the absence of Plaatje in 1919, helped forestall a general strike against De Beers.²⁰

Skota cemented his social position by marriage. In 1920 he married Francis Xiniwe. Francis was a third generation Lovedale graduate and a teacher at Lyndhurst Road. Her parents, Paul and Eleanor Xiniwe, were the epitome of an older, pre-segregation elite. After graduating from Lovedale, Paul Xiniwe worked as a teacher, accumulating sufficient capital to buy property in a number of Eastern Cape cities. In King Williamstown, he owned and ran the Temperance Hotel (the name reflected his abstemiousness), which faced onto the city's Market Square and catered largely for whites. Both Paul and Eleanor Xiniwe had toured Europe with the South African Native Choir, singing before royalty, including Queen Victoria. The Xiniwe family was one of the most established in the Cape, and marrying into it did young Skota's prospects no harm.²¹

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 257. The letters from Chicago are found in SKOTA, Box B1. On the Brotherhood, see Solomon Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa* (London, 1916), chapter 18 and Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*, pp. 219-221. On the averted strike at De Beers, see Willan, 'Sol Plaatje, De Beers and an Old Tram Shed...'

²¹ *Register*, pp. 108-109, 258, 280-281.

He was indeed a lad of prospects. He was a politician of national stature. He served as chairman and sang bass in the Abantu-Batho music troupe, the very pinnacle of black Kimberley society. He was a member of the Synod of the Church of the Province of South Africa and, he later claimed, the bishop's 'righthand layman'; half a century later he still took pains to mention that he was 'the only non-European member of the Diocesan Board of Education.' (Ironically, his marriage to Francis Xiniwe forced him to sever this cherished European connection. Francis was a divorcee, a fact which precipitated Skota's resignation from the C.P.S.A. He apparently joined the A.M.E. Church at this time, an all-black institution which nonetheless possessed deep roots within Kimberley's black middle class.) Unfortunately, Skota's economic fortunes did not keep pace with his social advance. After resigning as court interpreter he briefly served as Kimberley representative of a Cape Town-based black life insurance company. In 1922, he stepped down another well-trod path: he founded and edited a newspaper. But, like Plaastje before him, he lacked the capital to sustain the venture, and *The African Shield* folded after a few issues. No copies survive. What these failures portend is a growing disjunction between Skota's social and economic status -- a disjunction which was to become a defining feature of his life. His standing in the black elite was rock solid. He was destitute.²²

²² A program from a concert of the Abantu Batho Musical Association on 12 December, 1919 can be found in SKOTA, Box G. Skota sang in a quartet that evening with Francis Xiniwe. On his role in the C.P.S.A., see his letter to Father P.H. Coxan, 2 January, 1962, in Box Ba3, and his biographical sketch of himself from the same period in Box Ad. On insurance, see *Register*, p. 257. On the *African Shield*, see Les and Donna Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: A Descriptive Bibliographical Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines 1836-1976*, (Boston: 1979), p. 6.

Skota returned to Johannesburg in about 1923. He settled in Pimville, his home for the last half century of his life. Pimville, initially known as Klipspruit, lay about a dozen miles southwest of Johannesburg, on the site of an old sewerage farm. Its creation, amidst a plague scare two decades before, marked the first removal of Africans from the central city. The land on which the location was built remained the property of the municipality; residents paid a monthly rent for stands and built their own dwellings according to their means. With only a handful of water taps and no sanitation, Pimville was already by 1923 blighted and decaying. Nonetheless, it remained a cohesive community, largely centred on the A.M.E. Church. As a church member and a national politician, Skota was quickly assumed into Pimville's elite.²³

On the Rand, Skota went to work full-time for *Abantu Batho*, eventually becoming editor of the paper. His skills as journalist and printer were probably in high demand, for the creation of *Umteteli wa Bantu* (a rival newspaper established by the Chamber of Mines as a moderate alternative to *Abantu Batho*) had drained the struggling Congress paper of skilled personnel. From the vantage of *Abantu*, Skota went on to become Acting General Secretary of the South African Native National Congress. By 1925 he had been elected in his own right to the post, which he held for most of the ensuing decade.²⁴

²³ On Pimville, see the City of Johannesburg's Non-European and Native Affairs Department *Survey of Reef Locations*, May, 1939. The observation about the role of the A.M.E. Church in the community is drawn from my own research and is pursued in a forthcoming paper.

²⁴ *Register*, p. 257. On the creation of *Umteteli*, see Tim Couzens, 'History of the Black Press in South Africa, 1836-1960', unpublished paper, p. 23. Skota referred to the loss of personnel from *Abantu* in an interview with Paul Rich. See Rich, 'Ministering to the White Man's Needs: The Development of Urban Segregation in South Africa, 1913-1923', paper delivered to the History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, February, 1978, fn. 25, p. 23.

Little is known about Skota's activities as General Secretary of the Congress. He is credited with foreshortening the name of the organisation to its present 'African National Congress.' The proposal clearly reflected Skota's attachment to Garveyism, as did his well-known suggestion in 1930 that the Congress assemble a 'monster conclave' of all the oppressed 'negro' people from the Cape to Cairo. He also apparently credited himself with the decision to adopt *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* as the Congress anthem in place of the more parochial *Umteteli wa Land Act*. Aside from such fragments, Skota's activities in the Congress remain largely obscure. Walshe lumps him with the 'radical' faction surrounding Gumede and *Abantu Batho*; Simons and Simons implicitly characterise him as one of the 'good boys' who helped engineer Pixley Seme's overthrow of Gumede and the communists.²⁸

Neither label is particularly helpful. Skota evidently moved among both 'radicals' and 'good boys.' Gumede was his uncle, and the two were always personally close. They were colleagues on *Abantu Batho* and later business partners. Yet when Gumede assumed the Presidency of the Congress, Skota was replaced as General Secretary by E.J. Khaile, an executive member of the South African Communist Party and a former leader of the I.C.U. Skota recovered the office in 1928 or '29, still during Gumede's tenure. Skota was also close to Seme, having worked with him on *Abantu Batho* during his first visit to Johannesburg. He remained on as Secretary following Seme's accession and purge of the Executive. Two years later, however, he spearheaded the group which denounced Seme for his lack of leadership. It was Skota who called the emergency session which accused Seme of 'culpable inertia'; and he headed the committee

²⁸ Gwendolyn Carter and Thomas Karis (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964*, 4 volumes (Stanford, 1972-77), v.I, 306-308, 312 and v. IV, p. 146; Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress 1912-1952* (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 99, 175-176; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour* pp. 392, 422, 429. On the adoption of 'Nkosi...', see the letter to Skota from Mary Benson, 10 August, 1962, in SKOTA, Box Ba4.

chosen to oversee the reorganization and resuscitation of the Congress. Still, he did not break with Seme; the two apparently worked closely in preparing for the Bloemfontein Convention of April, 1933. Only after the fiasco at Bloemfontein did Skota speak out decisively, comparing Seme's tactics to those of a 'cornered monkey' and denouncing him for betraying 'certain leaders in Johannesburg [who had done] all in their power to co-operate' with him. For all of that, his relationship with Seme apparently remained cordial into the 1940s.²⁶

The foregoing suggests that the dichotomy between 'moderates' and 'radicals' is grossly inadequate for disentangling the web of association within the inter-war Congress. Ideology was mediated by ties of family and friendship, by business connections, by personality. Even in the best of circumstances, ideology provided an uncertain marker, for within the Congress ideas were used promiscuously and with little consistency. Again, Skota illustrates the point. He borrowed freely from Garvey, particularly in promoting the idea that colonialism was the primary menace to all African people. He supported the decision to affiliate the A.N.C. with the League Against Imperialism, and was selected, along with Gumede, Selope Thema and Levi Mvabaza, to represent Congress at the League's 1929 Paris convention. (The abortive delegation planned to proceed from there to Jamaica for a convention of Garvey's U.N.I.A.) For all of that, he continued to style himself as a loyal subject of the Crown, and persisted in portraying British liberalism as a kind of social ideal. The *African Yearly Register* contained a dozen pages of photographs from the Prince of Wales' African tour, and Skota dispatched a copy of the newly published book to the Prince. Through most of the following year he prominently

²⁶ Skota's relationship to Gumede is established in the sketch of his mother, Lydia Gumede Skota, in the *Register*, p. 258; the one surviving letter from Gumede to Skota is addressed to 'My dear nephew.' (11 August, 1942, in SKOTA, Box Ba2.) His relationship with Seme can be gleaned from *The African Leader* -- the scathing quotation is taken from the 6 May, 1933 issue. However, letters to Skota from his second wife (see below) suggest that he and Seme remained friends into the 1940s.

displayed the polite reply he received from the Prince's Private Secretary.²⁷

Skota's attitude toward communism was equally idiosyncratic. He was never a party member. As a newspaper editor he printed various anti-communist screeds, and on one occasion he dismissed communism as just another 'foreign' ideology impeding the search for an authentic 'African Creed.' Nonetheless, he joined Gumede in defending affiliation with the League, which many in the Congress denounced as a surrender to Moscow. And even if he rejected the communists' program, he certainly imbibed their idiom. The result was sometimes bizarre, as for example when he dismissed allegations that the League was a communist front as a phantasm of 'Imperialists and Capitalists.'²⁸

Insofar as Skota had a preoccupation during his decade as A.N.C. General Secretary, it was less with advancing the interests of a particular faction than with maintaining the unity and effectiveness of the Congress as an institution. Congress embodied for Skota the essence of political leadership -- it was responsible, scrupulously legal, adept in the ways of the colonisers, and dominated by people who, whatever their ideological differences, were all natural leaders and 'spokesmen' of the race. He was well-chosen to launch the reorganisation drive. He was tireless in his efforts to distribute membership cards, ensure that local branches were properly chartered and registered, and collar local factions which had flouted the leadership of the National Executive.

²⁷ On the planned A.N.C. delegation, see the draft program for the 1929 Convention of the Congress, written in Skota's hand, in SKOTA, Box Bc. File NTS 1681 2/276 v. I, at the Pretoria Archives Depot, suggests that the deputation collapsed when members could not raise money for their passage. The letter from the Prince's Secretary is printed in most issues of *The African Leader*. On the Prince's tour, see *Register*, pp. 110-121.

²⁸ Anti-communist articles can be found in many issues of *The African Leader*. The characterisation of communism comes from an undated, handwritten address in SKOTA, Box Bc. For his unusual defense of the League Against Imperialism, see the 1929 draft Congress program.

Unity was his watchcry. 'The African people are crying for something capable of drawing them together,' he wrote in the days before the 1933 Convention. Congress, in failing to provide that unified leadership, had surrendered the field to groups like the I.C.U., which 'contented itself with shouting "high wages" and "away with the Pass Laws" and in addition made promises it could never fulfil.' The admonition was revealing. To Skota, the I.C.U. represented headless politics, a movement of the masses untempered by the elite's superior insight. He suggested that Congress bring the masses back into the fold by introducing its own responsible trade union wing, 'guided by the National Executive.' 'Without this,' he warned, 'Congress will always find itself weakened whenever such movements as the I.C.U. which appeal to the natural instincts of the workers start ingratiating themselves with the masses.' Whether he was a 'radical' or a 'good boy', Skota remained convinced that political leadership was the province of a responsible elite.²⁰

V

Skota's return to Johannesburg coincided with the passage of the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act. The Act, the foundation of all subsequent urban segregation bills in South Africa, had devastating implications for the black elite on the Rand. As Paul Rich and others have noted, the Act represented something of a turning point in the state's attitude toward the black middle classes. The idea of trying to co-opt the black elite had been widely mooted in the wake of World War I. The disaffected 'educated native' was a staple character in the writings of white liberals of the period, many of whom had witnessed firsthand the dangers of coop-

²⁰ See *The African Leader*, especially 11 February, 1 April, and 15 April, 1933. Skota's portrait of the I.C.U. in the *Register* contains the only critical remark in the book, when he notes that 'speeches made by some of its members were unwise and unnecessary...' (p. 429).

eration between black proletariat and elite during the Witwatersrand 'disturbances' of 1918-1920. European missionaries, educators and social workers responded with a concerted campaign to reinvigorate 'moderate' black leadership, a campaign made possible through the largesse of the Rand mining houses. Aggrey's visit, the launching of *Umteteli*, the creation of Joint Councils, Bantu Mens' Social Centre, and later the South African Institute of Race Relations all represented efforts to create forums for the educated and thereby win back their loyalty. Many whites went so far as to advocate granting urban freehold rights in order to stimulate the growth of a stable, propertied class in the municipal locations. A 1919 Transvaal Commission, for example, suggested freehold as one solution to native grievances in Nancefield, a Johannesburg location which encompassed Skota's home in Pimville.³⁰

Enthusiasm for such ideas ebbed. The deflation of 1921 highlighted the costs of any co-optation scheme; while the white miners' revolt of 1922 served to remind the mining houses of the advantages of maintaining a society polarised along racial rather than class lines. With the report of the Stallard Commission in 1922, talk of cultivating a black middle class was displaced by the idea that all natives, regardless of their stature, lived in cities on white sufferance. While draft urban legis-

³⁰ On the Urban Areas Act see Paul Rich, 'Ministering to the White Man's Needs'; T.R.H. Davenport, 'African Townsmen? South African Natives (Urban Areas) Legislation through the Years', *African Affairs*, Vol. 68, 1969, pp. 95-109; and Davenport, 'The Triumph of Colonel Stallard: The Transformation of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act between 1923 and 1937', *South African Historical Journal*, No. 2, 1970, pp. 77-96. For related material on the black middle class on the Rand in the 1920s, see Couzens, 'Moralizing Leisure Time: The Transatlantic Connection and Black Johannesburg', in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (London, 1982), pp. 314-337; Philip Bonner, 'The Transvaal Native Congress, 1917-1920: The Radicalisation of the Black Petty Bourgeoisie on the Rand', in Marks and Rathbone, pp. 270-313; and Bonner, 'The 1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike: A Preliminary Account', in Belinda Bozzoli (ed.) *Labour, Townships and Protest: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand* (Johannesburg, 1979). A classic lament of the educated African's disaffection and potential for agitation is Rev. F.B. Bridgman's Annual Report for the Transvaal to the American Board Mission in June 1918, in the ABM papers, A/3/42, at the Natal Archives Depot.

lation included provisions for accommodating the black middle classes, particularly through the granting of freehold rights, all such provisions had been excised by the time the Urban Areas Act became law. Property would be held on short lease, and only in specifically designated native locations. Provisions for a more liberal policy on pass law exemptions, embodied in the 1923 Natives Registration and Protection Bill, were similarly scuttled. Some residue of earlier thinking persisted in the form of Location Advisory Board, though municipalities were under no obligation to convene or consult them. In sum, the Act embodied the Stallard doctrine that blacks were in cities solely to 'minister to the white man's needs.'¹

The Natives (Urban Areas) Act raised howls of protest from the black elite. Congress denounced it as 'a direct challenge to the loyalty of the Bantu and an insult of the most provocative character to the sense of fairness of the Bantu.' Beneath the rhetoric of loyalty and fairness lay the issue of accumulation. Restrictions on property ownership cut most deeply, especially among people like Skota who were new to an urban area. Blacks who already owned property might keep it or at least receive compensation, and property rights of legitimate heirs were protected. Such loopholes, however, ensured only the survival of a residual class of property holders in old freehold areas. Entry into the class was blocked. The Act similarly restricted access to pass exemptions, ensuring that the children of Skota and his cohort would face the spectre of passes and labour contracts which their parents had largely avoided. Even in the locations, the position of the black elite was jeopardised. In enhancing municipal regulatory power, the Urban Areas Act freed municipalities to enact a dizzying array of licensing, leasing, and trading regulations, most of which aimed to choke off black traders and shopowners. In the Free State, for example, municipalities used such

¹ Rich, 'Ministering to the White Man's Needs'; Davenport, 'The Triumph of Colonel Stallard'.

regulations to maintain the traditional ban against all black commerce in the cities.²²

The Urban Areas Act of 1923, subsequently tightened in 1930 and '37, did more to undermine the welfare of the urban black elite than any other single piece of legislation. And it was only the opening salvo: The Pact Government, elected a year later, proceeded to attack what few elite niches the Urban Areas legislation had left unscathed. Job reservation, accelerating through the '20s and into the depression, foreclosed many of the clerical and semi-skilled positions traditionally occupied by educated blacks. In short, within a few years of Skota's arrival on the Rand, the material foundation of the black urban elite had been gutted. Urban Africans' fortunes would be confined to segregated, impoverished locations, in which their rights to own property, to trade, and to utilise their skills were tightly circumscribed.

The elaboration of urban segregation foreclosed avenues of accumulation, but at the same time it created new possibilities. By ensuring that all black businessmen would face similar handicaps -- most notably, the limited size of the market for their goods and services, together with a chronic shortage of credit -- segregationist legislation paved the way for the organisation of racial cooperatives. Skota responded with alacrity. In 1926 he floated the 'African and Indian Trading Association, Ltd.' His partners in the venture were K.V. Patel and D.M. Nursoo, two Indian solicitors in Johannesburg, Reverend H.R. Ngcayiya, head of the Ethiopian Church and a founder of the A.N.C., and, after Ngcayiya's death, Gumede. The Association was a classic self-help organisation, and it bore the clear imprint of Garveyism. It sought to concentrate the resources of the black community through cooperative financing, purchasing and wholesaling. By supplying black retailers directly, the Association

²² The statement by the Congress is quoted in Rich, 'Ministering...', p. 19.

would cut out white middlemen and stop the flow of wealth out of the African community; profits could be used to provide credit to other capital-shy black entrepreneurs. From the beginning, however, the Association was itself capital-shy, with registered capital of 10 000 £1 shares, of which Skota and his co-directors subscribed 203. While the company prospectus conceded the small capitalisation, it went on to outline a grandiose series of proposals. Once the company had secured a foothold in wholesaling, warehousing and import-export, it would plough profits back into land, with the ultimate aim of accumulating 30 000 acres 'outside the Union of South Africa'. There the Company would settle and equip 300 shareholder tenants who would produce a variety of staples for marketing through the Association. Black-owned factories would complement the scheme, producing necessities such as shoes and clothing. Ultimately, the Association aimed at nothing less than the creation of an independent black economy in the sub-continent.³³

Nothing envisaged in the Association's prospectus reached fruition. The company never obtained land. One fragment in Skota's papers suggests that the Association sought permission in 1931 to erect a private native hostel in Ferreirstown, Johannesburg -- itself evidence of Skota's sensitivity to the economic opportunities afforded by segregationist legislation. In the same year, the Company purchased the decaying printing plant of *Abantu Batho*. The press, donated by the Queen Regent of Swaziland in 1913, had been purchased on behalf of the Congress in 1929 by Gumede, who in turn conveyed both it and the paper to the Company in 1931. When the debt-ridden paper collapsed a few months later, the African and Indian Trading Association apparently went with it.³⁴

³³ A copy of the Company prospectus can be found in SKOTA, Box Ba1. An advertisement for the Company, featuring plans for shoe and clothing factories, is in Skota's handwritten draft program for the 1929 A.N.C. Convention, in SKOTA, Box Bc.

³⁴ SKOTA, Box Ba1. Switzer and Switzer, *The Black Press*, pp. 25-27; Couzens, 'History of the Black Press in South Africa', pp. 22-23.

While unique in the scope of its vision, the African and Indian Trading Association was in many ways representative of the cooperative movement of the 1920s and '30s. First, it revealed an intertwining of business and political affiliations. Two of Skota's partners were colleagues on the A.N.C. Executive; subscribers were solicited along Congress networks. (A copy was sent to John Dube's *Ilanga Lase Natal*, which endorsed it with the hope that 'the lethargy that has so long characterised the Native will be transformed by the sharp wits of the Indians who are well-known experts in business principles.') Within a few years, similar ventures had been launched by Kadalie's I.C.U. faction and by a Congress coterie centred on Pixley Seme. Examples could be multiplied. One possible implication is that political office, while rarely well-remunerated, could be crucial in opening up certain avenues of accumulation. Secondly, the Association well illustrates the disjunction between 'shadow and substance' so characteristic of the cooperative movement. Most cooperatives, including this one, were profit-making enterprises launched by middle class businessmen. Inevitably, however, they were portrayed in far more radical terms, often as a form of resistance to exploitation by white capitalists. Finally the African and Indian Trading Association was representative in the rapidity of its demise. As with so many of black cooperatives, the shortage of capital which gave it birth also killed it.³⁵

³⁵ *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 11 February, 1927. My thanks to Paul la Hausse for sharing this reference with me. See also, Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism* (Johannesburg, 1984), pp.34-49 and Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism*, pp. 145-147. Skota remained convinced of the merits of racial cooperation throughout his life. In 1948, he established a national purchasing cooperative for black shopkeepers, the African Federation of Trade, Commerce and Industry, aimed at 'consolidating African Businesses on [a] sound business basis.' (See SKOTA Box Dc.) In 1961, he attempted to launch the African Territorial Commerce & Industries, Ltd. (SKOTA Fe) Both ventures quickly withered for want of capital. Material on the cooperative movement, which still needs systematic treatment, can be found in the Ballinger Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand. For a comparative perspective on racial cooperatives as a response to segregation, the best place to begin is still August Meier's *Negro Thought in America* (Ann Arbor, 1963), pp. 119-157.

Skota's career as a journalist did not end with the collapse of *Abantu Batho*. The paper's printing plant was rescued from the liquidators by another African, George Hashe, a former mine compound superintendent. Hashe promptly launched a new paper, *The African Leader*, with Skota as editor. Skota characterised the *Leader* as the lineal descendent of *Abantu*, and editorially it probably differed little from its predecessor. The paper, which survived only about a year, enabled Skota to air his views on 'African Culture' and the virtues of racial self-help, as well as to advertise the newly published *African Yearly Register*. The paper also provided him with a forum to resist the continuing assault on the prerogatives of the black elite. Throughout the pages of the *African Leader*, Skota decried policies seemingly calculated to undermine the 'progressive class' of Africans. He was especially caustic after reading the report of the 1932 Native Economic Commission. While broadly sympathetic with its recommendations for stimulating the Reserves, Skota denounced the Commission for its casual dismissal of the needs of what the Commissioners chose to characterise as 'a small, vocal, dissatisfied, semi-civilised group of urbanised Natives.' In overlooking the interests of the elite, Skota argued, the Commission betrayed its indifference to racial progress. History, he wrote, 'is brimful of evidence ... that the development of a race obtains its impetus from a few of its members who have made good.' A 'progressive class ... creates ambition'; its 'industry and progressiveness ... radiate and permeate' the community around it; the 'masses' follow 'in the natural way.' The South African government, however, had chosen to arrest the race's leaders on the pretext that their 'illiterate kinsmen' must first be awakened. Such a policy, Skota concluded, represented nothing but a cynical attempt to preserve white supremacy.¹⁶

¹⁶ *The African Leader* 4 June, 1932. See also 31 December, 1932 and Switzer and Switzer, *The Black Press*, p. 27. Couzens suggests that the *Leader* was torpedoed by the proprietors of the white-owned *Bantu World* and *Umteteli*, who joined together to obtain Hashe's outstanding bond with a printing machinery company. 'History of the Black Press', pp. 27-28.

The editorial was uncharacteristically vituperative. In part, its tone no doubt reflected the looming presence of the Hertzog Bills. First tabled in 1926 and passed in amended form ten years later, the Bills shadowed Skota's every turn as General Secretary of the Congress. He served on the A.N.C. deputation sent to Cape Town in 1926 to monitor the Bills' progress through Parliament, and throughout the ensuing decade he railed against the Bills at every opportunity. In 1935 and '36, he served on the Transvaal Executive of the All-Africa Convention, apparently with the conviction that the Convention would not displace the Congress as a permanent body. Politically, he no doubt found the Convention congenial. While the A.A.C. noted the grievances of farm labourers, tenants, and industrial workers, its delegates were generally drawn from the black elite and the debates reflected elite preoccupations. The provision to stop non-tribal cooperative purchase of land drew the fiercest fire. The restriction struck at the vitals of urban Africans, like Skota, who possessed neither tribal affiliation nor the resources to purchase land independently. D.D.T. Jabavu, in his 1935 Presidential Address, denounced the proposal as an attempt 'to shunt the Natives from all civilised spheres back to tribal life', adding, 'No path is offered by which we may travel to full blown citizenship through either education or wealth.'²⁷

Equally galling was the elimination of the Cape African franchise. For Skota, Jabavu, and others who had come of age in the Cape, the franchise represented real political power. It also was a potent symbol, for it embodied the last opportunity for Africans to participate in the wider society. Skota's own devotion to racial self-help had not dimmed his commitment to the goal of full participation, and he commenced marshalling funds for a legal challenge to the Franchise Bill. A letter written to A.B. Xuma about the fundraising campaign in the Transvaal revealed the

²⁷ Carter and Karis, *From Protest to Challenge*, v. I, p. 302. 'The Findings of the All-Africa Convention, pamphlet among Skota's books, no publication data, p. 26.

co-existence of separatist methods and integrationist goals in Skota's thinking: 'We feel it is the bounden duty of the native to finance this case, although we have information that some of our European friends are willing to support.' Ultimately, however, the legal challenge proved unavailing. The Bill passed, taking with it the last vestige of Cape liberalism. There was little for Skota to do except preserve the legacy of the struggle. In 1938 he began collecting materials for a pictorial history of the All-Africa Convention, a project he never completed. He kept among his papers until his death copies of the proceedings of the 1935 and '36 Conventions, as well as a tattered copy of the 1923 Kimberley Voters Roll, which contained the names of both himself and his father.²⁸

Little other evidence remains from this period of Skota's life. Francis Xiniwe Skota died in 1933. Skota was remarried, in about 1938, to Zilpah Shupinyaneng, daughter of an A.M.E. Church minister stationed at Pimville. The contrast between Francis Xiniwe and Zilpah Shupinyaneng paralleled Skota's own trajectory, away from a mission-educated, pre-segregation Cape elite into an elite defined by segregation. In contrast to Francis Xiniwe, Zilpah, who worked as a doctor's receptionist, was only modestly educated. Surviving letters suggest she was defensive about her lack of schooling and occasionally resentful of Skota's greater polish. In one letter during their courtship, she accused Skota of refusing to see her in order to preserve his reputation. For all of that, it was a successful marriage, despite Skota's flagging fortunes. 'Your poorness cant part me with you,' she assured him in one letter. 'I will stay with you even in bear foot.'²⁹

²⁸ Letter from Skota to Xuma, April 11, 1936, in the Xuma papers.

²⁹ A handful of letters to Skota, all but a few from Zilpah, are housed with the Oral History Project at the African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand (hereafter ASI/OHP). See 10 October, 1936, an undated letter from 1937, and 6 May, 1941.

The depression, together with the wartime inflation hard on its heels, exacted a heavy price from Skota. All of Zilpah's letters between 1939 and 1942 were sent from Klerksdorp, where she lived with her family, apparently because Skota had been forced to take subtenants into their Pimville home. Her letters are affectionate and she visited when she could raise train fare, but she steadfastly refused to return until he had at least sub-divided the rooms in their house to afford her some privacy. She often asked Skota to forward odds and ends -- a few shillings for a pair of shoes (she had been forced to sell her only pair), a jar of shampoo or skin lightener, a small glass basin to save her the humiliation of arriving at a friend's wedding empty-handed -- but for the most part she was supported by her father. In one letter she noted that she had taken to wearing her mother's old dresses, both because she could afford none and also, apparently, because she was pregnant. A son was born in about 1941, but mother and child were sickly and the boy died a few years later.²⁰

Whatever money Skota earned during these years, he earned as a printer. According to stationery from the period, he continued as Managing Director of the African Leader Press, Ltd.. Working from the old *Leader* office on Commissioner Street, he probably attracted some casual European trade, but the bulk of his business undoubtedly came from the African market. Again, his political connections certainly helped, enabling him to land contracts for handbills and posters. Equally important was his affiliation with the A.M.E. Church, for which he printed a variety of posters, certificates, and a calendar. Dependence on black trade was hazardous, however, for the black printing market was small and, in light of the number of failed black newspapers, highly competitive. In 1941, a rival press appeared, floated by Godfrey Kuzwayo and two A.M.E.C. ministers, P.N. Selepe and N.B. Tantsi. Tantsi, once prominent in the South African

²⁰ ASI/OHP, see especially April 17, April 20, April 23, May 2 and May 6, 1941.

Communist Party, was a son of one of the A.M.E. Church's South African founders; Kuzwayo, a former *Bantu World* society columnist, was the church's financial secretary. With its privileged position, the group quickly cornered the market on church publications, including a lucrative contract for 10 000 hymnals. Skota's business was crippled. By 1942 he was unable to pay his rent, his furniture had been sequestered, and he seems to have lost his printing press. If letterheads can be believed, the African Leader Press lingered on into the 1950s, but Skota was never able to muster the capital to buy another press.^{*1}

The papers provide little evidence on how Skota survived over the next two decades. His two forays back into the world of racial cooperatives floundered; his printing business was moribund. He received some money from subtenants, along with a stipend for service on the Pimville Advisory Board. He remained an inveterate schemer. He briefly engaged with Wilfred Sentso in renting musical instruments. He priced chainsaws and obtained a permit to clear old trees from Pimville, in hopes of selling wood. Seeing the increasing number of cars in Soweto, he solicited loans to start a battery charging business; in a characteristic flight of enthusiasm, he predicted the business would grow into an electrification scheme bringing lights into 'the homes of progressive natives.' He also, on occasion, wrote to overseas companies enquiring about obtaining South African agency rights for various products -- a spraygun, a cheap oil heater manufactured in South Dakota. Nothing came of any of the schemes, but he somehow scraped together enough to save him submitting to wage

^{*1} SKOTA Boxes Ba1, Ba2, Bc and G. See also ASI/OHP April 23, 1941 and June 30, 1942, which refers to the rent and furniture. According to the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1937, magistrates had power to issue warrants of execution against the movable property of Africans who fell into arrears on rent payments. See Davenport, 'The Triumph of Colonel Stallard', p. 89.

labour. Throughout his life, no matter how dire his straits, he never worked for wages.⁴²

Through it all, Skota clung to his sense of himself as a member of a racial elite. In the face of his de-classing, however, the role of the 'New African' became a kind of charade -- a charade which could, at times, by savagely exposed. Abuse from a white railway official (a perpetual grievance of the black elite); a policeman's blunt, '*Jy is net 'n kaffer*'; a midnight raid during a location liquor sweep: All ripped away pretensions to influence and respectability so carefully nurtured by Skota and his compatriots. At the same time, one's standing as 'man of the people' was vulnerable from below. Members of the black elite were not only insufficiently appreciated by the thankless 'masses', they were also a preferred target of township criminals. 'Notoreity is a veritable terror,' an oft-victimised Dr. Xuma wrote to Dr. Molema after the latter had been divested of money and car. 'Things that are happening seem to be pages from some fiction.' Xuma, who was less sentimental about his relationship to 'his people' than Skota, resorted to carrying a gun. For his part, Skota was nearly beaten to death in 1942 by a Sotho gang. His assault by these 'blanket wild men' -- the characterisation was Gumede's -- proved as destructive psychologically as physically, for it carried with it a reminder of just one of the realities of the community which Skota had presumed to lead.⁴³

⁴² The material is scattered throughout the collection. See especially SKOTA Boxes Ba3, Ca2, Fe.

⁴³ Xuma to Molema, 4 May, 1937, and Xuma to the Johannesburg Administrative Magistrate, 15 April, 1939. Xuma Papers. Xuma, who was allowed to own a gun to protect drugs kept in his surgery, was most indignant at the fact that Molema's assailants received only 15 fines, scarcely a fraction of the sentence they would have received had their victim been white. In regard to Skota, both Gumede and Skota's sister, E.C. Gule, sent condolences after he had informed them of the assault. Gumede's comment about 'blanket wild men' (SKOTA Box Ba2, Gumede to Skota, 11 August, 1942), and Gule's disparaging reference to 'Basutos' (ASI/OHP, Gule to Skota, 15 June, 1942) provide some insight into the way Skota must have characterised his attackers. By classing them in ethnic terms, as uncivilised and savage, Skota

On top of it all, lay the grinding fact of poverty, the reality of unpaid bills, of one's furniture being repossessed, of one's child going hungry. Such realities were doubly devastating for individuals who had imbibed an ideology which equated economic station with personal merit. The result, at least in Skota's case, was the development of a penchant for prevarication, a glib facility for disguising his destitution. This too was part of the world of the 'New African.'

VI

Little evidence remains about the last decades of Skota's life. He virtually disappeared from national politics. He apparently campaigned, unsuccessfully, for the Presidency of the Transvaal Congress in 1944, and according to Carter and Karis he was affiliated with Selope Thema's 'conservative nationalist bloc' in the early 1950s. Neither claim can be substantiated from his papers. The papers do, however, provide a glimpse of Skota's final three struggles: to prevent the removal of Pimville; to produce a new edition of the *Yearly Register*; and to educate his one surviving son. Reviewing these struggles serves to illustrate the continuing decline of his fortunes, as well as abiding aspects of his character.⁴⁴

Skota led the fight against removing Pimville from his office as Chairman of the Local Advisory. It is not clear when he assumed the office, but he held it from at least 1943 until the Board's extinction more than two decades later. His presence on the Board is surprising, given *The African Leader's* florid denunciations of Advisory Boards a decade

seems to have been attempting to define his attackers as somehow outside the community which he led.

⁴⁴ Carter and Karis, *From Protest to Challenge*, v. IV, pp. 146-147.

earlier. The *Leader* had described the Boards as a 'shameful farce', and accused the men on them of 'prostituting' themselves to earn enough money to pay their municipal rates; it demanded Board members resign, assuming they had 'any backbone or courage in them.' One explanation for Skota's apparent change of heart is that he himself now needed the money to pay his rates. In fact, Skota led a 1946 deputation of Reef Advisory Boards to the Johannesburg City Council's Non-European Affairs Committee to demand an increase in Board member stipends. The Boards' work 'was not sufficiently appreciated,' he argued. He found it particularly unfair that board members had to pay for their own stationery.⁴⁵

On the Board, his political concerns naturally grew more parochial. He campaigned for improved sanitation, roads, and lighting; for better treatment on the railroads for Africans commuting into the city; and above all against Pimville's removal. The office did enable Skota to recreate his intermediary position. He led local delegations to state and municipal authorities, convened township meetings, and wrote endless letters to officialdom on behalf of illiterate constituents. But once again, his efforts to carve out a role as broker enjoyed little success. The Advisory Board possessed no independent power, and the obligation to consult it was honoured more in the breach than the observance.

Plans for 'remodelling' Pimville were current as early as 1943. As Chairman of the Advisory Board and founder of the new Pimville Standholders Association, Skota devoted himself to safeguarding the rights of registered tenants through the process. His central concern was security of tenure. Few people, he pointed out, would invest in im-

⁴⁵ *The African Leader*, 16 July, 31 December, 1932. On his role on the Advisory Board in the 1940s, see SKOTA Box Fe, especially a Resolution of Pimville Residents (24 March, 1943), copy of a report of the Manager of the Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department (5 June, 1944), Minutes of a Pimville Deputation to the N.E.A.D. (16 April, 1943), and Minutes of Johannesburg's Non-European Affairs Committee meeting with a delegation from Reef Advisory Boards (15 October, 1946).

proving their homes when they could face eviction on one month's notice. Thus any renovation should be accompanied by the introduction of freehold tenure or long lease in order to encourage people to build 'good and substantial homes.' In a meeting with the City Council, he cast freehold as a way to encourage stable families in the townships, and to protect the rights of the aged, who often faced eviction despite having paid for their stands many times over.⁴⁶

Little was done in the way of remodelling Pimville in the ensuing decade. In 1955, however, the Mentz Commission determined that Pimville stood outside of the area to be set aside for African occupation. With the passage of the Group Areas Act, Pimville was slated for destruction, ostensibly for reasons of sanitation. Residents were to be moved to a site and service area, a devastating turn for those who lacked the means to build new homes. Skota, characteristically, hatched a variety of self-help schemes which would obviate the need for removal. In 1959, for example, he circulated a plan in which the impoverished community would subscribe £760 000 to upgrade Pimville. He negotiated a half price arrangement with a local brickyard, and apparently began collecting money under the auspices of the Standholders Association. A few pounds trickled in.⁴⁷

After six years of uncertainty, the state elected to allow Pimville residents to remain. The community beneath them, however, was to be bulldozed, re-surveyed, and re-built with standard two-room municipal housing. It was a pyrrhic victory, but Skota set about organising a community day of thanksgiving, complete with the slaughtering of an ox. With removal imminent, he elected to cooperate with the state, perhaps

⁴⁶ SKOTA Box Fe, especially the Minutes of the 16 April, 1943 Pimville Deputation.

⁴⁷ Skota to W.J.P. Carr, 10 January, 1962, Minutes of a meeting of the Pimville Standholders Association, 20 October, 1959, and miscellaneous papers in SKOTA Box Cal.

in the hopes of minimising the upheaval. Whatever his motives in cooperating, he allowed himself to be shamelessly used. He chaired the local Valuation Committee, which determined how much residents would be compensated for their destroyed homes. He shared a podium with Minister of Bantu Administration and Development De Wet Nel in a 1965 ceremony to mark the demolition and re-building of the 'new Pimville', which Skota hailed as 'the best, modern township in the Republic.' (The Advisory Board and Valuation Committee oversaw preparations for the ceremony, which included speeches by Skota and the Minister and the unveiling of a plaque; township children were assembled and carried South African flags.) Later, Skota convened meetings at government behest, to enable officials to explain new influx and housing regulations.⁴⁸

The state availed itself of Skota's mediation, but if Skota expected any consideration for his efforts, he was disappointed. His efforts to shepherd residents' interests through the process of removal were stymied at every turn. His assertion of Pimville residents' traditional rights to keep cattle and grow mealies was noted and dismissed as impractical. He defended the interests of traders, only to learn that the state had set aside a fixed number of commercial sites -- a number far lower than the number of traders in old Pimville. Skota was most vociferous on the question of tenure. He apparently expected that sites in the new township would be held freehold; or at the very least that the state would follow the precedent set in the construction of Dube, where standholders were granted long leases and offered low interest government loans to help them build. He set about organising purchasing and brick-making cooperatives to help trim building costs. In October, 1967, however, he was informed by the Bantu Affairs Commissioner in Johannesburg that the state had

⁴⁸ Skota to N.E.A.D., 12 June, 1961; Circular for celebration, ca. April, 1962; Minutes of Pimville Advisory Board, 13 April and 31 August, 1965; Minutes of Pimville Compensation (Valuation?) Committee, 16 February, 1965; Application to hold a meeting from Skota to the N.E.A.D., 25 November, 1969: all in SKOTA Box Cal.

'decided that there can be no ownership by Bantu of new houses in urban residential areas.' All houses would be built and owned by the City Council.⁴⁹

There was a final betrayal. As construction began, Skota discovered that many of the residents of old Pimville would not be allowed to settle in the new. The state, before accepting site applications, required residents to submit a letter from their employer as well as proof that they had lived continuously in Pimville. Those unable to demonstrate urban rights were to be removed to the appropriate rural homelands. Skota dutifully set about collecting affidavits from residents, many of whom had lived in Pimville since 1904, attesting to the *bona fides* of neighbors, schoolmates, and fellow church-goers. Affidavits litter his papers, like the bare bones of a community.

VII

Skota envisioned the *African Yearly Register* as an annual publication. Yet aside from a reprinting in 1932, no new edition appeared. There is some evidence that he began preparing a new book in the late '30s, the materials for which may have been destroyed in a fire at the printing works. Skota was often disingenuous in accounting for the delay between editions, referring in one letter, for example, to a 'scarcity of printing equipments' during the depression and war. In 1958, he again began collecting materials for a new edition of the *Register*. His plans, characteristically, were grandiose. He envisaged an expanded 'Who's Who',

⁴⁹ Minutes of Pimville Advisory Board, 19 January, 1966; Skota to N.E.A.D., 28 July, 1966; Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Johannesburg, to Skota, 24 October, 1967, in SKOTA Box Cal.

followed by a series of directories featuring black businessmen in each of the Provinces and Protectorates. Skota hoped to profit from the books, and he may also have hoped to recover some of the prestige that had been his following publication of the first edition. In broader terms, the project's impetus was unchanged from 1930: It was yet another attempt to awaken Africans to their legacy of struggle and achievement; to appropriate that legacy for a contemporary elite; and to facilitate the development of consciousness and cohesiveness among black businessmen. For Skota, the need for such a project was even more glaring than it had been three decades earlier.⁸⁰

Most of the questionnaires Skota sent out, often to thirty year old addresses, returned undelivered. A few of Skota's contemporaries did resurface. A.W.G. Champion replied with astonishment: 'I had no idea that you[w]ere still alive as many of our big guns have left the globe.' Champion attributed their shared oblivion to a hostile press and to a younger generation which had grown indifferent to 'we of the old school of thought.' Time had muted old disputes, and Champion agreed to prepare a sketch of his old comrade and rival, Clements Kadalie. Any hope that the book would resurrect the 'old school', however, was vain. For Skota, the project succeeded only in resurrecting many of the obstacles that had dogged his life. Mounting debts, together with a new battery of state legislation, produced endless delays. In the end, only one book appeared, a combination 'Who's Who' and Transvaal business directory, published in 1966 through the largesse of a white philanthropist.⁸¹

Initially Skota planned to publish the books independently. He would prepare each himself, pay for printing from advertising revenue, and pocket the proceeds from sales. He contacted potential advertisers, white

⁸⁰ Skota to Paul Mosaka, 1 October, 1960, SKOTA Box Ab.

⁸¹ Champion to Skota, 28 October, 1961, SKOTA Box Ac.

and black, casting the series as 'the advertising medium for the potential black market'. Few advertisers came forward. African traders, catering to small, local markets in the black townships, had little incentive to invest R100,00 per page to advertise in a book aimed at a national audience. White advertisers were even less forthcoming. White capital had its own channels into the 'potential black market' and was not dependent on the intercession of Skota. Furthermore, and in spite of the thirty year old press notices which Skota enclosed with the circular, few white businessmen were prepared to entrust even R100,00 to an African of whom they had never heard. One advertising executive consulted by Skota explained, delicately, that white businesses would be more likely to advertise in the book if it was put in the hands of a 'reputable publisher.' Skota resisted the suggestion, pointing out to various friends that royalties from a publisher would scarcely cover his costs. By July, 1961, he had sold eleven partial pages.⁵²

Desperate for money, Skota tried to mobilize political connections. He wrote a lengthy letter to Paul Mosaka, a colleague from the Pimville Advisory Board and an officer of the Institute of Race Relations' Bantu Welfare Trust. In 1961, the Trust proffered a loan of R1200,00. The loan did not begin to cover printing costs, but it enabled Skota to extinguish debts, pay for postage and stationery, and continue his feckless pursuit of advertisers. One of the first things Skota did with the money was to re-open an office in central Johannesburg. In a grateful letter to the Trust, he confessed some difficulty in finding 'suitable accommodation' due to the 'Group Arrears Act' (the malapropism was prophetic), but he eventually settled back on Commissioner Street.⁵³

⁵² Undated circular, ca. 1960; L.H. Walton, South African Associated Newspapers, Ltd. to Skota, n.d., SKOTA Box Ab.

⁵³ Skota to P. Mosaka, 1 October, 1960, SKOTA Box Ab; Bantu Welfare Trust to Skota 1 March, 1961, and Skota's reply 9 March, 1961, SKOTA Ba3.

Inevitably, Skota's predictions on the date of the first book's appearance were optimistic. The money dwindled. He was soon unable to meet his rent, though he insisted on paying at least one rand per month, apparently as a testament of good faith. By the end of 1962, he was six months in arrears and struggling to stave off eviction. The Bantu Welfare Trust, uneasy about publication delays, withdrew the final installment on Skota's loan and instituted legal proceedings to recover the R1000,00 already lent. For his part, Skota continued to solicit quotations from printers; he negotiated with publishers (in 1962, he predicted publication 'next week'); and he began to explore the possibility of buying a press and printing the book himself.⁸⁴

Skota had an ulterior motive for purchasing his own press. At some point in the early 1960s he had been struck by the vast market for school exercise books created by the Bantu Education Act. His papers are full of calculations on the number of exercise books consumed annually in the Union's 2176 Bantu schools. He approached the Government with a plan to go into the printing business, eventually securing an interview with the Secretary for Bantu Education. It appears that he couched his proposal shrewdly: He argued that he could undersell the present supplier; that part of his profits would be used to fund scholarships for black youth; and, in a final flourish, that it was in keeping with 'Government policy' that 'Africans should serve themselves.' The Secretary, who spoke his own dialect of self-help, concurred and invited Skota to tender a bid on exercise books. Not surprisingly, Skota failed to raise the capital to take advantage of the opportunity, but he remained obsessed with the idea,

⁸⁴ Skota's correspondence with his landlord (and their attorneys) can be found in SKOTA Box Bd. A letter from his attorney to Skota on 10 June, informed him of an impending suit by the Bantu Welfare Trust; eventually the Trust settled for a signed undertaking: See SKOTA Boxes Ab and Ba4.

soliciting money for a press from any and all European acquaintances, including some visiting historians.⁵⁵

This ability to recognize the spaces created by government legislation was equally evident in Skota's encounter with the Group Areas Act. In November, 1962, he was ordered to vacate his Commissioner Street office in terms of the Act. (It appears that the city's Non-European Affairs Department became alert to Skota's presence after he had written requesting information for his book.) Skota still possessed enough contacts within the Department to secure an interview with the Secretary of the Natives Resettlement Board, and he succeeded in winning a series of extensions through the end of 1963. In the interim, he hatched a plan to construct an office block in Soweto to accommodate black professionals driven from the center city by the Act. He proposed building on a site opposite Baragwanath Hospital, convenient to Johannesburg, appropriating the time-honoured language of sanitation to justify displacing the fruitsellers and vendors who occupied the site. The state, judging from surviving correspondence, ignored the proposal, although it did reserve Skota space in a government-built block. Nonetheless, the incident, like the abortive school exercise book venture, is suggestive: It again reveals that government legislation opened certain avenues of accumulation even as it foreclosed others; it presages a process in which middle class accumulation would become increasingly entwined with apartheid policy; and finally, the state's response to Skota's overture suggests that it still remained largely indifferent to the opportunity to cultivate urban collaborators which this process afforded.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Notes in SKOTA Ba3; Skota to E.R. Silberbaur, 3 January, 1969, SKOTA Box Cal; Secretary for Bantu Education to the Secretary of the Advisory Board for Bantu Education, carbon copy to Skota, 27 September, 1965, in SKOTA Box Fe (the same box contains a price list for printing machines); Skota to the Secretary for Information, 17 April, 1967, SKOTA Box Ab.

⁵⁶ Letter to Skota from his landlords, 14 November, 1962; Skota to Mrs. Binswanger, 19 June, 1963; N.E.A.D. to Skota, 4 February, 1963; Natives Resettlement Board to Skota, 10 December, 1962; Skota to

More devastating to Skota's immediate task of finishing his book was a government restriction, gazetted in February, 1963, which barred any current or former member of an 'unlawful organisation' from writing, printing or publishing any material without ministerial consent. The regulation, circulated to supplement the Suppression of Communism Act, effectively gagged Skota, a former member of the banned A.N.C. Even the trickle of advertising revenue evaporated. For Skota, the remainder of the year was consumed by visits to the Johannesburg Chief Magistrate, to the Office of the Chief Commissioner for the Witwatersrand, the Information Office, the Ministry of the Interior, and eventually the Ministry of Justice. He eventually was given leave to continue with the book, though none of the officials he met was willing to entrust him with a note to the effect with which to placate advertisers. Skota proceeded to excise all references to the A.N.C. from the book. As an additional precaution, he decided to include only South Africans in the book, effectively vitiating the book's Pan-African pretensions. He later informed the Secretary of Information that he saw 'no wisdom' in preparing a book which encompassed countries that 'condemned South Africa'.⁵⁷

Throttled by debt and unable to meet even day to day expenses, Skota turned finally to philanthropy. He solicited from liberal European acquaintances letters of introduction to Mary Oppenheimer, granddaughter of Ernest Oppenheimer, the founder of Anglo-American. Miss Oppenheimer was apparently quite taken with him, and became a kind of personal patron. Details of publication fell smoothly into place. The Ernest Oppenheimer Trust guaranteed the nearly R8 000,00 needed to print copies of the book.

Johannesburg Bantu Commissioner, 22 November, 1962 in SKOTA Box Ba3. Natives Resettlement Board to Skota, July 2, 1963, SKOTA Box Ba4. Skota to E.R. Silberbauer, 3 January, 1969 and Natives Resettlement Board memo 30 March, 1967 in SKOTA Cal.

⁵⁷ Skota to Mrs. Binswanger, 19 June, 1963, SKOTA Box Ba3. Skota to Chief Magistrate, Johannesburg, 7 August, 1963; Magistrate's reply, 14 August, 1963; clipping from Johannesburg Star, 23 February, 1963 in SKOTA Box Ba4. Skota to Secretary of Information, 17 April, 1967, SKOTA Box Ab.

Distribution, at the insistence of the Trust, was entrusted to a European publisher, the Central News Agency, which demanded a whopping 50% of sales revenue for its trouble. For his part, Skota assumed the role of supplicant. He wrote heart-wrenching letters confessing his inability to raise rent or even the five rand tariff on his postbox; the debts were quickly extinguished by the Trust. As a testament of his gratitude, he assembled a delegation of the old elite to present Miss Oppenheimer with a portrait on the occasion of her betrothal. (He browbeat Modiri Molema into coming from Mafikeng for the ceremony, reminding him of the £3 000 000 that Ernest Oppenheimer had donated for the construction of Soweto, 'where our erstwhile homeless people now live happily.') As a final gesture of his gratitude, he decided to dedicate the book to Oppenheimer, 'in recognition of the noble and priceless deeds he performed for the benefit of the Africans in the sub-continent.' The irony of dedicating a book devoted to recapturing Africans' legacy of struggle to a Randlord apparently escaped him.⁵⁸

The book finally appeared in 1966, but any hopes Skota had of profiting from it were soon dashed. The C.N.A., never committed to the project, failed to advertise the book and, in Skota's opinion, overpriced it. By the time the Agency removed the book from the shelves in December, 1967, just seventy copies had been sold. Proceeds were divided between Skota's creditors; the remaining 9930 copies were re-boxed and returned to the Oppenheimer Trust. The Oppenheimer Trust, in reply to Skota's complaints, suggested he distribute the book himself, offering him as many copies as he could buy at one rand per book. Skota announced his inten-

⁵⁸ Introductions came from Silberbauer, Director of the Bantu Wage and Productivity Association, and Guy Tatham, of the African Market Research Service, Ltd. See Skota to Mr. Drummond Campbell, 4 January, 1965, SKOTA Box Ab; correspondence between Skota and Mary Oppenheimer, January - July, 1964, SKOTA Box Ba3; and Skota to Modiri Molema, 30 July, 1965, SKOTA Box Ba4. T.D.M. Skota (ed.) *The African Who's Who: An Illustrated Register and National Biographical Dictionary of the Africans in the Transvaal (3rd edition - Revised and Enlarged)* (Johannesburg: 1966). Hereafter *Who's Who*.

tion to purchase one hundred copies of the book to distribute to black schools, but he never mustered the cash."

The book itself was an anachronism. It reproduced much of the vocabulary of the first edition: Progressive, interested in the welfare of his people, respected by Europeans. The Bantu Mens' Social Centre -- one of the middle class institutions of the 1920s and by 1966 a grotesque irrelevancy -- featured prominently; the banned A.N.C. did not appear. Most of the individuals in the book had appeared in the first edition, and often the original biography was inserted verbatim. Where it was not, as in Skota's case, the additional information amounted to a litany of defunct organizations and failed enterprises.

The book did include some members of the next generation, people unborn or still children when the first edition had appeared. Most occupied longstanding niches of the black elite -- teaching and preaching, clerical work and trading. The book does reveal, however, the emergence of new employment categories. Daniel Chocho, manager of the African Marketing Division of a Cape Town agency, and David Nkosi, a personnel manager for Coca-Cola, were white collar workers within white capital. Both positions suggest a kind of inversion of the elite's intermediary role. The career of C. Nemedi Phatudi, teacher, inspector of Bantu Schools, and President of the South African Federation of Sub-Inspectors and Supervisors, illustrated again some of the possibilities opened by the Bantu Education Act. But what is most striking about the new entries in the 1966 *Register* is the absence of generational continuity. Frequently in the first edition, two or even three generations of a single family were represented. Skota himself possessed such a provenance. Certainly one should not overgeneralise; given the narrowness of employment categories, elite

" Skota to the Secretary of Information, 17 April, 1967; Ernest Oppenheimer Trust to Skota, 6 March and 16 May, 1968, SKOTA Box Ab. Undated draft letter by Skota, SKOTA Box Ba4.

status was precarious at the best of times. Nevertheless, the 1930 edition of the *Register* does suggest that many of the older mission-educated elite had succeeded in conveying elite status to their children. In contrast, Skota and his generation seem to have been relatively less successful in reproducing their status. Their children are conspicuous in the 1966 *Who's Who* only by their absence.⁶⁰

VIII

Ultimately, the history of any class must be measured over generations, and it is in the measuring that one begins to grasp the full dimensions of Skota's failure. For Skota, it was in the order of things that children superseded their parents, just as he had exceeded the achievements and status of his father. In the case of the black elite, this eminently middle class notion had an additional racial overlay: 'Civilisation' was progressive, and it was the task of each new generation of educated Africans to light their race's path to full manhood. This twin notion of generational progress infused the original *African Yearly Register*, lending an evangelical note to many of the life histories in the book.⁶¹

Skota understood the generational component of racial 'progress.' He noted in his preface to the 1930 *Register* that the book was written for children, to disabuse them of the belief that their ancestors were 'mur-

⁶⁰ *Who's Who*, pp. 12, 40, 98.

⁶¹ Louise White, in an article on the Kenyan petty bourgeoisie, has put the generational issue well: 'Would that petty bourgeoisie ... be allowed to accumulate capital and pass property to heirs, thereby developing a partly autonomous economic base, around which a sense of continuity, a sense of place in the city, and a sense of collective identity might, over generations, emerge?' The short answer in Kenya, as in South Africa, was no. See White's 'A Colonial State and an African Petty Bourgeoisie: Prostitution, Property, and Class Struggle in Nairobi, 1936-40', in Frederick Cooper (ed.) *Struggle for the City: Migrant Labour, Capital, and the State in Urban Africa* (London: 1983).

derers, traitors, etc.', and to provide an historical foundation for their continued advance. He was well aware of pitfalls along the way. Like so many of the urban black elite, he was obsessed with the problem of 'juvenile delinquency.' He generally attributed its prevalence to the displacement of African 'culture'. The end of the *lobola* system had undermined a crucial mechanism of generational control; uncritical acceptance of 'Western' notions of sexual equality -- what Skota termed 'petticoat rule' -- had undermined patriarchal authority. Thus loosed from the 'discipline of Bantudom,' children ran wild. 'So it goes on,' he concluded, 'until we breed a generation of *analaita*, *Anarabi* and cut throats.'⁶²

The *African Yearly Register* stood at the center of a lifelong effort to restore the restraints of culture. At the same time, Skota attacked the problem of juvenile delinquency in a number of more tangible ways. In the 1930s, he campaigned against Lodger Permits, a form of municipal taxation which tended to drive adolescents into the labour market. In the 1940s and '50s, he fought for a relaxation of municipal housing restrictions to enable children to settle near to their parents. In the 1960s, he attempted to organise, through the new Urban Bantu Council, a public campaign in Soweto against youth crime. (He suggested arranging local meetings at which community leaders would exhort 'the lawless element to divert their energies along better and ... beneficial lines.') And in the 1970s, he oversaw a program to feed children of working parents in Pimville who often had nowhere to go and nothing to eat at lunchtime. Everyday during the school term his house was swamped by hordes of young children, to whom he gave broken biscuits purchased at a discount from a local baker.'⁶³

⁶² *Register*, p. xiii. *The African Leader*, 11 June, 1932.

⁶³ *The African Leader*, 4 February, 1933; Minutes of a Pimville Deputation to the N.E.A.D., 16 April, 1943, SKOTA Box Fa. References to the feeding scheme are scattered through the collection.

When Skota fulminated about *amalaite* and 'Sons and Daughters who do as they please, often bringing Shame and Disgrace to the home,' he may have been speaking from personal experience. He had two sons, both by his second wife, Zilpah. The first was born into poverty in Klerksdorp and died in 1946. Three years later, the couple had a second son, Mjokwani Vulindlela. Little evidence remains about Jockie Skota, but he seems, in his father's terms, to have been wayward. In 1958, Skota considered enrolling the boy in school in Basutoland, both to escape the impact of Bantu education and in the hopes that in a 'countrylike' setting the boy might outgrow his proclivity for 'dodging' school. Nothing came of the plan, but three years later he succeeded in getting Jockie out of Soweto. He enrolled the boy at St. Christopher's, an Anglican School in Swaziland. Church membership was one prerequisite for admission; thus Jockie re-entered the church which his father had left forty years before. For the required reference from the boy's 'priest', Skota submitted a letter from an A.M.E. minister, to whom he confided, 'I am terribly worried about the schooling of my boy.' In February, 1962, with the application still incomplete, he dispatched Jockie to Swaziland, wiring fifteen rands directly to the school to help pay for books.⁶⁴

Thus begun a year-long struggle to raise school fees. Skota wired a few rands to the school intermittently, always with the promise that the balance would soon follow. In one letter in early 1962, he assured the principal that 'when my book is published about April or May, I will show my gratitude in a practical way.' Six months later, and further in arrears, he was more contrite: 'You cannot imagine how ashamed and disappointed I feel when I fail to meet my obligations on time. But circumstances have been such that I have to be fighting all the time -- until my book is published.' It seems the administration at St.

⁶⁴ See Skota's address on the 'Order of Africa', n.d., SKOTA Box Bc. Vera Gule to Skota, 5 March, 1958, SKOTA Box Ba2. Skota to Fr. P.H. Coxan, 21 November, 1961 and 2 January, 1962; Skota to Rev. Mgomezulu, 30 December, 1961 and 16 January, 1962, in SKOTA Box Ba3.

Christopher's was less interested in Skota's contrition than in his money, and in September they sent Jackie home to fetch outstanding fees of R19,68. For all of Skota's correspondence to the school, only one letter to his son survives, a copy of a brief note which accompanied a pair of shoes: 'My dear boy, I hope you are studying very hard, and above all pray as often as possible.'⁶⁶

In spite of his father's admonition, Jackie failed in his first term at the new school. A terse note in January, 1963 informed Skota that the boy should not return to St. Christopher's. Skota frantically cast about for another school, eventually settling for a Catholic School in Natal which had not yet fallen beneath the hammer of Bantu Education. He prevailed on the principal at St. Christopher's to write a reference for the boy. 'You are the only person to whom I can appeal,' he wrote. 'By granting the said testimonial you may be saving the boy from becoming a vagabond, that roam[s] the streets of Johannesburg until he gets into serious mischief.'⁶⁶

The papers give no indication how the boy fared at the new school. What is clear is that in 1971, Jackie Skota was killed in Soweto, a victim of a hit and run driver in Orlando East. An inquest failed to turn up the identity of the driver. A year later, Skota tried to engage the Witwatersrand Traffic Investigator to find the driver. The papers give no indication of whether he succeeded, but he did subsequently engage a European attorney to file a claim for compensation. It is not too uncharitable to think that he was less concerned in securing a prosecution

⁶⁶ Skota to Fr. Coxan, 5 February, 3 April, and 28 September, 1962; Skota to Jackie, 14 March 1962. SKOTA Box ??

⁶⁶ Coxan to Skota, 15 January, 1963; Skota to Coxan, 1 March and 8 March, 1963, in SKOTA Box Ba3.

than in obtaining some settlement to supplement his meagrely pension. The claim was rejected.⁶⁷

Skota lived out his life on a pension of sixteen rands per month. In 1974, he wrote a polite letter to the Director of Pensions enquiring whether the amount was correct. He was informed that the amount was 'quite correct', although it appears that the pension was subsequently reduced. He and his wife relied on charity: An undated circular letter addressed to 'Dear Friends' expressed their gratitude for food parcels. The circle had closed; the man who had cast himself as benefactor to his people was now a beneficiary of charity. Nonetheless, he continued to offer himself as an intermediary, a role for which he was still equipped only by virtue of his literacy. He wrote many letters in the last years of his life: letters for people ensnared in the pass laws; a plea from a man whose son had apparently been misplaced by the South African Prison Services; claims for people who had been bilked out of money; and endless letters to establish the rights of individuals to remain in the reconstructed Pimville. He continued to provide broken biscuits to schoolchildren, though the task was made more difficult by the refusal of suppliers to continue delivering to Soweto. And, to anyone who would listen, he expounded on the profits he would make selling school exercise books, but for a printing press. He shared his failing memory with visiting historians, and at some point undertook to write a history of the African National Congress, petering out after a few pages. In June, 1976, he died at his home in Pimville. He left only a single cabinet of tattered books and papers, a physical metaphor for the evisceration of a class.

⁶⁷ Skota to M.G. Salomon, 8 January, 1974, SKOTA Box Ac. Skota to Manager Witwatersrand Investigation and Training, 3 January, 1973; M.G. Salomon to Skota, 8 January, 1974, SKOTA Box Ba3.