

https://dspace.org/

Dr S. Modiri Molema (1891-1965) : The making of an historian

Starfield, Jane

2008-12-05T11:33:27Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/5872

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

INTRODUCTION:
"HISTORY, HISTORIOGRAPHY, BIOGRAPHY"

Dr Seetsele Modiri Molema was one of several early twentieth-century black South Africans to divert from the main course of his career and tackle the writing of history. In his twenties, and while completing two demanding medical degrees at Glasgow University, he found it so vital to explain South African history and culture to the world that he wrote *The Bantu Past and Present*, a critical history of black South Africans. His earnest engagement with the contemporary disciplines of history and ethnography poses a fascinating historical problem: why would a young black South African immerse himself in "all the relevant literature which I could find" to write *The Bantu* while pursuing the third year of his medical studies? [1]

Intriguing as this problem is in itself, a possibly more potent historical question involves Molema's "place" (and that of other black South African historians) in the discipline of historical writing. Since the writing of history is a social activity, implying a community or communities of writers in representing and critiquing the past, this study also considers other historians' reception of his contribution. To this end, this thesis argues that two major historiographical studies published in 1988 by Christopher Saunders and Ken Smith treated the genesis and purpose of African historical writing cursorily and rather negatively. This did Molema and his peers a great disservice. Indeed, these summations' minimal attention to black writers reflected the condition of 1980s historical practice and even prolonged the exclusion of black writers from the mainstream of historical debate.

During the 1990s, historians and social scientists began to recognise Molema's work. Although more positive than Saunders and Smith's work, Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius, Tom Lodge and Saul Dubow dealt briefly with aspects of his writing, as the Introduction shows. To date, anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff have given the most weight to his work in their authoritative studies of Setswana culture.[2]

This thesis aims to establish the circumstances that helped to make Molema an historian, and to redress the limited critical reception accorded his first major work. A task of this kind has several theoretical and methodological implications, the first being generic. The fact that Molema inscribes himself, his grandfather and his community, into the text indicates his avoidance of the "objective" Rankean mode prevalent in early twentieth-century South African historiography.[3] This investigation delineates the concept of "autoethnography" as an historical genre and an explanatory tool that will explicate Molema's purpose in writing, and the difficulty that certain critics faced in interpreting his work. As the Introduction later shows, autoethnography is one of the historical genres of the Self — autobiography and biography are others — and Molema is one of several writers who employed it in order to represent his community's history.

---

[1] SM Molema, 1920. *The Bantu Past and Present*. (Edinburgh: W. Green & Son), p.viii. Glasgow University Archives [GUA] Glasgow University *Matriculation Albums*, 1916/17, R8/5/37/2, No.482, H-M, Modiri S Molema (aged 25) was in his Third Year and registered for Materia Medica & Pathology. See *infra,* p.18.

[2] See Belinda Bozzoli & Peter Delius (eds), 1990. *History from South Africa*, Special Issue of the *Radical History Review* [*RHR*, 1990], 46/7 (New York), pp.25ff. See *infra,* p.38. Also Saul Dubow, 1995 *Illicit Union: Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*. (JHB: Witwatersrand University Press [WUP]), p.72 and Tom Lodge, "Charters from the Past: The African National Congress and Its Historiographical Traditions". In *RHR*, 1990: 164. Also John L & Jean Comaroff, 1991. *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*. Vol.1. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), *passim*, and JL & J Comaroff, 1997. *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*. Vol. 2. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). See *infra*, p.19.

[3] For further discussion on the influence of Leopold von Ranke's work, see *infra*, pp.20 fn.117 & 37.

In exploring the conditions that impelled Dr Molema to become an historian, the present study focuses particularly on his first work, *The Bantu Past and Present* [henceforth, *The Bantu*], and also draws on his subsequent published works, *Chief Moroka: His Life, His Times, His Country and His People* and *Montshiwa, Barolong Chief and Patriot*, as well as his unpublished histories and many essays.[4] This thesis both situates *The Bantu* in the context of his own life, and then demonstrates the significance of his work within the South African historical canon. To accommodate these twin objectives, this study's structure is two-fold, being both biographical (Chapters One to Four) and analytical (Chapters Five and Six).[5] This investigation of Dr Molema's historical endeavours has a further, more general aim: to expand the "space" that African intellectuals occupy in the South African historical canon. As such, it forms part of the effort after 1994 to unearth and consolidate the long buried tradition of intellectual debate in African universities, public fora and the media.[6]

In 1920, Molema's confidence and erudition in striving to create a sustained account of two millennia of African history in southern Africa from an *African* viewpoint flew in the face of societal and historiographical convention. Nor did he confine himself to history, but called *The Bantu* both "history" and "ethnography". This in itself was not unique: at least two important sources for *The Bantu* had taken a multidisciplinary approach.[7] However, writing as one of the African people usually sidelined as historical actors in writings of settler and other western sources, Molema's approach was rare. Few African writers had published texts of any kind. Just two of his 115 sources represented an African perspective.[8] Molema's temporary "exile" in Glasgow while writing *The Bantu* distanced him from primary sources — in particular, from the debates about African history, colonisation and African Nationalism then current in the Eastern Cape and Natal. Lovedale's newspaper, *The Christian Express*, pressed missionary interests in African education and culture. Its September 1917 issue was *The Bantu*'s one source of current journalistic debate on African history and culture.[9] Important sites of historical debate, such as African newspapers and political associations, were not available to him. Although without access to back-copies of JT Jabavu's *Imvo Zabantsundu*, Walter Rubusana and the Soga brothers' *Izwi Labantu*, and John Dube's *Ilanga lase Natal* and Plaatje's Setswana-English, Molema did include a brief section on the "Bantu Press". Yet his emphatic statement that "there is no such thing as 'native opinion' in politics, if numbers count in the matter", was a reflection of his long absence from South Africa, and the vital debates about history and politics then underway among African intellectuals and a growing number of the working class.[10]

---

[4] SM Molema, 1951. *Chief Moroka: His Life, His Times, His Country and His People*. (Cape Town: Acacia), and *Montshiwa, Barolong Chief and Patriot.* (JHB: Struik). Dr Molema's works are listed in the Bibliography, *infra*, pp.375-76.

[5] See *infra*, p.5: "A Note on Methodology" for more on the structure.

[6] Recent publications on the subject of black intellectuals include: Thandika Mkandawire (ed), 2005. *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*. (Oxford: The African Books Collective). See also, Xolani Xundu, "Black Intelligentsia Stirs". In *Sunday Times*, 3 July 2006, discussing the formation of the "native club" of black intellectuals, sponsored by Thabo Mbeki and the presidency, or Nithiya Chetty, "Where are our black intellectuals?". In *The Star*, 3 April 2006.[http://www.thestar.co.za/index.php?fSectionId=233&fArticleId=3186613]. Alongside the academic domain, the South African History Archive and the Kara Heritage Institute endeavour to accumulate documents and other material on South African history and culture. See http://www.kara.co.za/home.htm and http://www.wits.ac.za/saha/.

[7] These were: George McCall Theal, 1919. *Ethnography and Condition of South Africa before 1505*. (London: George Allen & Unwin) and Maurice Evans, 1911. *Black and White in South East Africa. A Study in Sociology*. (London: Longmans, Green). Both writers used an historical approach in delineating, as they saw it, the ethnography (Theal) and the sociology (Evans) of South Africa. Chapters Five and Six examine Molema's sources in detail.

[8] Sol T Plaatje, 1916 & 1982. *Native Life in South Africa*. (JHB: Ravan). [Henceforth, Plaatje, 1916a & 1982] and WB Rubusana [c.1906]. *Zemk'Inkomo Magwala Ndini*. (London). As a comparative source, Molema was greatly inspired by WEB Du Bois's, 1905 & 1913. *The Souls of Black Folk.* (London: Archibald Constable).

[9] See *infra*, p.173 & fn.66.

[10] Molema, 1920: 304-06. Catherine Higgs, 1997. *The Ghost of Equality: The Public Lives of DDT Jabavu of South Africa, 1885-1959*. (Cape Town & JHB: David Philip), pp.10-13 & 151 mentions the Xhosa press as a crucial debating forum. DDT Jabavu praised Tiyo Soga's *Intlalo kaXhosa* (*Life and Customs of the Xhosa*) [1917] as source of ethnic history and culture, but added — in *Imbumba yamaNyama* (Unity Is Strength [1952]) — that it was rare for a educated Africans to write about the past; "What was in fashion was the reading of books on black history…by whites and those books were written for use at school….. The history of the nation was kept in the heads of praise poets, the wise men and the old men."

No earlier historical narrative of its scope is known to exist. Moreover, as the first black South African to publish such a work, he wrote without formal training in history and ethnography.

When he published *The Bantu*, South Africa possessed little socio-cultural "space" to accommodate black academics in the social sciences: DDT Jabavu stood out as the lone African member of the South African Native College staff on its opening in 1916. Nor did university education for black South Africans exist locally before that date; even thereafter, it was limited.[11] Until 1940, local doors of learning were "barred and bolted" against aspirant black doctors, who had to go abroad at vast expense to study medicine.[12] In 1914, with the opportunity to study at Glasgow University before him, Molema chose medicine, not history and ethnography. While a resident in mainly white Glasgow (and the city's "lone Motswana"), his relations with fellow African diaspora students made him aware of the need for a corrective exposition and analysis of the condition of black South Africans, in past and present.[13]

Self-taught in both disciplines, Molema was what Saunders termed an "amateur" in the first of the 1988 historiographies. To Ken Smith, the other historiographer, Molema and other early twentieth-century African writers are "mission-inspired".[14] In asserting the need to re-assess Dr Molema's historical contribution, the Introduction and Chapters Five and Six take issue with aspects of each historiography. Both were major summations, defining key debates among South Africa's professional historians. In apartheid's penultimate years, these works reflected, sometimes inadvertently, the ways in which first segregation and then apartheid shaped the discipline. In particular, this thesis finds that Saunders and Smith's intense engagement with the "professional" history emanating from academic institutions represented a limited portrayal of the role that history played in South African society as a whole. Thus, writers whose race and non-professional status would, at the time of writing, have excluded them from the universities, remained largely sidelined from the main lines of the historical canons Saunders and Smith constructed.[15] Molema's *oeuvre*, like the works of other black writers, shows that discussions of history were very much alive outside the universities.[16] The angry, even polemical, tone of Molema and Sol Plaatje's writing indicates a mounting rage over the marginalisation of black people from both history and historical debate.

Saunders defended the professional status of the Settler, Liberal and Radical historians who engaged in the mainstream of the historical debate. For him, all early twentieth-century African historical writers were "amateurs". Strangely, while some white writers were also amateurs, no blacks were considered professional, despite the level of research they had conducted. That said, Saunders identified a vital aspect of many of these texts: Molema and other African historians desired to popularise a critique of the ways in which many professional writings depicted black people. Yet, in equating the popularising motives of Afrikaner, Socialist and African writers, Saunders overlooked the historical and cultural

[11] RHW Shepherd, 1942. *Lovedale, South Africa: The Story of a Century, 1841-1941.* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press), pp.284, 513 & 290: on 8 February 1916, the South African Prime Minister opened the South African Native College, at Fort Hare. It was recognised as a University College in 1923, under the Higher Education Act. While selected Lovedale scholars (like Modiri Molema) had been able to become medical orderlies from the early 1900s, a formal programme to train medical aids was only introduced at the University of Fort Hare in 1937. Cf. *infra*, p.192. Facilities for that enabled to become medical aids were only opened in 1937.

[12] University of the Witwatersrand [UW], the AB Xuma Papers, ABX290731, 31 July 1929, Xuma, "Medical training for Native S[outh] Africans", (for British Association for the Advancement of Science), p.1: Dr AB Xuma, future president of the African National Congress made this observation, quoted more fully, *infra*, p.192. On the training of black doctors, see also Karin A Shapiro, 1987. "Doctors or Medical Aids — The Debate over the Training of Black Medical Personnel for the Rural Black Population in South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s", *JSAS*, 13, 2, Jan: 234-55.

[13] UW, Molema-Plaatje Papers [MPP, henceforth] A979 Ad1, 27 Aug 1915, Modiri Molema [henceforth, SMM], Glasgow, to Silas Molema [henceforth, STM], Mafikeng: Modiri called himself "the lone Motswana in Glasgow" when writing to his father.

[14] Christopher Saunders, 1988. *The Making of the South African Past.* (Cape Town: David Philip) and Ken Smith, 1988. *The Changing Past: Trends in South African Historical Writing*. (Johannesburg [JHB]: Southern).

[15] Appendix B summarises these.

[16] "Works", here, includes journalism. Discussions of history often featured in the African press.

specificity of Molema's intellectual project.[17] Saunders' focus on the professional at the expense of popular initiatives implied that the academic forum was the only arena in which South African history could be debated adequately. This purview did not capture the "amateur" critique, overt or implicit, of professional writing, which Molema began in 1920.

For Smith, African writers were likewise marginal to historiography's central academic debates. Their voices were drowned out by the carrying tones of Settler, Afrikaner, Liberal and Radical historians. However, he did investigate the intriguing commonality of "mission education" in these writers' backgrounds, but did not delve into the contrary appeal of their African heritage, an ambiguity evident in all Dr Molema's writings.

Although well-intentioned, Saunders and Smith did not "liberate" black historians from the isolated position to which they had, during the twentieth century, been consigned. Perhaps these scholars' failure to provide a more systematic critique of the discipline is excusable in the light of the pressing academic and political problems of the late 1980s. The fact that, nearly twenty years on, historians are still struggling to give adequate representation to long-hidden or marginalised historians of the past indicates that such redress is a long and challenging process.[18]

Nonetheless, it is of major concern that Saunders undermined the weight of Molema's work by dismissing him as a disciple of George McCall Theal's, while overlooking his emergent (and often angry!) critique of this settler historian. Saunders also seemed somewhat surprised that Molema should praise the missionaries for bringing "progress and light" to southern Africa.[19] This point ignores the long Christian tradition in the Molema family: Modiri was the third generation to serve as a lay preacher in the Mafikeng Wesleyan Chapel built by his grandfather in the 1850s. Both Saunders and Smith partially acknowledged Molema's Africanism, alluding to his long membership of the African National Congress, but not his liberalism and some tendency towards socialism.[20] Neither historiography commented on the ambiguity of Molema or any other African writer's cultural and intellectual affiliations.

In investigating Saunders' "charge" that Molema was the conservative Theal's African mouthpiece, this thesis finds that in the 1920s, Theal's influence was pervasive. Almost all historians were more or less in his debt. Only during the latter part of the decade did university-based historians, WM Macmillan and CW de Kiewiet, begin articulating a liberal critique of Theal. A careful reading of *The Bantu* would have revealed that Molema had identified Theal's pro-Afrikaner bias in 1920, labelling him "the champion of the Boers".[21] As this comment reveals, Molema was clearly more involved in the "great debate" of South African historiography than either Saunders or Smith recognised. This study illuminates his affiliations to some of the liberal views that Macmillan and De Kiewiet would later express. Chapters Five and Six attest to the many influences on his writing: classical learning, the European Enlightenment philosophers, Anti-Slavery campaigners and Christian missionaries, and Darwinian evolutionary thinking. He was more cautious in accepting Social Darwinism and its many racist analogues.

Although Saunders and Smith established a genealogy of professional historiography, their canons seriously underestimated the African intellectual tradition, which grounded an emergent, but hesitant,

---

[17] See *infra*, p.234.

[18] Both Saunders and Smith do make it clear that it was not only African writers who wrote outside the academic stream. See Saunders (1988: 165-76) and Smith (1988: 155-62) on left-wing white writers.

[19] Saunders, 1988: 108.

[20] Saunders, 1988: 108 and Smith, 1988: 132.

[21] Molema, 1920: 357. He expressed this anti-Theal "attitude" in *Moroka* (1951), though Saunders (1988: 108) cited this text as a further example of his *pro*-Theal stance.

anticolonialism in debates about the history of Africa. This critique was conducted in the public domain, often beginning in schoolrooms, continuing at university, and flaring forth in the African press.[22] Longer texts that found their way into print represented only a portion of the debate.

As stated, the genres many African intellectuals used to present their versions of history differed from the debatably "objective" texts of the professional domain. Saunders and Smith acknowledged the generic variety of the published "amateur/mission-inspired" works, but examined neither the ideological nor the historiographical implications of such generic choices. For Smith, it sufficed to dismiss them as "political writings and autobiographies which convey an *attitude* about the past".[23]

In contrast to Smith's apparent disapproval, the present study finds that "attitude" highly significant and asserts that an important aspect of the emergent black tradition — and its reception — was its generic complexity. One of the most intriguing aspects of Dr Molema's historical writing was the liminal presence of a textual "self" in each of his texts, as the Introduction shows.[24] While it may be argued that several African writers chose autobiography, novels and plays as an alternative way of writing history, Molema did not. Instead, he consciously used his own identity as "a member of the [African] race" to make authoritative statements about the history of black South Africans.[25] Nor did he venture into autobiography's customary concerns: providing an account of his own development as an individual. Rather, this thesis identifies his approach as "autoethnography", a genre of the Self receiving increasing recent critical attention, and which this thesis defines and explores in its analysis of *The Bantu*.

Autoethnography is central to explaining the way in which Molema constructed his writing Self and his historical relationship to the communities that he defined as "his": the Rolong, the Tswana and, more broadly, African South Africans. Relying on these critical insights, this thesis elucidates Molema's use of autoethnography, by locating it within the history of his own life.

A Note on Methodology

As noted, the thesis' methodology is two-fold: the first four chapters are biographical, while Chapters Five and Six provide exposition and analysis of *The Bantu*. The biographical approach allows for an exploration of the personal, familial and spatio-cultural reasons impelling Molema to pursue the writing of history and ethnography while studying medicine. The biographical structure was suggested by the primary research material, which documents the remarkable lives of three generations of the Molema family. This family was both a locus of power and a catalyst of change in the Molopo region from 1832 to 1965. Molema's writings represent and interpret these processes, indicating the need for a greater understanding of the history of his own life, and of the lives and worlds Chief Silas and Chief Molema helped to make. There is a reflexive element to the relationship between third-generation Modiri and the chain of meaning his father and grandfather established: all three men help to make the history of the their community, the Rolong boo RaTshidi [henceforth, the Tshidi] but Dr Molema then committed their actions to historical record.[26]

[22] Smith (1988: 132) states "academically trained black historians have made a contribution to the study of South African history in Masters and Doctoral theses", but adds that these are mostly "non-controversial".

[23] Smith, 1988: 132.

[24] See *infra*, pp.7, 22.

[25] Molema, 1920: viii.

[26] This thesis adopts John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff's (1991: 1 & *passim*) convention of referring to the Barolong boo Ratshidi as the Tshidi. Similarly, the other Barolong communities are designated as: Ratlou [Barolong boo Ratlou], Rapulana [Barolong boo Rapulana] and Seleka [Barolong boo Seleka]. To pronounce the possessive pronoun "*boo*", one separates the sounds of the two "o"s, rather than making them a diphthong, after the English convention.

The primary and secondary material frames the evolving relationship between Modiri Molema and his powerful father, Chief Silas, and illuminates themes that recur in all three generations: religious conversion, the practice of a new faith, socio-cultural and political difference as a result of Christian conviction, education, and the agricultural and commercial ventures that provided for considerable capital accumulation to fund that education. All of these were important catalysts of change and conflict in nineteenth- and twentieth-century southern Africa. As importantly, a genealogy of educational endeavour emerged from 1833 onwards: in that year, Chief Molema sought education from the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries at Thaba 'Nchu. From the 1850s, he sent his sons to the Eastern Cape for their education. Documents pertaining to the years that Silas Molema spent at Healdtown in the 1870s illuminate the content and the privations he endured as he trained to become the first teacher among the Tshidi, as does the documentation of Modiri's years at Healdtown and Lovedale (c.1906-1912). Ambiguously, Silas passionately regarded learning as the instrument of economic and social improvement, but he maintained the strict codes of Rolong family and community conduct. He devotedly educated his eight children and helped to fund those of his brothers, Israel and Joshua. On his death, his eldest son, Modiri, began funding the family's education, often up to tertiary level, as Chapters Two, Three and Four illuminate.

Building on the biographical studies of Chief Molema, Silas and Modiri, Chapters Five and Six offer an historical and cultural analysis of *The Bantu*. They examine Dr Molema's project as historian and ethnographer, and the techniques that he used to express his agreement with some of his sources and criticism of others. Notably, Molema relied on few archival sources, citing only a collection of constitutional documents relating to the history of southern Africa's two colonies and Boers republics. Instead, *The Bantu* relied heavily on the interpretative method, given that he had far more access to secondary material than to primary. He wrote the text during World War I, during an enforced seven-year "exile" while at Glasgow University (1914-1921). His letters home to Silas and the family provide the scaffolding of Chapter Four, offering insight into his state of mind at the time of writing.

A biographical study is an appropriate way to approach Molema's life: he published two biographies and drafted two more in the latter part of his life. He had a great feeling for the interplay of character, culture and circumstance, as his studies *Moroka*, *Montshiwa*, the unpublished lives of his mentor, Sol Plaatje, and of the longstanding enemy of Mafikeng, General Piet Cronjé, reveal.[27] Thus, before beginning the three-generational account of Molema history, this Introduction surveys the art of biography and its relevance to the present thesis.

In search of the Life Genres, or "The New Biography":[28]

Biography stands at a generic crossroads where fiction meets the social sciences. Traditionally, biography meant the story of a life, written by someone other than the person who had lived that life. It was not self-reflection on the author's part, which would make it *auto*biography, but reflection *on* the life of another. Yet there are thin boundaries between the "life genres" — those narrative forms devoted to representing individual experience:

> …the autobiographical (they are written in the first person) and the biographical (that are written by another), between the historical (the protagonists are recognizable individuals who we know to have lived) and the fictional (they exist within texts that are not bound by any duty or fidelity to facts). This raises therefore further questions concerning the nature and status of the subject *in* and *of* writing….[29]

[27] These are listed in the Bibliography, pp.369-70.

[28] "The New Biography" is the title of Virginia Woolf's 1927 essay. In *Granite and Rainbow: Es*says. (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1958), p.149. First published in *New York Herald Tribune*, 30 Oct 1927.

[29] Lucia Boldrini, "'Allowing it to speak out of him': The Heterobiographies of David Malouf, Antonio Tabucchi and Marguerite Yourcenar". In *Comparative Critical Studies,* 2004, I: 3*: "Autobiographications: Comparatist Essays*", p.245.

The genres of the self are multiple; the recent fascination with biographical and autobiographical writing has increased the understanding of each emergent subdivision's subtle purpose. Definition, as the 2003 conference on *autobiografictions* showed, is largely retrospective and reinterpretative, as scholars revisit generic divisions and past writings on and about the self. The writings of Ovid and St Augustine are thus reconsidered alongside Dan Jacobson, Jacques Derrida and Marguerite Yourcenar.[30]

This thesis concerns itself with South African writer, SM Molema, until now identified solely as an "historian' and "ethnographer" and attempts to re-position — in order to understand it better — his first major work within the "life genres": as *autoethnography*. In autoethnography, the Self becomes the instrument of knowing and interpreting one's own community. It is not quite autobiography in which the writer's subject is his own life ("I write of myself then"), nor is it a study of the past (history) or of culture (ethnography) from which the writer's identity, past, and culture are excluded.[31] Instead, the writer's observant self is *liminal*: although it is the basis of knowledge, and guides the narration, the "I" remains largely outside the text. He (in Molema's case), belongs to the historical culture he interprets, yet outside it enough to represent (or translate) it to the reader.[32]

The representation of a life has a long history. The deeds of heroes and saints merited the earliest life-representations. The latter, such as Winchester monk Ælfric's tenth-century *Lives of the Saints*, were termed "hagiography", which has today become a byword for *uncritical* biography.[33] The "critical" element came later to the art — indeed, in one critic's view, biography only became an art in the twentieth century.[34] For Virginia Woolf, who devoted many essays to biographical works, biographers need to balance two constituents: "[o]n the one hand, there is truth; on the other there is personality".[35]

Woolf had sound autobiographical reasons for theorising about biography. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, in whom the Victorian zeal for codifying and cataloguing blazed intensely, began editing the vast *Dictionary of National Biography* in the year of her birth — 1882.[36] His own biographer (and successor as DNB editor), Sir Sidney Lee, devised the formula to which Woolf alluded: "'[t]he aim of biography is the truthful transmission of personality'".[37] She expanded:

> [a]nd if we think of truth as something of granite-like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow-like intangibility and reflect that the aim of biography is to weld these two into one seamless whole, we shall admit that the problem is a stiff one and that we need not wonder if biographers have for the most part failed to solve it.[38]

---

[30] Boldrini (2004) discussed David Malouf's reincarnation of Ovid in *An Imaginary Life* and Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien*. Françoise Lionnet elucidated St Augustine's Confessions in *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. (Ithaca, N Y: Cornell University Press, 1989). On Jacobson, see Nicola King, "Structures of Autobiographical Narrative: Lisa Appignanesi, Dan Jacobson, WG Sebald". In *Comparative Critical Studies,* 2004, I: 3, pp.265-277. On Derrida, see Ivan Callus, "Comparatism and (Auto)thanatography: Death and Mourning in Blanchot, Derrida, and Tim Parks", in *Comparative Critical Studies,* 2004, I: 3, pp.337-58.

[31] Boldrini, 2004: 252.

[32] Lionnet (1989: 99) uses the term liminal. See discussion *infra*, pp.22, 24, 30.

[33] The numerous early hagiographies helped spread Christianity in Europe and North Africa. Ælfric's dates are c.955-c.1010. The historian Bede (673-735) had also produced hagiography (*Lives of the Abbots*) while Ealhwine (Alcuin) of York exported English learning, hagiography included, to Charlemagne's ninth-century court. See Margaret Drabble & Jenny Stringer (eds), 1996. *Oxford Concise Companion to English Literature*. (Oxford: OUP), pp.5- 8, 17, 46, 178, 312.

[34] See fn.13.

[35] Virginia Woolf, 1958. "The New Biography". In *Granite and Rainbow: Essays*. (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), p.149. First published in *New York Herald Tribune*, 30 Oct 1927.

[36] Sir Leslie Stephen (1832-1904), a nineteenth-century philosopher, was much influenced by the secular rationalism of John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. He published the first volume of the *DNB* in 1884 and, on relinquishing its editorship to Sir Sidney Lee, had contributed 283 articles. See HCG Matthew, "Leslie Stephen and the New DNB", http://www.oup.com/oxforddnb/info/dictionary/newdnb/lslecture1/

[37] Sir Sidney Lee, cited in Woolf, 1958: 149. Lee (1859-1926, born Solomon Lazarus) became *DNB* editor in 1891.

[38] Woolf, 1958: 149.

The rueful barb launched her perusal of the two previous centuries' biographers. She held that the biographical subject's "true life…shows itself in action which is evident rather than in that inner life of thought and emotion which meanders darkly and obscurely through the hidden channels of the soul".[39]

Depicting the former was easier for Pre-Boswellian biographers, she noted, than the latter. They overdid the laudatory at the expense of both truth and personality, "draping the robes decorously over the figures of the dead". Boswell's contribution to the genre was less decorum and more veracity. His *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) enabled biographical writing's transformation: "all through the nineteenth century [it] concerned itself with the lives of the sedentary as with the lives of the active".[40] Despite Boswell's liberating influence on the depiction of personality in the early nineteenth century, the Victorian obsessions with "goodness" later stifled the biographical subject. While praising Victorian biographers for being "laden with truth", Woolf lamented their dour wordiness: "…we go seeking for voice or laughter, for curse or anger, for any trace that this fossil was once a living man".[41]

"[I]n or about December, 1910, human character changed", Woolf wrote in 1924.[42] She did not imply modernism's sudden arrival, but the stylistic techniques writers and painters use to convey character.[43] As a novelist, biographer, critical essayist and publisher, Woolf was personally involved in British modernism's "emergence" and applied many of the Post-Impressionists' formal innovations to her novels and biographies.[44] Of the "new" century's biographies, she observed, "[I]n the first twenty years of the new century biographies must have lost half their weight". "Weight", for her, meant size and not substance, as in the slimmed-down *Eminent Victorians* and *Queen Victoria* (Lytton Strachey), *Ariel: A Life of Shelley* (André Maurois), and *Some People* (Harold Nicolson).[45] Size shrank as a new "point of view" emerged. The biographer was no more "the serious and sympathetic companion, toiling even slavishly in the footsteps of his hero". The "new" biographer lacked "pose, humbug and solemnity", treating the subject as "an equal" while preserving a right to "independent judgment". This scholar "chooses, he synthesises; in short, he has ceased to be the chronicler; he has become an artist".[46]

In a 2003 paper, Jane Marcus confirmed Woolf's contentions. For her, the "New Biography's" defining features were: new relations of equality between the biographer and the subject; the importation of

[39] Woolf, 1958: 150.

[40] Woolf, 1958: 150-51.). Samuel Johnson's (1807-1784) best-known biography of his mature years is *The Lives of the English Poets* (1779-81). Scottish advocate James Boswell (1740-95) met European Enlightenment figures Voltaire and Rousseau, who inspired his love of literature. He dedicated himself to writing his friend, Dr Johnson's life (1791).

[41] Woolf, 1958: 151.

[42] Virginia Woolf, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown". In *Collected Essays*, vol.1. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), p.320. Initially, read to the Heretics Society, Cambridge University, 18 May 1924. Cf. *infra*, p.340 fn.315.

[43] Woolf could say this with insight, as her friend, the painter/art-critic, Roger Fry, opened the first Post-Impressionist exhibition ("Manet and the Post-Impressionists") in London on 8 Nov 1910. Art Critic, Frances Spalding (biographer of Woolf's artist sister, Vanessa Bell), considered that Fry's exhibition (and its 1912 successor) "…deliberately intended to rock accepted artistic standards….to an Edwardian audience the paintings by these French Post-Impressionists [Van Gogh, Gaugin, Cézanne] seemed crude, aggressive, vulgar in colour, prespectivally incorrect and in drawing unskilled". Spalding, 1983. *Vanessa Bell*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), p.91.

[44] In 1919, Woolf and her husband, Leonard, founded The Hogarth Press, which published many of Modernism's principal writers, among them TS Eliot, Katherine Mansfield, and Stephen Spender. Woolf's nephew, Art Professor, Quentin Bell, placed the Bell-Woolf family at the centre of what was, informally, termed "the Bloomsbury Group". Fry's critical work helped wean British artists from Victorian and Edwardian realism towards experiments with form, colour and representation. Bell's *Bloomsbury* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968) is an excellent introduction on the Group. His *Virginia Woolf*, (The Hogarth Press, 1972) was the first critical account of his aunt's life and *milieu*.

[45] Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918) and *Queen Victoria* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1921). His *Elizabeth and Essex, A Tragic History* (1928) was published a year after Woolf's "The New Biography" (1927). André Maurois (1885-1967), *Ariel: A Life of Shelley* (1923). *Some People* (1927), nine semi-autobiographical, semi-fictitious sketches by Sir Harold Nicolson (1886-1968) occupied the rest of Woolf's essay.

[46] Woolf, 1958: 152-53.

fictional styles of representation; the introduction of the concept of a "key" to personality; and the concentration by "New Biographers" on character rather than on events.[47]

A measure of this change was that four decades after the august *DNB*'s first publication, Leslie Stephen's daughter, Woolf, created *Orlando* (1928), an experimental biography. Intensely serious about its subject's inner life (Boswell's "hidden channels of the soul"), it dealt irreverently with the fundamentals biographers usually respect: character and gender, time and space and narrative.[48] It straddled genres: was it, as Woolf asserted, "fictional biography", or did it refer, as many suspected, to a living contemporary? If *Orlando* indeed represented an intimate of the author, the Hon. Vita Sackville-West, then it was less "fictional" than "imaginative" biography. *Orlando* symbolised the "spirit of the age" over six centuries, while ignoring the conventional stability of gender: the eponymous hero/heroine and his/her lover switch dizzyingly from male to female —and back! Woolf innovatively cut the conventional link between character and time, allowing Orlando and his/her lover Shelmerdine a six- hundred-year "being", as their personæ evolve existentially in relation to current events and beliefs. Leaving few norms unturned, Woolf also invited one to suspend disbelief in her ambiguous hero/ine's startling travel habits — often without means of locomotion — so taking the biography into the realms of travel-fantasy! In short, she untethered biography from its realist roots and exposed many once-accepted "essentials" of life-history as mere convention, even ideology.

An even "newer" biography emerged in the late twentieth century, whose practitioners were in Woolf's debt. Peter Ackroyd alluded to modernist and postmodernist biography's assaults on once-sacred chronological order: "[c]ontemporary theorists have suggested that linear time is itself a figment of the human imagination...".[49] Ackroyd wrote several epic biographies of significant cultural figures, TS Eliot (1984), Charles Dickens (1990), Thomas More (1998) — all weighty tomes — before creating the extraordinary *London: A Biography* (2000). *London*, a life-history of the ancient city, endowed it with "personal" identity. Novels like Émil Zola's *Paris* had, earlier, made cities the background to their novels' events, without being distinctively biographical.[50] Ackroyd represented London as a collective urban "character" with an inner life, evoked in metaphor and analogy: "[h]ere might be found the 'heart of London beating warm'". He urged readers to view London "as a human shape with its own laws of life and growth".[51] If one "bought" the author's argument by analogy, then one must accept his literary *habeas corpus*: if London had a "body", albeit metaphorical, it had the right to a biography.

But even with these analogical attributes, what made the story of the city of London a biography and not a history? Perhaps the answer lies here: Ackroyd did not write *the* story of London, but *his* thematic, achronological interpretation of its existence. In so doing, he addressed what Bram Fischer's biographer, Stephen Clingman, calls "a central problem of biography": representation.[52] For both biographers, the problematic of representation links their genre to fiction and the social sciences.

Literary theorist, Georg Lukács noted fiction and biography's interrelation as narrative genres: "[t]he outward form of the novel is essentially biographical".[53] While focusing on the novel, he recognised biography as one of fiction's neighbouring genres. He believed that biography and fiction illuminated

---

[47] Laura Marcus, "The New Biography and Its Legacy". Paper delivered at "Autobiografictions Conference", Goldsmith College, London University, 10 Sep 2003.

[48] Woolf's *Orlando* (London: Panther, 1928) was a complex character, both a highly imaginative portrait of her friend Vita Sackville-West, incidentally the wife of *Some People*'s author, Harold Nicolson.

[49] Peter Ackroyd, 2000. *London: The Biography*. (London: Chatto & Windus), p.2.

[50] Émil Zola, *Paris* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1898) and *Le ventre de Paris*. (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1900).

[51] Ackroyd, 2000: 1-2.

[52] Stephen Clingman, 1987. "Biography and Representation: some analogies from fiction". African Studies Institute Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, p.1.

[53] Georg Lukács, 1978. *The Theory of the Novel*. (London: Merlin), p.77.

the individual life, which both explained and circumscribed their representative capacities. There was, however, an underexplored tension between "the organic" (his term for "community" or "totality of human life") and the individual:

> [t]he fluctuation between a conceptual system which can never completely capture life and a life complex which can never attain completeness because completeness is immanently utopian, can be objectivised only in that organic quality which is the aim of biography. In a world situation where the organic was the all-dominating category of existence, to make the individuality of a living being, with all its limitations, the starting point of stylisation and the centre of form-giving would have seemed foolish — a gratuitous violence inflicted upon the organic. In an age of constitutive systems, the exemplary significance of an individual life could never be anything more than an example: to represent it as the vehicle of values rather than as their substratum, assuming even that such project might have been conceived, would have been an act of the most ridiculous arrogance.[54]

It would be limiting to attribute Lukács' arguments for the system's overriding power to determine the nature of existence to his Marxism alone. His grasp of the shaping power of social formations and institutions and the symbolic relationships between an individual and such structures says much about the construction of individuality in capitalist or, as Jameson indicated, late-capitalist, societies. His analysis resembles that of Modernist writers and poststructuralist theorists who highlight the capacity for the general, in powerful institutions and state organs, to swamp the individual.[55] For Lukács, the representative relations between individual and "the organic" are never uncomplex:

> [t]he central character of a biography is significant only by his relationship to a world of ideals that stands above him: but this world, in turn, is realised only through its existence within that individual and his lived experience. Thus in the biographical form the balance of both spheres which are unrealised and unrealisable in isolation produces a new and autonomous life that is, however paradoxically complete in itself and immanently meaningful: the life of the problematic individual.[56]

Whereas Lukács regarded the biographical subject as significant in typifying particular elements of the collective life, Clingman has argued, validly, that biographical subjects are selected for the very reason that they are *not* typical, but "in some way, extraordinary". What then may one learn of the events and social formations against which they stand out, so phenomenally? He attempted to resolve this dilemma at the level of style and structure. It behoved the biographer to seek the kinds of material and types of questions that enable the representation of both the extraordinary and the typical. It is vital "to place the question of 'identity', which biography can explore, as being of central social as well as individual importance...".[57] He also advocated postmodernist fictional techniques, such as the use of multiple narrative voices, to tell the "story", and provide diverse representations of the age.

Clingman's critique of biography (and Lukács' analysis) both deferred to twentieth-century narrative form's tendency towards self-reflexivity. It implies the writer's embedding in his/her narrative a consciousness of the constraints and capacities of form and genre. This recognition of the delicate symbolic dialectic tethering together the problematic individual, writing and society, has allowed twentieth-century biographers to abandon what Woolf mocked in earlier generations as "the first duty of a biographer, which is to plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth".[58] Freud, Foucault, and Derrida's writings, among many others, tend to favour a more relativistic

[54] Lukács, 1978: 77.

[55] Jameson, Fredric, 1984. "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism". *New Left Review*, 140: 53-92. Take WH Auden's "To The Unknown Citizen". In Miller & Greenberg, 1981: 279. George Orwell, 1945 & 1991. *Animal Farm* (Harlow: Longman) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel* (London: Secker &Warburg, 1949).

[56] Lukács, 1978: 77-78.

[57] Clingman (1987: 1, 3): both quotations are from Clingman.

[58] Virginia Woolf, 1928 & 1977. *Orlando: A Biography*. (London: Panther), p.41. Woolf wrote two other biographies: *Roger Fry* (London: Hogarth Press, 1940) and *Flush* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933), a life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel — from the dog's point of view. She also produced some experimental essays on the lives of ordinary people, "Lives of the Obscure", which prefigured English social science's postwar interest in minority cultures.

interpretation of "truth". Given that this term now bristles with symbolic signification, the notion of "person" or "personality" — biography's clay — is now far more malleable.

Hence the trend among 1990s and 2000s writers to produce works like *London* and Dava Sobel's *Longitude*, a biography (in two time-frames) of the technology for gauging time and distance at sea. Longitude aided marine cartography and the growth of Empires.[59] Sobel's *Galileo's Daughter* was the biography of renaissance taboos about learning and gender as manifest in Galileo's relationship with his daughter, Maria Celeste.[60] Giles Milton's *Nathaniel's Nutmeg*, another daring new biography of a "phenomenon", apprehended in a few grains of rare nutmeg, grown solely on a small Moluccan island, the history of mercantile capitalism. Through the biography of this spice, its location and its purveyor, Milton explored the foundations of the rival Dutch and English East India Companies. So valuable was this spice that the Dutch eventually traded the island to the English for their then lesser-prized asset: the colony of New Amsterdam — today New York.[61]

Perhaps the most inventive of these biographies was Simon Winchester's *The Surgeon of Crowthorne*, an account of the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s making. Although edited by a team of professional lexicographers, the *OED* relied on the sedulous contributions of the public. One such was an American doctor imprisoned for murder. He devoted his "time" to collecting verbal usages. Winchester's *Surgeon* illuminated the dictionary's beginnings, while telling the portentous story of the nineteenth-century passion for codifying and marketing knowledge. Thus, each work made a phenomenon its biographical subject and the gateway to greater cultural enquiry.

If authors may invest such topics with the status of biographical subject, may one make the same claims for an historical work? Take a work of history published in Edinburgh in 1920, and unorthodox according to its day's standards. It is thought to be the first large-scale history of black South Africans written *by* an African. While the racial epithets immediately suggest the ways in which critics have received this text, its length and place of publication invite questions about the author. What linked a black South African to Glasgow shortly after World War I? Why did he write a two-thousand year history of black South Africans then *and there*? Moreover, why do so while studying for a very taxing medical degree? Furthermore, why write it in a style that is partly historical, partly ethnographical, and (a surprise for the reader), strongly personal without being autobiographical?

While this thesis seeks to answer these questions, it also proposes that, in writing *The Bantu*, Dr Seetsele Modiri Molema of Mafikeng sought to provide a unity and identity, a communal selfhood, for African history. To understand Molema's intentions in writing the general history (and the contexts that generated it), this thesis embarks on two biographical inquiries: into Molema's own life and then, into the genesis of *The Bantu*. As Clingman states, one does not just investigate extraordinary individuals, meaning that their individuality and their extraordinariness are not only what interests one. More recently, he argued for the intrinsic interconnectedness of "identity (the inner) and the social (the outer)", and questioned the relationship between "self" and a "concept of the 'nation'".[62] Taking this argument a step further, Molema was an extraordinary individual whose enunciation of "the" African Past was both collective and, to an extent, corrective: he criticised the negative interpretations of African people in standard histories and emphasised the inner resilience of African societies and the potential within them. *The Bantu* both articulates a concept of "nation-hood", and in a more veiled sense, expresses his own "selfhood".

---

[59] Dava Sobel, 1996. *Longitude*: *The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time* (London: Penguin) and Simon Winchester, 1998. *The Surgeon of Crowthorne*. (London: Penguin).

[60] Dava Sobel, 1999. *Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith and Love*. (New York: Walker & Co).

[61] Giles Milton, 1999. *Nathaniel's Nutmeg: Or, the True and Incredible Adventures of the Spice Trader Who Changed the Course of History*. (NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

[62] Stephen Clingman, "Bram Fischer and Identity". In *Current Writing* [forthcoming]. p.6.

Lukács contends that the biographer strives to make the text represent both "organic" and "individual" but, fatefully, stylistic conventions doom the work to being little more than exemplary of the general life. Had Molema set out to write an autobiography, he might too have fallen victim to the "curse" Lukács identified. But if life-history had been on his mind, then he would surely not have chosen a title to evoke the "organic": *The Bantu* implied the majority of South Africa's people. An autobiographer might have inserted his name or a first person pronoun into the title: witness Modisane's *Blame Me on History* or ZK Matthews' *Freedom for My People* [my underlining].[63] Again, autobiography was not Molema's plan; he chose to represent a very large contingent of people (the African "nation's" constituent groups) and, in de-centering his own experience, became their knowing observer: he wrote as one of them, having first-hand experience of many of their experiences. He had also read many secondary historical and ethnographical works, and used these to pursue debates in South African historiography throughout *The Bantu*. So his book was both personal and collective — and further distanced from the strictly autobiographical by the weight of secondary literature.

This thesis explores Molema's chosen hybrid genre and complex sense of identity both as a black South African and, more broadly, as a member of the African diaspora. His family, generation, class, cultural community and membership of an emergent political organisation all enabled him to investigate diverse strands of an identity simultaneously personal and communal.

As stated, this thesis uses the methodology of a three-generational biography to trace Modiri Molema's deep interest in history back to his grandfather, Chief Molema, Mafikeng's founder, and then moves forward to examine aspects of the life of Modiri's father, Chief Silas Thelesho Molema. Although two other studies of Dr Molema's life exist, this is the first that understands his life as being partly self-narrated in the historical and ethnographical works that he wrote.[64] This self-narration contributes to *The Bantu*'s generic complexity, and the ways in which Molema personalised his account of African history and culture.

"The Exemplary Significance of an Individual Life" — Dr Molema and the Life Genres:[65]

Modiri Molema was in many ways a remarkable man. He possessed the "exemplary significance" (Lukàcs) and the "atypical" or "extraordinary" qualities (Clingman) judged ideal for biography. Both his historical significance, and his writing of history are the subject of this biographical study.

Molema was not an historian by training. In his professional life, he was a medical doctor with patients from all South Africa's population groups among his clients, which was unusual in his day. Some even flew their private planes into Mafikeng for consultations with him.[66] Two professional critics have considered his "amateur" status a shortcoming. But more on that presently. In 1921, when he returned from his medical studies in Glasgow and Dublin, African doctors were a South African rarity. In the 1910-1921 Report of the Native Affairs Department, the section on the health of Mafikeng's African residents noted that "[t]here are a few Native doctors among them, principally members of the tribes but one does not hear of them".[67] Dr Molema's clerk, Victor Mapanya, confirmed the scarcity of doctors trained in Western medicine. In the late 1920s, Mafikeng teacher, Barnabas Sampson, told his grandson, Victor, that their bright young visitor was "a doctor". "A traditional *ngaka*?" thought young

[63] Bloke Modisane, 1963. *Blame Me on History*. (London: Thames & Hudson), and ZK Matthews, 1958. *Freedom for My People*. (Cape Town: David Philip). Matthews (1901-1968) was Professor of Anthropology at Fort Hare University.

[64] Dr MOM Seboni, [Nd]. *Ngaka Modiri Molema*. (Better Books) and Hilary Sapire, 1983. "The Early Years of Seetsele Modiri Molema". Honours Dissertation, History Department, University of the Witwatersrand.

[65] See Lukács, 1978: 77.

[66] Interview with Ms Warada Molema (henceforth, *Warada Molema Interview, 1992*), Dr Molema's daughter, Mafikeng, 1992.

[67] UG 15 (1922), *Union Native Affairs Department Report*, 1910-1921, p.80.

Victor looking for the bones. Sampson assured him that Molema was "a physician". Mapanya was still working for Dr Molema in 1965 at the time of his death.[68]

In 1921, the term "Native doctor" apparently signified *ngaka* or one traditionally-trained in Setswana medicine.[69] However, in January that year, the young man returning from abroad came with qualifications in "Western" medicine. His degrees and diplomas put him among the best-qualified medical men in the country, and over the next forty-five years, his reputation spread from Mafikeng to the Witwatersrand, the Cape and Natal.

Glasgow University's records testify to his prowess. Modiri Molema graduated from Glasgow University's Medical school on 4 April 1919 after just over four years' study. He defied his contemporary, the future novelist Archibald John Cronin, who claimed that one could not do equally well in Surgery and Clinical Medicine.[70] He also became a Licentiate of Medicine, Dublin.[71]

Molema's medical studies were not his only achievement during his seven-years abroad (1914-1921). It is hard to determine when he began writing, but by 1917, he had submitted the manuscript of *The Bantu* to Green and Sons, Edinburgh, for publication. On publication in 1920 — wartime paper shortages caused the delay — it was a work of some 400 pages. The three-page bibliography and numerous textual references indicate the extent of preparation this work involved, while he was also studying such taxing subjects as Anatomy, Physiology, Materia Medica, and Pathology.

Chapter Four of this thesis attempts to reconstruct the circumstances in which he wrote *The Bantu* and, through the aid of his correspondence with his father and family, shows how intimately its content was bound up with his sense of alienation and loneliness, far away from home. Like much of his life's work, he wrote with a mission. "Mission" is not a word to use lightly of Dr Molema. His attorney and friend, Spencer Minchin, recalled that Molema never commenced a surgical operation without first offering a prayer. His niece, Professor Leloba Molema of Gaborone, who spent many childhood years in Dr Molema's home, recollected that he inflected much of his language with religious metaphor.[72] On returning from Glasgow, Molema became increasingly involved in politics, and served as the African National Congress' Treasurer-General in the early 1950s. In this office, he not only helped organise the Defiance Campaign, but also funded it, with £250 of his own money![73] As a regional organiser of the

---

[68] Interview with Mr Victor Mapanya, [*Victor Mapanya Interview, 1992*], Attorney Molema Moshoela's Offices, Mafikeng, 1992. Mr Mapanya had suffered a stroke shortly before our interview, which accounted for some indistinct passages on the tape. His mental acuity seemed unimpaired; his account of Dr Molema was most insightful. He was also a relative of Plaatje's wife, Elizabeth Budlwana M'belle: "JS: Oh, is she your cousin…? I always thought the M'belles were Mfengu". VM: "Yes, [laughs at this humour] we've come a long way".

[69] Comaroff & Comaroff (1991: 157-58) noted Setswana medicine's distinction between the intent of ritual actions: *bongaka* was the "beneficent work of the doctor", while *boloi* was "destructive sorcery". J Tom Brown noted, "doctors were said to engage sometimes in the latter while pretending the former". (*Among the Bantu Nomads: A Record of Forty Years Spent among the Bechuana* [London: Seeley Service], p.132ff. In Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991: 157). *Bongaka* practitioners specialised in two rites: *go alafa* " to heal or reconstitute" and *go thaya,* to "strengthen, affirm, or reproduce". *Go alafa* was performed to heal the "dislocation in the life of persons and groups and corresponded to the 'movable' or piacular rituals of other African societies". Although rain-making was the Chief's preserve, he was sometimes helped by *baroka,* a "special class of 'doctors of the nation' (*dingaka tsa merafe*), who assisted when the skies were not producing the desired amounts of rain— a situation judged to have arisen because of 'remissness in administering the affairs of the town'".

[70] GUA32166, 4 Apr 1919, Dr SM Molema's MB & ChB Degrees, Glasgow University, reproduced in Appendix G.

[71] The title page of Molema's 69pp booklet, *Life and Health*: *Being Health Lectures Delivered to Bechuanaland Bantu Societies etc*. (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1924, University of Botswana Library, Gaborone) lists Molema's degrees.

[72] *Interview with Prof. Leloba Molema, 1992* [*Leloba Molema Interview, 1992*]. See *infra*, p.323 fn.197, for examples of his use of religious metaphor. In SM Molema, "Separate and Inferior" (*Bantu World*, 29 Aug 1953) proved his love of Biblical register when attacking apartheid, "[n]ow from the secret top of Oreb or of Sinai, the plain 'Thus saith the Lord' has come to shed light on the encircling gloom".

[73] This was a substantial amount in 1949. For reference, see, *infra*, p.220 fn.142.

Campaign, he was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act on 11 September 1953 for two years and also prohibited from being an ANC office-bearer.[74]

In addition, he was a lay preacher in Mafikeng Stadt's Methodist Chapel, always delivering measured, well-structured sermons. Preaching was a Molema tradition he took over from his father, who had, in turn, assumed it after *his* father and brother Israel's deaths. When Modiri published *The Bantu*, the Molemas had been Wesleyan Methodists for nearly ninety years. The story of his grandfather's conversion and later career as evangelist among the Tshidi is embedded in the narrative of Tshidi history, as Chapter One illustrates. So when he wrote a history of the "organic", the constitutive system, he was also writing the history of an individual life. Yet, as this thesis argues, he veiled that individuality in subtle ways that perplex more orthodox notions of biography and autobiography. For without knowing Molema history, one might not know the extent to which his writing was self-inflected. He rarely used the first person, one of the chief markers of autobiography, save in the Preface, and in the section on the Rolong.

His purpose was not autobiography in any known sense of the term. Yet, as stated, he wrote with a sense of personal mission. As Chapter Four shows, *The Bantu* began as a seminar paper on the present and future capabilities of Africans in South Africa. He wrote in his capacity as President of a small discussion circle, the African Races Association [ARA] of Glasgow, then apparently became so fired by the task of explaining black South African history to his colleagues from the African diaspora, that he embarked on the far larger undertaking: explaining two thousand years of history.[75] As far as he knew, he would be the first African South African to attempt such a synthesis. So for him, it was very definitely a racialised chronicle; he wrote, he said, as "a member of the race", which had vast generic, not to say historiographical implications, which the next section of this Introduction explores.[76]

Dramatis Personæ — their world, a text and a critique:[77]

As a writer, Dr Molema pursued intellectual and moral truths relentlessly. However, his critics found fault with his belief-system and his methodology, as several white academics' responses have shown. In the 1950s, at least one black intellectual attacked him in the press for not being radical enough and another cautiously implied that his style, though eloquent, was antiquated. During that decade, Molema was besieged by the state, owing to his political, rather than his historical undertakings. These had earlier troubled some of the people whose past he set out to represent! Councilors of the Mafikeng chief's *kgotla* became so outraged over his interpretation of the Tshidi Rolong succession in 1938, that they fined him one beast — a heavy penalty for historical debate! The disputed issue was one of the most significant running themes in Molema and Tshidi history.

"It began" are two difficult words to use when describing historical processes so protracted their beginnings predate memory. It is probably more accurate to say that among Molema's immediate ancestors, the most momentous succession dispute occurred when his great-grandfather, Chief Tawana Tlhutlwa, entered the homesteads of his late brother's wives and raised up seed to them. This practice, *seantlho*, which Dr Molema likened to the levirate, was conducted clandestinely, often to preserve

[74] University of South Africa [UNISA], African National Congress Papers, AD2186/N, 117, 11 Sep 1953, "Notice in terms of Sec.5 of the Suppression of Communism Act, 1950, signed CR Swart, Minister of Justice, to Dr Silias Modiri Molemo [sic] & AD2186/N, 118, 11 Sep 1953, Notice in terms of Sec.9 of the Suppression of Communism Act, 1950, signed CR Swart, Minister of Justice (Banning Order). AD2186/N, 115, in the Supreme Court of South Africa, Griqualand West Division, presented the indictment of Samuel Pico Sesidi & 10 Others, including SM Molema, Makxotho Matji and Joseph Gaobakwe Matthews (ZK's son) charged them on five counts under various acts.

[75] See his paper to the African Races Association of Glasgow, which became Chapter XXVI, "The Present Social Condition — A Résumé". Molema, 1920: 307-321.

[76] Molema, 1920: viii.

[77] For the second half of this rubric, apologies to Edward Said, 1983. *The World, the Text and the Critic*. (London: Vintage).

power and wealth within a family.[78] In chiefly families, *seantlho* could have devastating effects, often endangering the Chief's power, and drawing the entire community into disputation over who was whose son, heir, and entitled to rule. As the nineteenth and twentieth centuries unfolded, several *seantlho* controversies had devastating political and personal outcomes, threatening to disrupt Tshidi affairs almost as greatly as had the arrivals of Christian missionaries, and imperial traders and statesmen in the Molopo region.[79] The potential for confusion is only to be imagined, and for the sake of clarity, this brief *dramatis personæ* follows. Appendix A contains a more extended genealogy.[80]

The Molema family narrative contains a remarkable lineage of men and women: in its foreground are Tawana's son in his first house, Chief Molema, and *his* son and grandson, Chief Silas Thelesho and Dr Modiri Molema. They feature against the relief of many brothers and sisters in each generation. First was Chief Molema's younger, but politically more senior, brother, Chief Montshiwa of the Barolong boo RaTshidi. Although fifth of Molema's sons, written history treats Silas as the most prominent brother.[81] Yet, three other brothers played influential roles in his and in Tshidi life: Chiefs Israel, Joshua and Palo Molema. The firstborn, Israel Mosiako was a prominent soldier-statesman, after his father's death (1881), Montshiwa's right-hand man. Joshua Moshwela was, like Silas, a Mafikeng businessman and farmer, and briefly Tshidi regent during Chief Bakolopang's minority. Palo (or Paul) was a noted Tshidi administrator at Lotlakana (see Chapter Two), while a fourth brother, Tawana, perished in Mafikeng's first Siege.[82] Their older and younger sisters, Ngwanakabo and Mafikeng were also commanding presences. Modiri married Ngwanakabo's granddaughter, Anna Seikeletseng, the former wife of Mafikeng's son, Mmadichukudu!

All Molema's sons were famous soldiers and rulers, while Silas was also a scholar and the next generation's model of professionalism. Sebopiwa, Joshua's son, studied law, but did not quite finish his training; he became an eminent leader at Mafikeng.[83] Two of Molema's brothers also joined medical professions: Silas' second and third sons, Morara and Sefetoge, became (respectively) a veterinary surgeon and a medical doctor. Silas' firstborn, Seleje, their elder sister, and Harriet Tshadinyana, born after Modiri, trained as teachers. A fourth Molema generation assisted in assembling this account of their family: Modiri's daughter, Warada Molema, Sefetoge's daughter, Professor Leloba Molema, and Solomon Molema, son of Morara Molema and Violet, Sol T Plaatje's daughter and Solomon's wife, Elisabeth.[84]

This story is also partly Plaatje's. He and Silas Molema enjoyed a multilayered relationship. Although "friends" and business associates, Silas was clearly the senior partner, and Plaatje's patron. Some twenty-four years Silas' junior, Plaatje, who was nearer to Modiri's age, befriended him during the Second Siege of Mafikeng (October 1899-May 1900), later encouraging him to become a teacher and a writer.[85] The two had much in common: both found themselves "captive" in Britain during World War

[78] See *infra*, p.303.

[79] 11 Oct 1944, ZK Matthews, Ft Hare, Alice to Professor Isaac Schapera. In Schapera, 1943a. "The Royal House of Barolong BooraTshidi".

[80] See Appendix A.

[81] Brian Willan, 1984. *Sol Plaatje: South African Nationalist 1876-1932*. (London: Heinemann) and Peter Warwick, 1983. *Black People and the South African War*. (Johannesburg [JHB]: Ravan).

[82] On Palo and Tawana, see Appendix A, Genealogy of Chief Molema's Descendants, p.IV & fn.9.

[83] See Sebopiwa, pp.47 & fn.77, 96 fn.6, 123 fn.177, 126 fn.198, 139 fn.286, 146 fn.326, 148 fn.336, 150 fn.349, 157 fn.396, 164, 166-67 fn.53, 173, 175-76 fn.109, 185 fns.160 & 163, 197-98 & fn.34, 232 fn.54.

[84] Solomon also co-edited the 1999 Centenary edition of his grandfather, Solomon Plaatje's *Mafeking Diary*; see. Sol T Plaatje, 1973 & 1999. *The Mafeking Diary of Sol T Plaatje*. Ed. John Comaroff with Brian Willan, Solomon Molema & Andrew Reed. (Cape Town: David Philip).

[85] Willan (1984: 62-64) noted that the Plaatje-Molema connection predated Silas and Sol's meeting; "Plaatje's father...had lived on one of the Molema family farms until his death in 1896, and it would be surprising if Plaatje himself had not met both Joshua Molema and Silas Molema on one of his earlier visits to Mafeking". See Chapters Two, Three and Four.

I. Molema knew he was there for the long haul: a medical degree took at least four years. Plaatje went over in 1914 with the South African Native National Congress [SANNC] delegation to protest to the Imperial Government against the 1913 Natives Land Act [NLA]'s segregationist strategy for Africans. The Act inspired professional journalist Plaatje to compose a thorough analysis of colonisation's impact on African landholding and livelihood throughout the country. *Native Life in South Africa* (1916) helped to inspire Molema's own historical account. Plaatje urged him on. On the day in 1920 that *The Bantu* finally rolled off the press, Plaatje (in Britain with the second SANNC delegation) visited Modiri in Glasgow.[86] This gave Modiri his first opportunity to speak Setswana since his only other compatriot, James Moroka, had graduated and left Scotland in 1918. The book, Plaatje later wrote admiringly had made him laugh aloud, but also filled him with fear that it would please only the Rolong, so hotly contested was the African past![87]

Aspects of the Molemas' and Plaatjes' family history are better documented than most families'. Their achievements are worthier of emulation than the envy Plaatje feared *The Bantu* might inspire. Modiri became one of their history's best documenters. Chief Sebopiwa was another; in 1943, he assisted Professor Isaac Schapera in compiling a detailed Tshidi genealogy from the precolonial days of Chief Tawana. Morara Molema, his sons, and Modiri Molema's widow, Mrs Lucretia Molema, have been the family's more silent archivists, each contributing to the collection of Molema-Plaatje Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand[88], one of South Africa's vital *lieux de mémoire*.[89]

Patently, families are not all alike: the circumstances into which they are born influence their internal workings enormously. Being in part, a tale of Empire, this is a story about power, difference and — because it examines the underside of Empire — a grand indifference to the powerless. It is also the story of two hundred-year conflicts. The first was a "running sore", a recurrent frontier war over land, labour and vested interests, which did not break down quite as conveniently as postcolonial analyses would have it into a confrontation between colonist and colonised.

The second conflict was a war of paper and words, a narrative clash between proponents of differing interpretations of South African history. An impassioned contender in this long-running war was that same careful documenter of his family's past: Dr SM Molema of Mafikeng. This thesis traces aspects of the first hundred years of his family's history through the lives of his grandfather, Chief Molema, Mafikeng's founder, his son, Chief Silas, and Modiri himself. Their life-stories help, in part, to explain the narrative's second half: the life-history of Dr Molema's major challenge to South African history's existing discourse, *The Bantu Past and Present*.[90] Together the two parts of this story make a biography, a history, and the biography of *a* history of South Africa.

---

[86] Plaatje, 1916 & 1982. MPP A979 Da61, 11 July 1920, STP, London to Dr SMM, Glasgow, and Da62, 25 Aug 1920, STP, London to STM, Maf.

[87] MPP A979 Da6.1, Plaatje to Dr Modiri Molema, 11 July 1920; also partly quoted in Willan, 1984: 254. On Moroka, see *infra*, pp.201 fn.15, 203 fn.37, 212 & fns.83 & 86, 216 & fn.113, 224 fn.173, 281 fn.325.

[88] UW's Historical & Literary Papers Collection Catalogue No. 7, MPP A979 "The Silas T Molema and Solomon T Plaatje Papers", by Marcelle Jacobson (1978), attributes the papers' provenance as follows: "[t]hose of Silas Molema, which include family papers, correspondence with Plaatje and papers relating to the Rolong tribe, were in the possession of his son Morara T Molema. Mr [Barolong] Victor Molema, son of Plaatje's daughter, Violet, [and Morara], had miscellaneous material of Plaatje's, including photographs, press clippings and a TS…by Plaatje, describing a visit to the [USA]. Lucretia Molema, SM Molema's widow, had an unpublished Plaatje Ms, Sekgoma: the Black Dreyfus, photographs and postcards given to her husband by Plaatje, as well as her husband's literary manuscripts". Prof. Tim Couzens and Dr Brian Willan, Plaatje's biographer, arranged the University's acquisition of these papers. UNISA (Pretoria) houses another collection of Dr SM Molema's papers.

[89] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*" [Places of Memory]. In *Representations,* 26, Spring 1989: 7. By *lieux de mémoires*, historian Pierre Nora designated places in which memories of earlier ages are now stored, such as archival repositories. See *infra*, pp.264-65 discusses his theory at more length.

[90] Molema, 1920.

Molema's eminence stands out in South African cultural and historical writing. As a young man (25 or 27 in 1916), he attempted a vast expository and analytical work, covering an immense time-frame. In addition, he audaciously tackled the entire existing "prison-house" of historical and ethnographical writing in which representation of African people was trapped. In doing so, he became one of the founders of an African discourse that included his brand of logical, well-researched disputation and elements of personal writing. His strong moral and political vision led him to enter a righteous voice into South African cultural discourse in an uncritical age. *The Bantu* was his first published work; for the rest of his life he wrote prolifically; his study became "a storehouse of books and manuscripts", recalled his daughter, Warada.[91]

For all that, his books were not as popular as he would have wished. That in itself is the subject of literary history and politics. Interestingly, those who construct canons of historical interpretation have not found him great. Indeed, two major liberal critiques have marginalised him and his contemporary African historians, which says much about the relationship between the academy, the state and civil society. This raises absorbing questions about the marginalisation of so many African documenters of the past in South African historical canons.[92] Chapter Five investigates the "canonical" and the implications for Molema and contemporary African writers.

His "exclusion" also has generic implications, as — by his own declaration — his first work was not "properly' a history.[93] He was not a "trained" historian and constructed *The Bantu* as an historical, ethnographical and philosophical argument on current and past questions of race and racial prejudice. However, Molema was very much a man of letters in that he enjoyed a flair for writing and was a prolific correspondent. His letters to his father and those other family members wrote to him indicate that, from an early age, his ambition to become a medical doctor and ease the life and health of his community, were the central script of his life. Sebopiwa advised Silas Molema on his son's career on at least two occasions.[94] In 1905, Sebopiwa commented on Modiri's progress at Healdtown, and on the career for which the family had already selected him: "I am more than delighted to note the progress of my brother Molire [*sic*] and the way planned for him (Medical Course) is indeed fine…". The reason for his pleasure was that he saw his own generation following their illustrious grandfather's example: "our grand-father was the instigator of civilization to the Barolong".[95] The notion of civilisation he espoused, and which Modiri shared, featured prominently in *The Bantu*, and is discussed in Chapter Six.

Modiri himself called his proposed career "the great course before me", clearly referring not only to the lengthy university course he wished to take at Glasgow University, but also to the larger role he wished to play in the life of his country.[96] If ever a young man had a narrative projection of the life he wished to lead, and a driving ambition, he did.

He personalised his historical narratives in particular ways, making his many books outgrowths of his family history, medical interests, and religious faith. These personal ramifications extend beyond *The Bantu* to his other published writings: *Moroka* (1951) was a biography of Chief Moroka II of the Barolong boo RaSeleka, founder of Thaba 'Nchu and host to several Christian missionaries whose teachings influenced all the Rolong immensely. Modiri devoted much of *Moroka* to his own

[91] Warada Molema, 1992.

[92] See Chapter Six, *passim*, and Appendix B, "South Africa's Historiographical Canon".

[93] Molema, 1920: 1.

[94] MPP A979 Ac1, 06 July 1904, Sebopiwa Molema [SJM, henceforth], Zonnebloem College to Silas T Molema [STM, henceforth], Mafikeng. This letter is discussed *infra*, p.181.

[95] MPP A979 Ac1, 18 Oct 1905, SJM, Jacksonville, Florida to STM, Maf. Sebopiwa Molema's career is discussed in *infra*, pp.170 & fn.41, 190 fn.160. This letter is cited more fully in *infra*, p.203.

[96] MPP A979 Ad1, 27 July 1913, Seetsele Modiri Molema [SMM, henceforth], Kimberley [Kmb], to STM, Maf.

grandfather, Molema's early years and conversion to Christianity. In *Montshiwa*, Modiri detailed the complex relationship between the ruling brother, Montshiwa, and Molema, leader of the Barolong boo RaTshidi ba Wesele. Among his many unpublished papers, Modiri left a lengthy history of the Barolong and a biography of Boer General Piet Cronjé, the man who twice besieged Mafikeng. He also wrote an unpublished Setswana biography of Plaatje. Molema's deep religious beliefs made him include Moses and the St Paul in his spiritual family and write studies of their lives.[97] His many essays, some anthropological, one on Freud, and others on political and historical issues, usually became public addresses to organisations. They provide further evidence of his desire to educate his audiences about cultural and historical matters.[98]

"Nervous Conditions" or the Writing of "Native":

From his first major work on, Molema consciously wrote as an African, and this thesis investigates what that meant to him. Introducing Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, "the status of 'native' is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonised people *with their consent*".[99] "*Nervous Condition[s]*" gained further popularity as the title of Zimbabwean Tsitsi Dangarembga's 1980s autobiographical novel.[100] Her protagonist, the fictional autobiographer's nervous attitude to her life and opinions suggests that writing as "a native" (one indigenous to a colony) about "native life" was extremely nervous-making. Was Molema's writing nervous? His politely confident Preface to *The Bantu* is overtly not so. However, the structural ambiguity contained in the book and his depiction of colonisation tells a rather different story.

In *The Bantu*'s Preface, he began defining his relationship to the text in a paragraph partially self-introductory that alluded to his status as its writer:

> [f]inally, I may say that I am a member of the race whose life I have described in the following pages, kith and kin of the people whose story I am unfolding to the world. This has given me the advantage, as it were, of telling the story of my own life, relying much on my personal observation and experience, and more correctly interpreting the psychological touches which must be unfathomable to a foreigner.[101]

Four "I"s in one paragraph makes rather a high first-person count for a Molema-narrative, his letters apart. He did not make so free with the first-person pronoun in other texts. The Preface inflected "I" and, implicitly, the "eye", the organ of metaphysical and physical perception, to situate himself in relation to his account of the past. However, the introduction of self, did not announce an impending autobiography, although that genre gained great currency in South African historical writing at a later date. As the century proceeded, autobiography would become the major African historical genre, often the vehicle for an attack on conventional white conservative misrepresentations of the past. Peter Abrahams, Esk'ia Mphahlele, ZK Matthews, Noni Jabavu, Ellen Kuzwayo and Sindiwe Magona are among many who contributed to the shaping of an "alternative" history, in content as well as in style.[102]

However, Molema was not an autobiographer. He believed his narrative persona was better kept *hors du texte*. Nevertheless, in 1917, he wove a version of "self", based on his own personal observation and experience into *The Bantu*'s epistemological foundation, along with "all the relevant literature which I

---

[97] See Bibliography for full details of all Dr Molema's works.

[98] Unisa, ACC 142, Molema Varia and M842 microfilmed essays (see Bibliography, "The Works of Modiri Molema, Unpublished Manuscripts").

[99] J-P Sartre, "Preface" to Frantz Fanon, 1963 & 1990. *The Wretched of the Earth*. (London: Penguin), p.17.

[100] Tsitsi Dangarembga, 1988. *Nervous Conditions.* (London: The Women's Press), epigraph. That her wording of the quotation differed slightly from his, was probably owing to differing translations.

[101] Molema, 1920: viii.

[102] See Bibliography for titles and publication details.

could find".[103] Making Self the basis of knowledge (a means of knowing the country's history) but not the object of the text, as autobiography does, resulted in his employing a minority genre which has, until recently, eluded detection: autoethnography.

In the quoted passage, the first-person shifter, "I", accorded the "author-function" a brief but highly significant narrative presence.[104] "I" announced the author's racial identity and a high degree of identification with his subject, the history and ethnography of race in southern Africa. "I am part of this society I describe", he was saying, by way of authenticating his analysis. The introductory announcement that *The Bantu* was, in many ways, "the story of his own life", proclaimed his intention to represent his own experiences and the experiences of others of his race. The audacity of this large claim — and success — had made Plaatje, an early reader, laugh aloud while reading it.[105]

Representing Africa's past was not Molema's sole purpose; he also explored and challenged the academic disciplines — ethnography and history — that claimed to explain Africa's people scientifically and socially. His phrase "more correctly" evidenced his attitudes to, firstly, "the relevant literature" in his long bibliography, which works were, mainly, not written by persons of his "race".[106] Secondly, "more correctly" commented on his own work, which he believed more penetratingly understood areas of African history that much "relevant literature" misconstrued.

The phrase "interpreting the psychological touches" offers the most insightful clue to his own purpose, cautioning the reader that *The Bantu* contained debate and opinion, and did not just recount alleged "facts". The existing literature could not, he hinted, interpret the inner, psychological understanding of Africans as well as could a member of their own race.[107] Chapters Three to Six examine the meanings and explanatory power he attached to race as a physical and a social category. He did not claim total correctness in his interpretation, using the comparative degree to qualify "complete" and acknowledge that history was a continuous, unfolding debate between writers of opposing persuasions.

Difficulty in defining the genre in which he wrote created an ambiguity in Molema's work, and some confusion in the ways in which he has been read. Critics like Saunders and Smith treated Molema as an "historian" and made great play of his being a "black", "African" or even "Africanist" historian, even an "ANC" mouthpiece.[108] Dealing with one aspect of Molema's work, Margaret Kinsman concluded that Molema's representation of Tswana women made him "in many respects an apologist for [Tswana] culture" and patriarchal society in particular.[109] With the exception of Tom Lodge, all seemed more concerned with the racial-ethnic epithet than with the more intriguingly descriptive noun, historian.[110] By reading Molema as an historian and not concentrating on the prefatory unveiling of his race, critics have done him the least interpretative service. Saul Dubow's recuperation of Molema's ethnographic contributions has been more helpful, and John and Jean Comaroff went further in recognising Molema,

---

[103] Molema, 1920: viii.

[104] In "What is an Author?" (1969), Foucault uses this term to disaggregate the writer of a text from, *inter alia*, the text's narrative persona. In Donald Boucher (ed.), 1977. *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP), *passim*.

[105] MPP A979 Da61, 11 July 1920, STP, London to Dr SMM, Glasgow. Also in Willan, 1984: 253.

[106] See Appendix C: Molema's Sources.

[107] Whether Molema was referring to Freud when he invoked the importance of psychological understanding is unknown. Certainly, in the 1950s he found Freud a fascinating subject and lectured on his work in Mafikeng. Freud's anthropological *Totem and Taboo* was in circulation in 1913/14. Even if Molema had read it, he did not include it in his bibliography.

[108] Smith (1988: 132-33; 157) dubbed Molema "black" and an "early radical"; to Saunders (1988: 108) he was an "early Africanist". Lodge (1990: 164) placed him within ANC historiography. To Dubow (1995: 72), he was a "black South African author". On Africanism, see *infra*, pp.242ff.

[109] Margaret Kinsman, "'Beasts of Burden': The Subordination of Southern Tswana Women, ca.1800-1840". In *JSAS*, Oct 1983, 10: 1, p.40.

[110] See *infra*, p.42.

the ethnographer, more fully.[111] However, none of these critics focused on the "I" that Molema, the observer of and implicit participant in the narratives that he wrote, introduced to readers in 1920.

History and autobiography are two discrete narrative modes employing distinctive truth claims and narrative methods. African writers have, until recently, chosen autobiographical forms as an alternative to writing "document-based", "objective" history, to re-tell their own and their communities' lives.[112] Document-based histories remained, until the 1990s, largely the preserve of white academic writers. James Olney conjectured that autobiography might indeed be *the* genre of black history, worldwide. He used Blassingame's analyses of slave narratives to support this assertion: "[f]rom Frederick Douglass to Malcolm X, from Olaudah Equiano, Maya Angelou, the mode specific to the black experience has been autobiography...".[113] This was not an essentialist assumption about black writers' preference for autobiography, but an empirical observation about a trend towards a chosen literary convention. In autobiography, the author plays a dual role in the text. Self and perceived community are usually the writer's prime sources of knowledge and the writer takes him- or herself as "narrative object":[114]

> [an autobiography] is a retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his own existence, emphasising his/her individual life, and in particular the history of his personality.[115]

Mainstream historical writing aims at unbiased accounts of events, using sources external to the writer's life (archival documents, newspapers and statistics) to reconstruct the past. This does not imply a complete separation of subject (writer) and object (history), as nineteenth-century positivists held. Nor is an historical account a naturalist depiction of "all" the facts. Rather, reconstructing the past entails the "selection and interpretation of the facts". EH Carr explained that the historian requires imagination but that his "function...is neither to love the past nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to master and understand it as the key to the understanding of the present".[116] While he admitted the importance of interpretation in the making of history, he disagreed with Nietzsche that in history, opinion is all.[117] For Carr, an historian has an "obligation" to the facts; they exist independently of the writing subject, whose function it is to recognise and depict them as constitutive elements of the past.[118]

This acknowledgment of interplay between subject and object still supposes that in historical epistemology, "facts" exist wholly in themselves, prior to interpretation. While Carr's position was an advance on Rankean naturalism, it suggested that a "realist" relationship pertained between the writer and his object.[119] The writer's duty was not just to restate facts, but to represent and interpret them.

---

[111] Dubow, 1995: 72-73. See Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991: *passim*.

[112] See Jane Starfield, 1988. "'Not Quite' History: The Autobiographical Writings of RV Selope Thema and H Selby Msimang". In *Social Dynamics*, Dec, IV, 14 for further discussion.

[113] James Olney (ed), 1980. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p.15. See also Donald B Gibson's "Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass, and the Slavery debate: Bondage, Family, and the Discourse of Domesticity". In Deborah M Garfield & Rafia Zafar (eds.) 1996. *Harriet Jacobs and "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl"*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.156-178.

[114] Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography", in Olney, 1980: 35.

[115] Philippe Lejeune, 1975. *Le pacte autobiographique*. (Paris: Seuil), p.14.

[116] EH Carr, 1961. *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p.26.

[117] Nietzsche, to three of whose works Molema referred, prefigured Foucault in voicing this opinion. See Michel Foucault "Genealogy and Social Criticism", In Steven Seidman (ed), 1994. *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social theory*. (Cambridge, MA: CUP), p.42. In another context, Dr Molema used Nietzsche's views to characterise the amoral "materialism" he found in the modern world, particularly in the post-union South African government. Molema, 1920: 349, 352 and 355. Cf. *infra*, pp.233-34 &255, on Nietzsche. For compact definitions of Realism, see Raymond Williams, 1985. *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*. (London: Flamingo), pp.257-62.

[118] Carr, 1961: 27-28.

[119] See *infra*, p.37 on Rankean Positivism. Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), Professor of History at the University of Berlin, is regarded as one of the founders of "scientific" history. Georg G Iggers, 1975. *New Directions in European Historiography*. (London: Methuen), p.31: "No new 'paradigm' has emerged which within the community of historians has gained the degree of acceptance that the Rankean model, however limited its influence, had temporarily possessed in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries".

However, historical writing remains, Elizabeth Tonkin argued more recently, prisoner to "the myth of realism".[120] Realism, here, denotes the literary convention of representation in which a writer creates the illusion, through assiduously accurate description, of conveying the whole truth of experience. Challenging realist writers' truth claims, Tonkin insisted, "realism is a point of view about the proper significance of certain events".[121] She identified "realism" as the western academy's predominant mode of historical writing. Her elucidation helpfully permitted an understanding that all reconstitutions of the past (oral or written) are governed by organising and representative principles; no one convention, like realism, reproduces the "truth" exactly. These considerations accepted the possibility of multiple versions of the past, *and* multiple narrative conventions for "re-telling" it.

Biography, a major species of life-story reliant on constructive principles similar to history itself, has long been accepted as legitimate historical writing. Dealing with individual (or even several) personal lives, biography is usually narrated in the third person. Yet, in dealing with the biography an author may write of himself or herself, or autobiography, one confronts the ambiguities of first person narrative. First person narratives tend to unsettle historians more than biographies do. Historiographers have often doubted the first person genres' historical legitimacy. Mainstream "realist" historians have accorded lesser status to autobiographical writing and life-stories narrated in interviews. They tend to hold that the autobiographer's dual roles (both "I" narrator *and* historical actor) compromise his/her objectivity. The narrator's personal involvement in events and an absence of documentary evidence to substantiate his or her conclusions are methodological limitations to objectivity. Analysts often categorise autobiography's singular viewpoint as the genre's unreliable "fictional" aspect. Autobiography, thus, is a "nervous" narrative form, being not quite fiction, and not quite history.[122] Allegorical modes of conveying reality are thus relegated to the secondary order of importance (at best) or to bias (at worst).

This restriction on the development of South African historical writing has sidelined the autobiographical voices of writers like Mphahlele, Naboth Mokgatle and Kuzwayo. Their accounts aimed to represent their communities' unknown or perhaps repressed histories. Conceptually, autobiographies foregrounding personal testimony or community biography also claim an historical authority, even though their authors may not be trained academics. Autobiography in this vein becomes personal testimony, personal revelation — and, in cases like Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me On History*, confession — of lived experience, based on the local or standpoint knowledge of a community defined by racial, ethnic or even gender difference. One of this thesis' aims is to revisit the historiographical marginalisation that these "alternative" testimonies of the segregation and apartheid years make.[123]

Autobiography's critics argue that one should read its claims to represent "truth" or "reality" or a greater truth than history may offer with an eye to the genre's limitations. As an object of his or her own creation, the textualised autobiographer becomes what Michael Sprinker called a "fiction of self".[124] Autobiographical "truth" is experiential rather than historically "documented". However, in the last fifty years, critics have come to understand autobiography as a generic cluster; writers may put it to diverse purposes. This critical shift owes most to the influence of Cultural Studies. The almost absolute separation between the subjective and the objective modes has weathered the contestations of new scholarship that marry "grassroots" experience with academic study. Raymond Williams, among others,

[120] Elizabeth Tonkin, 1990. "History and the myth of realism". Raphael Samuel & Paul Thompson, 1990. *The Myths We Live By*. (London & New York: Routledge), p. 25.

[121] Tonkin, 1990: 28.

[122] Autobiography's bi-generic status is discussed by Starfield, 1988. "'Not Quite' History" (see *supra*, p.19 fn.110) and Judith Lutge-Coullie, "Not Quite Fiction": The challenges of Poststructuralism to the Reading of Contemporary South African Autobiography". In *Current Writing*, 1991: 3, pp.1-21.

[123] Ellen Kuzwayo, 1985. *Call Me Woman* (JHB: Ravan). Ezekiel Mphahlele, 1959. *Down Second Avenue.* (London: Faber & Faber). Chapters Five and Six debate the South African historiography more fully.

[124] Michael Sprinkler, "Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography". In Olney, 1980: 321-342.

fostered "standpoint theory": an epistemology constructed around the sense of socio-cultural difference that marginalised social groups experience *vis-à-vis* the cultural mainstream.[125] Standpoint theorists — in Working-Class Studies, African Studies, Women's Studies and Local Knowledge — work *with* these communities as well as in the academy. All allow personal testimony considerable significance in their accounts of society.[126] The new credence accorded to community-based or standpoint knowledge has helped to secure the status of autobiographical testimony.

"Standpoint" history and "professional" or "academic" history represent, respectively, marginal and mainstream modes of re-telling the past. Applying this divergence to South Africa, it seems that black autobiographers have, generally, been "standpoint" historians, contesting mainstream historians' depictions of African people and lifestyles. They have tried to "redeem" and preserve a counter-image to the one standard histories presented: Africa from *an* (rather than *the*) African viewpoint. Some white writers, opposed to segregation, have also used autobiography as a surrogate historical form in which to depict their own lives and the lives of larger, sometimes adopted, communities.[127]

One is not arguing for a collapse of distinctions between historian and autobiographer, and for uninflected readings of all writing about the past. Recognition of generic difference reveals the divergent claims writers make about their authorial or narrative powers, their texts' conditions and limitations, and the forms of authenticity and authorial responsibility they assert. Foucault stated that in any text, the "author" is an invention or device: "only one of the possible specifications of the subject", who expresses or "authorises" the multiple discourses circulating in society at a specific time.[128]

Foucault suggests that an author may occupy multiple textual identities or subject positions simultaneously. By assuming a triple identity in *The Bantu*, Molema has, this thesis proposes, confused readers, perhaps without their knowing it. Overtly, he adopted the identities of ethnographer and historian, narrating much of the text in these two disciplines' contemporary discourses. His third writing-identity was more enigmatic, camouflaged behind the other two. In the quoted Preface, he only partly declared his intention in adopting this identity: to represent his own life and, from his informed standpoint *as* historian-ethnographer, that of the racially-designated community he termed his. This covert objective created a subtext to the main text. While not playing an autobiographical role, his authorial identity remained liminal, "in the wings", both attached to and distanced from the African societies whose pasts he represented.

The genre to which *The Bantu*, *Chief Moroka* and *Montshiwa*, belong resides in this liminal state. Françoise Lionnet recognised it as a staging post where ethnography, history and autobiography intersect: "autoethnography". As a discipline, ethnography is already somewhat self-reflexive, as Lévi-Strauss stated: "'the observer apprehends himself as his own instrument of observation'".[129] He was referring to the European ethnographer describing an *alien* cultural setting, and having only personal experience as the sole yardstick, yet unaware of the extent to which "self" governs his/her judgement. An *auto*ethnographer writes from within his/her own society and regards that sense of belonging as justification for writing. The autoethnographer comprehends his/her subjective experience of ethnicity as mediated through language, history, and ethnographical analysis. In short, the text becomes a

[125] Terry Lovell, "The Burden of the Disciplines: African Studies, Women's Studies, Cultural Studies". In Brenda Cooper & Andrew Steyn (eds), 1996. *Transgressing Boundaries: New directions in the study of Culture in Africa*. (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press), p.19.

[126] See Bozzoli & Delius (1990: 25ff) on the emergence of African Studies in South African history in the 1970s.

[127] See Bozzoli & Delius, 1990: 14. Such writers include Ruth First, 1965. *117 Days.* (London: Bloomsbury); Helen Joseph, 1963. *If This Be Treason*. (JHB: Contra); Baruch Hirson, 1995. *Revolutions in My Life*. (JHB: WUP).

[128] Foucault, 1969 in Boucher, 1977: 138.

[129] Claude Levi-Strauss, 1976. *Structural Anthropology*, vol.2. Trans. M Layton. (New York: Basic Books), p.35. In Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991: 182.

"figural anthropology" of the self.[130] The term "autoethnography" helps to name the distinct literary space within autobiography that Olney had, in 1980, thought particular to Africa, where it often told "the story of a distinctive culture written in individual characters and from within — [which] offers a privileged access to experience [and may express] the vision of a people".[131]

The ethnicity represented under these conditions became, in both Molema and Plaatje's writings, more than an observation and description exercise. Molema "confessed" that his book was:

> ...not a history, properly so called. That work must be left to much abler pens. It is purposed in this work to describe, in a simple way, the life, not of all the Bantu races, but only of a section of them. This section of the Bantu shall be that which inhabits the land over which Great Britain holds sway, in particular, those Bantu who are in the "Union of South Africa", and, to a lesser extent, those that are in the British Protectorates and Crown Colonies.[132]

His project dealt specifically with colonial boundaries and the whole colonial project's consequences. While many convictions he expressed in *The Bantu* were influenced by colonial thinking, his frequent attacks on certain forms of colonialism did make aspects of his critique postcolonial.

Indeed, his exhortation that African readers "collect and record the history of their people", was postcolonial *and* nationalist in promoting the redemption of African identities from colonial culture.[133] Cultural brokers like Molema and Plaatje believed, even feared, that indigenous cultures might not be strong enough to survive the colonial impact. Apart from colonisation's more overtly violent and disruptive repercussions (war, trade in slaves and arms), even its "beneficent" aspects disorganised local cultural practices through imposed educational and religious systems. More generally, they feared that the loss of tribally-tenured land would disperse once-cohesive, ethnically-discrete communities, and dismember their cultural practices.

"Saved from Oblivion" — An Ethnography of Cultural Redemption:[134]

Molema's position was ambiguous: a third-generation Christian in a family deriving wealth from the trading possibilities colonisation provided, he was in many ways the product of colonial encounter.[135] For almost sixty years before his birth, the Molema clan had weathered the encroachments of one colonising power and another. Before this, the region's past had not been peaceful, but hostilities were related mostly to inter-Rolong rivalries. If Molema's interpretation of their history largely represented Rolong views, they dated the first invasion of their kingdom to the BaTlokoa and Matebele's power-hungry armies, which temporarily controlled the southern highveld.[136] These invasions predated those of Boers and Britons, wresting countryside and political domination from Molema's formidable great-grandfather, Tawana, the Tshidi chief. He and two other Rolong chiefs took refuge many miles southeast, at Chief Moroka II of the Seleka's Thaba 'Nchu court, an episode Chapter One takes up.

---

[130] Lionnet (1989: 99) adopts the phrase, "*une anthropologie figurée*", from Michel Serres, 1982. *The Parasite,* Trans. R Schehr. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), p.6.

[131] Olney, 1980: 13.

[132] Molema, 1920: 1.

[133] Molema, 1920: vii: "To members of the Bantu race I hope this small book may be an incentive to many to collect and record the history of their people". The adjective "small" was overly modest in the face of *The Bantu*'s length.

[134] Plaatje, Sol T, 1916. *Sechuana Proverbs: with Literal translations and their European Equivalents*. (London: Routledge), pp.3-4. Henceforth, Plaatje, 1916b. Cf. *infra*, pp.232 fn.25, 237, 264-65.

[135] In 1991, Professor Isaac Schapera commented that he believed Dr Molema's Christian identity was the one dearest to him. Interview with Professor Schapera, London, Dec 1991 [*Isaac Schapera Interview, 1991*].

[136] Molema (1951: 10ff) returned to the history of Tlokwa ("Mantatee") attacks and the Seleka's early contacts with Wesleyan missionaries Samuel Broadbent and Thomas Hodgson in the lower Lekgwa (Vaal) region. He dated their first meeting on 13 January 1823 "on the banks of the Bamboo spruit, slightly to the southwest of the present town of Wolmaransstad on the northern bank of the Vaal River...". For *Chief Moroka,* Molema read many more missionary records, such as Samuel Broadbent, Robert Moffat, and Thomas Arbousset & François Daumas, which had not been available to him for *The Bantu*.

Molema wished to store an account of Rolong history, as well as the history of all the country's Black peoples in *The Bantu*; but he wished to make it more than a military history and thus devoted at least nineteen of the thirty chapters to cultural matters.[137] What made *The Bantu* autoethnographic was its author's desire to make it a permanent repository in which to store descriptions of the cultural that colonisation and urbanisation were permanently transforming. Anthropologist James Clifford termed such endeavours to preserve indigenous culture "salvage ethnography".[138] In this cultural labour, Molema took his cue from Plaatje, who advocated preserving precolonial Bantu cultures, disintegrating under colonisation's corrosive influence, by recording them. This was precisely WEB Du Bois's response to change. An African American sociologist and political leader, he made it a vital cultural project to commit the description of an apparently vanishing, mostly oral and performative culture, to writing. In the early 1900s, the number of black South Africans – and African Americans – analysing their own societies was small. However, by the century's close, it had become more of a "traffic jam", as black feminist, Ann duCille says, a packed cultural highway in which opinions jostle for space.[139]

In the early 1900s, writers throughout the African Diaspora began writing autoethnographically about their communities, in order to resist change and the loss of community identity and power attendant on it.[140] They included Du Bois and Zora Neale Hurston (United States), Casely Hayford (Gold Coast) and Molema, Plaatje and DDT Jabavu (South Africa).[141] Clifford postulated that those who "salvage" believe implicitly that "the other is lost, in disintegrating time and space". Writing becomes for these writers, redemptive of the primal culture from "global entropy", in Lionnet's words.[142]

"Global", the word that has pervaded much of the past forty years' cultural analysis, is instructive. Early twentieth-century imperial culture played a universalising role, abetted by economic expansion, the communications revolution, and the missionary activities of evangelisation and education.[143] The disparate members of many small cultural groupings participated in cultural exchanges through the discourses of imperialism and colonialism. The imperial "umbrella" maintained the fiction of equality in the eyes of law and commerce for all the British Empire's citizens. Molema, Plaatje and many of their peers in the African elite found this notional equality, in which they believed as a total or partial reality, imperialism's most attractive element. It offered them the dignity and status that Boer colonisation — imperialism's alternative in South Africa's interior — denied all black people. *The Bantu*'s final chapters strongly endorsed a belief in "equal rights for all civilised people south of the

[137] See Appendix F for a Summary of *The Bantu*.

[138] James Clifford. "On Ethnographic Allegory". In James Clifford & George E Marcus (eds), 1984. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. (Berkeley: University of California Press), pp.112-13, 115.

[139] Ann duCille, 1994. "The occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black feminist Studies". In Barbara Christian & Elizabeth Abel, 1997. *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. (Berkeley: U. of California Press), p.1. DuCille discussed the growth of black feminist studies within the larger disciplines of black and African American studies. On Du Bois, see *infra*, pp.312-13, 316, 331, 341-42.

[140] Many African American texts followed the conventions of slave narrative. In Hazel Carby's view, "formal terms, a narrative of slavery has three conventional conclusions: escape, emancipation, or death. Antebellum slave narratives conventionally ended with escape to the North. In historical sagas like *Jubilee*, emancipation is central. In novels based on rebellions, death is the conclusion". H Carby, "Ideologies of Black Folk: The Historical Novel of Slavery". In DE McDowell, & A Rampersad (eds.), 1987. *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), p.143. See also Booker T Washington, 1901. *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday).

[141] Du Bois's work is discussed below and in Chapter Six; Hurston wrote several autoethnographic works; Hayford's best-known work is, perhaps, *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation* (1911). See *infra*, p.344.

[142] Lionnet (1989: 99) developed her ideas on "autoethnography" in a compelling re-reading of Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road*. Plaatje's (1916a & 1982: 20) used allegory subtly to evoke South African capitalism. The Governor-General, South Africa's most senior, albeit symbolic, ruler, appeared unaware of their dauntless contribution to the country and the British Empire's economy. The passage is autoethnographic in its emotive quality, especially in evoking capitalist indifference to workers' labours and in contrasting the situation's outcomes starkly: while the black heroes' labours earn their employers untold riches, their own portion is dread disease; while their "product" is the most prized on earth, their labour is the least valued.

[143] Eric Hobsbawm, 1987. *The Age of Empire*. (London: Sphere), pp.71-72.

Zambesi", Cecil Rhodes's 1898 election campaign slogan. Molema focused on the notion of equality, temporarily disregarding the mine magnate and arch-imperialist's role in Tswana colonisation.[144]

As will be shown too, entropy (local or global) was but one cause of southern Africa's socio-economic and cultural transformation. Locally, the newly "unified" South African state forthwith enacted measures permitting major transfers of land and power to the white community. Historian Timothy Keegan argued that this legislation merely ratified an agrarian revolution that was already underway. Following the South African War, successful black peasant farmers and sharecroppers were gradually forced to become labour tenants on white farm, or be driven from the land.[145] Plaatje and Molema believed the 1913 NLA's effects were more immediate. To it, they attributed territorial segregation and the agrarian change that became the most significant attack on ancient conceptions of space.[146]

Regarding the NLA, Plaatje wrote about matters he knew personally: the Act's immediate history and genesis. Molema's canvas was larger — 2,000 years of history — so he claimed more general affiliation with communities whose history and culture he depicted. In so doing, he conceived the objects of his description, those putative cultures he presumed evanescent, in problematic ways. Clifford analysed the position of the author-ethnographer *vis-à-vis* his object:

> I do, however, question the assumption that with rapid change something essential ("culture"), a coherent differential identity, vanishes. And I question, too, the mode of scientific and moral authority associated with salvage, or redemptive, ethnography. It is assumed that the other society is weak and "needs" to be represented by an outsider (and that what matters in its life is its past, not present or future). The recorder and interpreter of fragile custom is custodian of an essence, unimpeachable witness to an authenticity. (Moreover, since the "true" culture has always vanished, the salvaged version cannot be easily refuted.)[147]

As "recorder and interpreter", Molema's writing assumed the "weakness" of vanishing cultures. He constructed himself only partly as "unimpeachable" witness, also relying on secondary material to support his arguments.

An important oral history genre of the precolonial period was a form of genealogy, which hung remembered events (like battles, places and removals) upon the spine of chiefly succession. Young Modiri was in the fortunate position of having been born only six years into the official "colonial" period.[148] His position within the ruling Rolong dynasty would also have given him access to chiefly praise poetry and genealogical record. As a youth, he would have been present when elderly men and women recounted their memories, publicly or privately.[149] Plaatje recorded that Modiri's grandmother, Baetlhoi, Chief Molema's widow, still alive in 1900, and the Motshegare brothers all lived in the Stadt during the Siege, when Modiri was 9-years-old.[150] It has been suggested that the young Modiri heard such narratives embellished by his father, Silas, and Plaatje[151], and stored them for future reference.[152]

---

[144] Molema, 1920: 241. Also Paul Maylam, 1980. *Rhodes, the Tswana and the British*. (Westport, Conn: Greenwood).

[145] Timothy Keegan, 1986. *Rural Transformations in Industrializing South Africa: The Southern Highveld to 1914*. (JHB: Ravan), pp.196-207.

[146] Plaatje, 1916a: 21ff and Molema, 1920: 248-51.

[147] Clifford, 1984. "On Ethnographic Allegory". In Clifford & Marcus, 1984: 112-13.

[148] Anthony Sillery, 1971. *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland: A Study of Humanitarian Imperialism, 1835-1899*. (Cape Town: Balkema), pp.127-135: the Molopo area's formal colonisation to British Bechuanaland occurred in late 1885.

[149] Warada Molema, 1992: his daughter, Warada, recalled that her father had an extensive repertoire of folk-songs, which he had learned as a child and taught her, in turn, when she was young.

[150] See *infra*, p.52, on Baetlhoi Lekoma Molema's key position in the Tawana-Tau succession disputes. Motshegare was about four years older than Molema and died around the time of Silas Molema's birth. On his son's role shortly before the Siege of Mafikeng and in 1911, see *infra*, pp.123, 125 fn.160, 134 & fn.216, 141, 155, 158.

[151] *Leloba Molema* (1992): she believed that her paternal uncle, Dr Molema, had been strongly influenced by Plaatje during the South African War. Molema (1920: 279) acknowledged indebtedness to Plaatje for material in his "Bantu in the South African War" chapter; Willan (1984: chapters 1-3) outlined the beginnings of Plaatje and Silas Molema's relationship.

[152] MPP A979 Cc1, [Nd] Historical Notice from Chief [Silas Molema]'s Letter Book, p.4. The fact that Silas wrote out

He did, in 1951, state forthrightly that no people had ever preserved their history successfully without "some species of writing".[153] This does not preclude his reliance on oral sources; it merely confirms their need for preservation. His niece Professor Molema (a scholar of oral literature) believed that he relied more on oral tradition in his Setswana writings, but had felt reluctant to rely too heavily on them.

> …there was an indigenous culture to which we all belonged, my uncle did. A culture to which we belonged that was certainly chiefly level, which would give him access to certain things, put him in a certain position to achieve certain things, you see. And that with colonisation, and it happened during Victorian times, it was given up, right? And that part of what was adopted, for example, the English that he learnt and which he wrote is Victorian in tone…. [154]

Modiri's vivid descriptions of, firstly, Tshidi origins and, secondly, the descendants of Tawana, suggest that he had been exposed to the tales of people who had lived through these periods.[155] Tawana had ruled until 1848, so Modiri could have encountered as elders, some of Tawana's surviving subjects. This said, it is as likely that he learned of precolonial Rolong history from the accounts of travellers and missionaries, like Lichtenstein and Mackenzie, a matter covered in Chapters Five and Six.[156] Of prior importance is the conclusion that family and community helped to frame the narratives into which he was raised and were pivotal in his choice of historical subjects later in life.

It is also vital that this study recognise Molema's ethical and moral reasons for writing history and ethnography. While he considered preserving the narrative record of the past vital, yet more significant was the moral *exemplum* that past occasions could offer the present. Each of his three main works, *The Bantu*, *Moroka*, and *Montshiwa*, marked his responses to an intensification of segregationist policy. In contrasting the pre-colonial and colonial periods, *The Bantu* debated the purported benefits of settler culture ("civilisation") to indigenous peoples. His strongly allegorical elements were veiled warnings to readers and the new Union government that betraying African people would only invite disaster.

Moroka (1951) and *Montshiwa* (1966) evoked the strengths of chiefly independence and the complex ways in which nineteenth-century colonial incursions destabilised it. It was no coincidence that he re-told the vanishing tales of these epic figures stories precisely while the National Party government was subverting chiefly rule through laws like the Bantu Authorities Act (1951) and the Extension of Bantu Self-Government Act (1959), in the very areas Montshiwa and Moroka had ruled.[157]

His campaign was ideological *and* moral, deploying subtle tactics for these ends. As his political and writing careers expanded, he became evermore aware of the South African state's ability to silence (or, worse, ignore) its critics. While his tone altered as his writing matured, his central project remained bearing witness (*temoinage*) both to historical change, and to the profound injustices of colonial domination. Constructing a persona as "witness" was a narrative strategy. He did not need to have been physically present at specific events in order to testify to them. One may bear witness in different ways; according to Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, "[a] witness is a witness to the truth of what happened

---

translations of the praises (*mabôkô*) of the Rolong chiefs suggests his concern to preserve them for posterity. Silas recorded Chief Tau the Great's praises: "Now comes TAU (lion) the great king of the forest, master of a great country to whom even the sons of wild Khalagari pay tribute and kiss his hand. But the vile assassin's spear send his royal bones to a lamented grave at Taung (wrongly spelt Tauns). Yet left he five young lions all born to be Chiefs." Silas's son, the historian, did not think "Taung" was named after their ancestor, but after a people called the Ba-Taung. The suffix "-ng" usually refers to the place of a community, whereas a place named for a person would be called "Ga-Tau" or "Ga-Nyesa". (See MPP A979 Ad6.1, [Nd], Molema, "Barolong", p.37.

[153] Molema, 1951: 188-89. See *infra*, p.232.

[154] *Leloba Molema Interview, 1992*.

[155] See the early chapters of Dr Molema's *Montshiwa* (1966). He listed Stephen Lefenya (c.1836-1934), once Montshiwa's secretary, as one of his informants for *Moroka*. See Moroka, 1951: 206.

[156] Molema relied on Mackenzie's *Ten Years*, and referred to Lichtenstein's *Travels.* See Appendix C: Molema's Sources.

[157] TRH Davenport, 1991. *South Africa: A Modern History.* (Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan), pp.337-38; 353.

during an event".[158] Their analysis of World War II concentration camp survivors' trauma is useful for historians, because they show that consciousness of what one has survived is incipient or *post facto*. That truth may survive the event's temporal duration and imbue the witness to immoral or traumatic events with a sense of duty to recount them.

Generating and transmitting an "official", "state-sponsored" truth began in colonial times, and developed during the segregationist period (1910-1948). After 1948, the apartheid state perfected its ideological apparatus, to secure greater purchase on the diffusion of "truth", but was hardly a monolithic truth-generating organ. Various departments dealing with African people commissioned studies of their lives, land-holding, culture, history and languages. "Racial preconceptions", prevalent in early twentieth-century western thinking, Dubow discerned, dominated government thinking.[159] His study historicised the development of racial theories in South African intellectual associations during this period, but did not deal with popular levels of racial experience in South African society. He noted, "[p]atterns of paternalism and prejudice have been deeply embedded in the collective mentalities of white South Africans, for whom notions of superiority, exclusivity and hierarchy exist as more or less conscious 'habits of mind'".[160]

After 1910, South African governments evidently operated between these two levels of racial understanding and took the lead in turning racial preconceptions into policy. General Botha's successive governments' policies reflected the acquired segregationist traditions of the Union's four constitutive colonies, and also the more scientific arguments about race that its ethnographical and political advisers provided. The Department of Native Affairs [NAD] was instrumental in accumulating official knowledge about African people. It utilised the massive five-volume Report of the *South African Native Affairs Commission* (1905) to map a geographical and ideological strategy for segregation, beginning with the 1913 Natives Land Act. From 1912 to 1920, further Land Commissions compiled additional national and regional information about African land holding, customary law and the African chiefs' competence to govern. The NAD later formulated policy concerning these three areas based on information that many witnesses, including Plaatje and Silas Molema, provided.[161]

The policies thus formulated gradually constituted an official account of African history and lifestyle as state-sponsored truth, then disseminated through public pronouncements, media organs and education syllabi. Modiri Molema realised while writing *The Bantu* that his book would have to confront this embryonic official truth. In later works, he assailed the apartheid practice of rewriting the past that upheld the legitimacy of the ruling National Party and the white oligarchy.[162] His later works bore witness to those historiographical outrages; in *The Bantu*, he testified to and debated the meanings of colonisation for black South Africans, who had suffered by it.

A belief that one and one's community have suffered oppression may activate the re-telling of the past. This occurs, of necessity, after the fact. Felman argued that traumatic past events may numb subjects to their suffering's full meaning and may only find *post facto* expression through psychotherapeutic process and/or writing. The psychophysical experiences of entrapment ("being inside the event") and dehumanisation initially impede one's understanding of what has befallen one. In the South African setting, where colonisation and apartheid meant individual and collective loss, often violence, and both

[158] Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub, 1992. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. (NY: Routledge), p.80.

[159] Dubow, 1995: 1. Chapters Five and Six return to his analysis of early South African anthropology.

[160] Dubow, 1995: 5-6.

[161] UG 19 (1916), *Natives Land Commission*. v.I; UG 22 (1916), *Natives Land (Beaumont) Commission*, Evidence, v.II; UG 23 (1918), *Report of the Natives Land Committee: Western Transvaal*. Plaatje and Silas Molema's evidence is cited *infra*, p.146 & fns.299 & 300.

[162] Elizabeth Tonkin, 1990. "History and the myth of realism". In Samuel & Thompson, 1990: 25.

physical and cultural displacement, history-writing has meant more than an academic exercise. It has become the redemptive process of chronicling lost experience, culture and political struggle. Venting anger is another role that writing plays. Many sources suggest that the Tshidi experienced colonisation as a form of "trauma". Yet, Dr Molema's history identified a far older source of trauma: Tshidi fear of conquest went back far earlier than Boers and British to the 1820s, when the Mantatee and Matebele warriors, sacked Rolong towns and drove the Rolong into exile.[163]

The sources of collective Tshidi trauma included the loss of land: the traditional country of the Rolong; the many appeals that they launched to retrieve lost land bear this out.[164] Heavy poll and hut taxes, levied by more than one state before Union, placed arduous burdens on this dry, rinderpest- and locust-devastated region's productive capacity. They received few services in return for heavy taxes paid. During the Siege (1899-1900), many Tshidi starved as their rations were diverted to white townsfolk.[165] Tshidi efforts to forage for food or support the British militarily received little reward. The British, many Tshidi maintained, offered them little recompense for their loyalty. Instead, chiefly authority had to yield to successive colonial and "Boer" bureaucrats. Even the right to vote was threatened. After the passing of the NLA, the Tshidi were in the same parlous situation as *all* African people: all were, Plaatje summarised, "pariahs in the land of their birth".[166]

It is not only the litanies of lands and communities lost that distinguish Molema's and Plaatje's texts. Their use of rhetoric and narrative technique offer vital clues to their intentions as historical writers. Like many black South African historical writers and autobiographers since, they created a sustained rhetoric of anger to communicate the effects of colonial violence and dispossession. Giving coherent textual form to this otherwise unopposable violence enables one to:

> ...step outside of the coercively totalitarian and dehumanising frame of reference in which the event was taking place, and provide an independent frame of reference through which the event could be observed.[167]

Felman dealt with concentration camp survivors' endeavours to testify to the dehumanising violence they had encountered during World War II. Extended systematic violence denied them the ability to experience their own feelings fully:

> [t]his loss of the capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one's history is abolished, one's identity ceases to exist as well.[168]

Comparing the holocaust to colonisation and apartheid risks denying the historical specificity of either period. Yet, Felman's findings offer insights into some of the possible effects that both systematically violent historical periods had on victims and survivors. Relatively few survivors (in relation to those who perished or remained silent) have been able to translate experience into texts set against the background of each historical period and regime.[169] Comparatively few South Africans have written historical accounts of their personal encounters with structured, state-sanctioned brutality.

---

[163] Molema, 1951: 33ff.

[164] See pp.125 &136, for these appeals; suffice it to note here that Silas Molema and others mounted one appeal in 1903 shortly after the South African War, to reclaim land the British had promised the Tshidi in return for cooperation during the Siege of Mafeking. In 1914, Plaatje took the Barolong Land Claims to London and petitioned the imperial government to intervene in this matter. Some claims predated the Keate Award (1871), which stripped the Rolong of rights to the Kimberley diamond fields but recognised some Tshidi claims to Western Transvaal land. In overturning of the Award (1876), Transvaal Boers and their Rapulana Rolong allies repossessed that land, which the Tshidi continue to claim.

[165] See *infra*, p.137 fns.233-36.

[166] Plaatje, 1916a & 1982: 21.

[167] Felman & Laub, 1992: 81.

[168] Felman & Laub, 1992: 82.

[169] *American Imago*, 1998, 55: 1, Special Edition on South Africa, ed. James Sey & Donald Moss. In this edition, authors from many disciplines in the humanities analyse the ways in which South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

While material hardship, educational deficits and diverse psychosocial reasons may have hampered the production of such texts, inflexible disciplinary limitations are also implicated in ruling "historical" texts rare among African writers. Texts undertaking to salvage the past are often consigned to categories other than history, because they do not conform to the strict stylistic and methodological boundaries delineated by that powerful institution, the university. Non-university historical writers, Molema, Plaatje, JH Soga, Magema Fuze, DDT Jabavu and their heirs created a particular narrative discourse around the historical analysis of oppression.[170] Common to all is the criterion Jabavu sought:

> ...native history, written by black hands...[as]... however sympathetic and good a European may be, he cannot undertake such a task with the minute knowledge and enthusiasm that can belong only to the Native African, who must *himself* be the victim of the untoward circumstances and difficulties under discussion.[171] [*My italics*]

Jabavu's words conveyed the belief, shared by Molema and Plaatje, that in the segregated colonial context, race overdetermined experience and underpinned knowledge. Whether racial thinking were based upon assumptions about nature or society, in Jabavu's argument it became lived experience and the basis of specialised knowledge. He asserted the prime necessity for racial empathy, a shared sense of oppression that allows one to speak on behalf of the other oppressed subjects.

Dr Molema was one of this handful of black historians attempting to merge elements of both genres, the objective documented history and the account based on his own (sometimes unreferenced) socio-cultural standpoint. In so doing, his writings often transcended the historiographical canon's realist confines, to propose significant arguments about the nature of racial domination. This caused some South African critics to overlook his project's testamentary aims and to dismiss him as a disciple of Theal (Saunders) and mission-inspired (Smith). They underplayed his array of secondary sources and ignored his constant awareness of his anticipated readership. Equally, they disregarded his subtle use of irony and quotation, which threatened to unseat many an imperialist writer's ideological hegemony.[172]

His narrative reconstructions of African pasts exceed what Tonkin termed creating "...a social personality..." for those communities.[173] He made crucial discursive interventions into the written culture of South African history, giving an alternative texture and textual personality to existing depictions of Africans. Few critics have understood Molema's vital kind of questioning and so misread his works, as Plaatje was initially misread.[174] There was a contemporary urgency to their writing, which made narration a dual act of uncovering and recovery. They sought to incorporate their local knowledge into a usable past for readers to possess. Molema's historical object greatly resembled Plaatje's desire to "save from oblivion" the "Sechuana Proverbs" he had anthologised in 1916, fearing that, unless written down, they might die out.[175] Molema was one of the first black writers to offer a synoptic view of the region's past, creating a very different "plot or mode of organization"[176] from that which Settler generalists (like Theal and Cory) employed. Whereas they saw African people as a collection of tribes, Molema anticipated their becoming a nation in *The Bantu*'s two latter sections — a very different "historical plot" indeed, and based on his own and his father's participation in the SANNC.

---

may have provided apartheid victims with the opportunity to recount and relive their experiences. See in particular, James Sey, 1998. "Psychoanalysis and South Africa", p.4.

[170] See references for individual writers in Bibliography.

[171] DDT Jabavu, 1920. *The Black Problem*. (Lovedale: Lovedale Press), Preface. In Saunders, 1988: 109.

[172] Molema (1951: 50) charged that Theal (*History of South Africa, 1828-1846* [1888], p.286) "...and many others before and after him, have wasted much ink and time in trying to belittle the African contribution" to the 1837 Matebele defeat.

[173] Tonkin, 1990: 33.

[174] On the controversy surrounding RHW Shepherd's misreading and bowdlerisation of Plaatje's original text for the 1930 Lovedale edition, see Willan, 1984: 361-64. Gray, 1979: 172-82.

[175] Plaatje, 1916b: 1.

[176] Tonkin, 1990: 33.

His texts' ostensible subjects often differed markedly from their underlying purpose: to educate by drawing implicit parallels between past and present. In using this technique, Molema's style often approximated Plaatje's narrative approach in the epic *Mhudi.* Here, the apparently naive retelling of 1830s encounters between Rolong, Matebele and Boers served as an allegorical warning about the betrayal of all Africans contained in the 1913 NLA.[177] Molema's foremost strength lay in his recognition that historical writing need not be prisoner to "the myth of realism".[178] By casting his re-telling of history in both realist and allegorical modes, Molema could confront present and past simultaneously. Although virtually impossible to gauge the extent to which he believed he was writing "on behalf of his people", as many nationalist writers claim to do, he gave textual expression, in content and theme, to views that profoundly challenged the dominant historiography of his time.

In their autoethnographic representations, Molema and Plaatje wrote out of more multi-layered notions of community than Lionnet contended, as the idea of a united national African identity was still embryonic in 1916/1917, when they wrote. In terms of "ethnic" community, they considered themselves "Rolong", though the Molemas were of the Tshidi branch, Plaatje of an older Rolong segment that had detached from the main Rolong community years centuries ago.[179] The Rolong were linguistically and culturally tied to the broader Tswana community who inhabited the Western regions of the highveld, and eastern Bechuanaland. The concept of an overarching Tswana collective was ancient. Despite the fact that various Tswana-speaking subgroups had separated centuries earlier, regional ethnic identification tended to be stronger than a national identity in the early 1900s.[180] Yet, as the African nationalist movement gathered strength Rolong-, Tswana-, Zulu- and Xhosa-speakers were encouraged to subsume narrower ethnic identities in the larger term "African".[181] Nationalist unity was fragile in conception, and often undermined by the competing pull of local, ethnic allegiances.[182]

As Chapters Five and Six show, Molema gave a "Tswana-centric" slant to his history and ethnography. He argued that the Nguni (Zulu- and Xhosa-speakers) were "[i]n character...decidedly more aggressive and warlike" than their Sotho-Tswana counterparts.[183] In *The Bantu*, Molema tended to write on what he knew best, and the preponderance of his ethnographical description was Tswana-based.[184] His identification with the culture and past of one particular group of the larger community he portrayed, the Sotho-Tswana, allowed him to represent that group as familiar. The Nguni cultures were less familiar to him; accordingly, he depicted them in more distanced ways, as "Other".

Chronicling the passage of time also caused Othering: Molema often portrayed as culturally remote those precolonial figures whose historic roles he strove to preserve. Critic Liz Stanley observed:

> "[t]he past" is not a time and place that "exist" (like Auckland in New Zealand; or Grahamstown in South Africa; or Austin, Texas...) — it does not go on its own sweet way whether I visit it or not. Its time is over and done with and it exists, now, only in and through representational means. Its "then" no longer has existence except through "now" and those moments of apprehension which are concerned with it.[185]

[177] Plaatje, 1930: 1-15.

[178] Tonkin, 1990: 25.

[179] See Willan (1984: 4-7) on the Badibooa.

[180] Isaac Schapera, 1938 & 1970. *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom*. (London: Frank Cass), pp.3-4.

[181] See *infra* pp.173, 214, 337ff.

[182] Chapter Three, pp.175ff, 194, 196-97, discusses the SANNC's early years in more depth.

[183] Molema, 1920: 93-94. Chapter Five, pp.270ff, extends this discussion.

[184] He amplified his Tswana ethnography in his unpublished "History of the Barolong: An Ethnological and Historical Study of the Barolong Tribes", MPP A979 Ad6.1, [Nd].

[185] Liz Stanley ("Is There Life in the Contact Zone? Auto/Biographical Practices and the Field of Representation in Writing Past Lives". In Alison Donnell & Pauline Polkey [eds], 2000. *Representing Lives: Women and Auto/biography*. [London: Macmillan]), p.6. She takes issue with Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the "Contact Zone"; see Pratt, 1991. "Arts of the Contact Zone". In *Profession* (MLA), 91 or at http://web.nwe.ufl.edu/~stripp/2504/pratt.html.

Thus the needs of the present — or rather people's need to access history — shape and distort the ways in which it is written. Molema was no exception to this. For him, the marker of cardinal difference and distance between past and present was religion and it structured the "past" he recreated. To some extent, it encumbered his recapture of the pre-Christian, precolonial African world, as the ideology of missionary Christianity shaped his interpretative vision. In the binary understanding of the world that missionary imperialism encouraged, the precolonial period was "barbaric", whereas Christianity and education brought "civilisation" to Africans.[186]

The distortions of the present are several and one relates to writing itself. Writing produces its own Othering, and may defeat the ends for which salvage ethnographers use it. For in the very act of all representation, lies an Othering process that continually distances the object from its creator, even when that creator is recounting what he may consider particular to *his* Selfhood and community. The ineluctable occurs and the intended bridge into the unknown of an object becomes a discursive figure or allegory, not the thing itself. This is the property of *all* representation, and not merely ethnography. On the face of it, there was little recondite in the purpose of Molema's allegory:

> [T]he Great War is quoted to explain everything. It may be quoted as a reason for this work also. There are black races participating on both sides, but particularly on the Allied side. Among these latter are the Bantu on behalf of Great Britain. So I have hoped that my presenting to the public some facts about my people, the Bantu, would not be out of place, and that it might increase the public interest in them.[187]

His stated purpose was, like Plaatje's in 1916, to assert African South Africans' loyalty to the British Empire in its hour of need.[188] But, as this quotation asserts, there are hidden stories about Africans that Molema wanted his readers to learn.

In pursuit of the subterranean, often allegorically stated themes of Molema's writing, this thesis develops a more ample understanding of the ends to which he put the narrative modes of history, ethnography and autoethnography. One such end was the written expression of protest. To understand this the better, one needs to compare *The Bantu* with the more overt rhetoric of anger that Plaatje deployed in *Native Life*. The two writers' lives were closely linked and, as Chapters Two, Three and Four show, it is no exaggeration to say that Plaatje influenced Molema considerably. Plaatje entered black political debate, organisation, and journalism while living in Mafikeng during the South African War. Given Silas Molema's partnership with Plaatje in the first Setswana newspaper, *Koranta ea Becoana*, it is likely that Plaatje's journalism was available to Modiri.[189] Plaatje's outspoken, often inflamed, editorials and articles on African life contrasted starkly with the laconic tones and unsubtle racial bias of the *Mafeking Mail*, the town's white newspaper.[190]

En route to school at Healdtown and Lovedale (1906-1912), Molema broke in Kimberley to visit the Plaatjes and their circle. During that period, Plaatje edited two Kimberley-based newspapers, *Tsala ea Becoana* and *Tsala ea Batho*, both more frankly anti-government policy than *Koranta*. He saw the young Lovedale graduate's potential and arranged a temporary teaching job for Modiri at Lyndhurst Road Public School while Modiri waited for his father to "send him to Scotland".[191]

---

[186] For the two "testaments" of Molema's vision, see *infra*, pp.253ff & 322ff.

[187] Molema, 1920: vii.

[188] See Plaatje, 1916a & 1982: 17-20.

[189] *Koranta ea Becoana* was published at Mafikeng from 1901 to 1905 and sporadically thereafter. Willan (1984: 127-28) detailed its sad demise, after financial difficulties between Plaatje and Silas. *Koranta*'s influence on Modiri is couched speculatively in the absence of "hard evidence" of his reading habits while at school (1906-1912).

[190] The *Mafeking Mail*'s prejudice tended to be subtle. Tshidi and other African fighters (including 48-year-old Chief Silas and Acting-Chief Lekoko) are generally treated as "boys" in the daily Siege Slips. Their coverage of the Siege's final battle in May 1900 played down Tshidi soldiers' tremendous defence against Sarel Eloff's final storming of the Stadt, preferring to concentrate on the valour of Lord Bentinck among others. This episode is given fuller coverage, *infra*, pp.138-40.

[191] MPP A979 Ad1, 27 July 1913, SMM, Kmb, to STM. See *infra*, pp.199 & fns.4 & 5, 202-03 & fns.31& 32.

Strongest of all was the bond of enforced exile, which held both two men in Britain during World War I and encouraged in both the ardent need to explain their home country, in lengthy expositions. Although Molema was in Glasgow and Plaatje in London, they corresponded and met as regularly as commitments allowed. Plaatje's influence on *The Bantu* was substantial as Molema acknowledged in his chapter on the South African War.[192]

Both the South African War and the "Great War" had a local significance for the Molemas and for the Mafikeng district's 200,000 Rolongs, which had little to do with Europe.[193] Although Molema did not mention it in *The Bantu*, matters were coming to a head in Mafikeng even as he wrote and, this thesis argues, helped to concentrate his mind on the history of this conflict. This was the ongoing land war in which at least two Rolong branches, the Tshidi and the Rapulana had been embroiled since precolonial times. The conflict was a large incentive for the continual re-invention and writing down of Rolong history over a period of over thirty years. These decades spanned the periods of formal colonisation (1884-85), the South African War (1899-1902), the Unification of South Africa, the formation of the SANNC (1910-12), and the NLA's encroachment on rural land. In investigating this matter, this thesis examines material that has not to date been included in studies of Molema and Plaatje.

While in Glasgow Modiri was aware of the personal and financial strain the inter-Rolong conflicts imposed on his parents. For Acting-Minister of Native Affairs, FS Malan to rebuke Silas personally in the Mafikeng Court House in 1919 indicates how grave matters were. Chapters Two and Four analyse the threefold effect of these conflicts on the Molemas: firstly, on Silas' political position, secondly, on Modiri's unfolding sense of the Rolong past, and thirdly, on Silas' finances and his temporary inability to support Modiri in Glasgow.[194] Fierce inter-Rolong fighting at home may have prompted him to commence writing about the past: he wished to settle questions of seniority among the Rolong.

Molema's psychological motivation for writing *The Bantu* also deserves consideration: his loneliness in Glasgow was profound and had a racial edge to it. The young man from Mafikeng felt isolated, living and working among white people and even linguistically cut-off. Believing himself to be Glasgow's lone Motswana, and one of few black people at the University, his letters home to his father, mother, sisters Seleje and Harriet, and younger brother, Sefetoge, spoke of his loneliness and longing for home. He cherished the few African contacts he had: his only Tswana-speaking contact in Scotland was James Moroka, a medical student at Edinburgh University – and a future ANC President.[195] Apart from Plaatje, Molema's other contact with "Africa" was intellectual, at ARA seminars with Glasgow's few African diaspora students. Chapter Four attempts to reconstruct his Glasgow career and *The Bantu*'s genesis. David Thelen poses provocative questions about the psycho-historical reasons for which individuals resurrect their pasts, in relation to their present circumstances:

> [a]s intriguing as the ways people negotiated a larger collective identity out of many smaller pieces are the ways they reached back to some very remote past to recover a feeling or memory to meet present needs...What connections between present and past between private memory and public identity, inspired individuals and groups to campaign to "preserve" environment or neighborhood or culture or architectural landmark? What remembered pasts were they trying to preserve, and why?[196]

Research undertaken for this thesis enables one to answer some of these questions, and to begin answering others. Molema appropriated recognised western historiographical and ethnographical

---

[192] Molema, 1920: 279.

[193] MPP A979 Da6.1, Plaatje to Dr Modiri Molema, 11 July 1920; also partly quoted in Willan, 1984: 254.

[194] See *infra*, pp.140 & fn.260, 212, 220-26.

[195] In 1950, Dr Moroka would invite his old friend, Molema, to join his ANC Executive, as Treasurer-General. Peter Walshe, 1970. *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*. (JHB: AD. Donker), pp.399-400.

[196] Thelen, 1990: xiv.

conventions and inserted new ideas and content into old forms, "re-placing" these texts with his own version of the past. But his writing back at the Empire was, as Chapters Five and Six show, fraught with apparent contradiction.[197] The very pronoun "his" was ambiguous. Writing is never an entirely private undertaking, given the social nature of language and literary convention. In this context, Molema sometimes deliberately wrote as a "colonial other" *vis-à-vis* the imperial and colonial creators of the discourses he re-deployed. Yet, his ambiguity prevailed: while marking his *difference* from colonial writers, Molema simultaneously indicated his allegiance to aspects of colonial/settler opinion.

Perhaps this is why he has been accused of replication — of modelling his opinions on Theal's.[198] One may argue that in calling himself an indigenous voice, "a member of the race", he sought to overwrite an inevitable "othering" he feared the terms "Bantu" and "race" might evoke in readers. Instead, he asserted that the black-white dichotomy might, intermittently, break down into racial similarity, rather than difference. These beliefs refute assumptions that his work was either Thealite (Saunders) or mission-inspired (Smith).[199] Such conjectures neglect the shaping power of the language and discourse Molema used. He attempted to remould historical narrative by aligning it with ethnography, and importing veiled political and moral allegory as a cover for "dangerous" political ideas. However, like many colonial and postcolonial writers, he became trapped in inelastic historical and ethnographic conventions. Such "entrapment" may induce the colonised condition of being unable to express meaning in ways acceptable to mainstream readers, as one's life is marginal to their social experiences. This condition has resulted in many Postcolonial texts being inescapably hybrid, conflating the manifold discourses of colonising and colonised cultures, in order to "reach" their target audiences.

Molema unveiled his motives for writing *The Bantu* in defining these likely readers. He distinguished them racially, as he had his own persona: "[t]his, then, is a story designed for the average English-speaking person, without any great acquaintance with South African people and affairs". He did not equate English-speaking and white, a key point in both segregated South Africa and the racially-cleft British Empire. In a gesture making his historical and ethnographic work unusual in its day, he stressed that he did not merely write *about* Africans, but *for* them: "[t]o members of the Bantu race I hope this small book may be an incentive to many to collect and record the history of the people".[200]

As far as may be established, this was the readership he addressed, though authors may hardly control access to their works. Molema's letters to Chief Silas indicated that he hoped to attract black and white South African readers. It was, he said, a "History of the Native People of South Africa", and not merely for British consumption, as he hoped his father would "see it reviewed in the Mafeking Mail", and that South African press "— Black and White — and even in Mafeking", would advertise it.[201]

Until then, Modiri had told Silas nothing of *The Bantu*'s existence, but now he laid out the plans he wished to pursue upon returning from Glasgow:

> I have several plans which I [wish] to discuss with you...beginning: 1.a Nursing Home or Hospital[;] 2. Improving the sanitation of the Stadt[;] 3. Giving lectures on Nursing and First Aid to intelligent girls.[202]

---

[197] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, & Helen Tiffin (eds), 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. (London: Routledge), pp.181-89. See Chapters Five and Six.

[198] Saunders, 1988: 41.

[199] Saunders, 1988: 41, 108, and Smith, 1988: 132-33.

[200] Molema, 1920: vii.

[201] MPP A979 Ad1, 20 June 1919, SMM, Glasgow, to STM, Maf. MPP A979 Ad1, 18 June 1920, SMM, Dublin to STM, Maf, Green had sent review copies to the newspapers in Kimberley, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Bloemfontein. *The Times* (London), the *Methodist Recorder* and the *Methodist Times* all praised *The Bantu.*

[202] MPP A979 Ad1, 27 Apr 1920, SMM, Glasgow, to STM, Maf.

While he longed to upgrade health care in the Stadt, as things turned out, a clientele rapidly flocked to him from around the country.[203] His vision was that of an idealistic, yet very mature, young man (then 29) who, wished to devote his expertise to caring for a whole region's physical and mental health.

Chapters Five and Six explore Molema's interrelated visions: medical, cultural and historical. His letters home provide brief insights into the humble student writing in grim Glasgow lodgings, slowly realising that his ambitions — qualifying as a medical doctor and creating an argumentative history of Bantu-speaking people — would be fulfilled. Despite coming from a family of some privilege, as Chapters One to Four show, and (like Silas) attending the pick of Cape mission schools, he struggled financially and emotionally in Glasgow. He relied on his inner resources as never before. World War I broke out months after his arrival, almost rupturing links with home. As *The Bantu*'s Preface stated, that War was his reason for writing.[204] Two things kept him going: an iron determination to succeed in his long-planned goal of becoming a doctor, and his international friends, the Glasgow ARA.

The ARA's history is not yet fully known, but evidence suggests that members met regularly to educate one another on cultural topics, and more occasionally enjoyed social entertainments. Chapter Four provides a fuller picture of the ARA, and its role in *The Bantu*'s creation. Here, it suffices to say that Molema wrote a discussion paper, "Intellectual Possibilities or Impossibilities" to articulate to his comrades black people's current and future prospects in South Africa.[205] *The Bantu*'s relationship to that 1917 lecture is interesting, as in tone, it often creates the impression of teaching; while Molema is not didactic in the sense of "prescriptive", he explicitly set out to educate readers, often setting up a form of Socratic dialogue between the two sides of an argument.[206] *The Bantu*'s tutelary intentions were also evident in his enthusiastic delineation of the readership he hoped to attract. Yet he probably overestimated the size of his black readership at home. Slightly more realism than enthusiasm might have reminded him that relatively few African and "Coloured" South Africans would have bought his book, given its cost and the low rate of literacy at the time. Such comments have only speculative value, however, given the scarcity in literacy figures for the period.[207]

For all readers, he made *The Bantu*'s central argument a challenge to the dominant ideology of white supremacy.[208] In reviewing existing secondary literature, he found little of it contested white segregationists' negative perceptions of Africans. Most texts fortified those attitudes. Indeed, he used the few works he found by writers of African descent to present a more positive portrait of Black South

[203] ACC142, Molema Varia, MV: Dr Molema's Account Book from the 1930s.

[204] Molema, 1920: vii.

[205] Molema (1920: 322) noted that the chapter had been presented as "A Presidential Address to the African Races Association of Glasgow and Edinburgh, in Glasgow, December 1917".

[206] See Chapters Five and Six for analysis of *The Bantu*.

[207] A 1924 calculation, four years after *The Bantu*'s publication, estimates that Africans had an 18% share the country's total personal income, while whites took home 75%, and "Coloureds" 5%, and Indians 2% respectively. Merle Lipton, 1985. *Capitalism and Apartheid: South Africa, 1910-1986*. (Aldershot, England: Wildwood House), p.408, Table 9: "Racial Shares of Total Personal Income (Percentages)". Outside the mining sector, wages for more educated Africans varied between £3-£5 per month (higher for mine clerks), while teachers earned in the region of £5. See Philip Bonner, 1982. "The Transvaal Native Congress: 1917-1920". In Shula Marks & Richard Rathbone (eds), 1982. *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa.* (London: Longman), pp.276. He cited the Moffat Commission (1918). Among mineworkers (most of the urban workforce in 1920), the average wage per shift was 24.3 pence, having risen exactly 1 penny since 1911. (See Alan H Jeeves, 1985. *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy*. *The Struggle for the Gold Mines' Labour Supply, 1890-1920*. (JHB: WUP), p.122, "Earnings per Shift of Black Miners, 1911-19".

[208] George McCall Theal, 1915. *History of South Africa.* (London: George Allen & Unwin), 11 vols, [reprint Cape Town: Struik, 1964] and *Ethnography and Condition of South Africa before 1505*. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919); George W Stow, 1905. *The Native Races of South Africa.* (London: Swann Sonnenstein). George Cory, 1910ff. *The Rise of South Africa.* (London). [Reprint Cape Town, 1965]; Augustus Henry Keane published *Man: Past and Present* (Cambridge, 1899). For others, see Chapters Five and Six, *infra*.

Africans.[209] To these, he added the backing of missionaries and philanthropists, David Livingstone, James Stewart, and poet Thomas Pringle.[210]

Racial consciousness, race prejudice and abuse of power were *The Bantu*'s cardinal themes. In 1920, Molema's narrative aired a new voice in South African historical writing. The Preface identified this voice as a member of a racially-subject people, whose historical and cultural roles deserved reappraisal. Many of the chosen topics involved incidents illustrating these themes. He explained that exploitation of the powerless was not particular to white colonists, although it intensified in the colonial period. His often Tswana-centric history also censured the empire-building of Sikonyela, Mzilikazi, and Shaka, Chiefs of the Tlokwa, Ndebele [Matabele, in his usage] and Zulu, respectively. These proto-Napoleons (Molema's comparison) devastated and displaced Tswana communities (the Rolong included) in the 1820s.[211] In examining Molema's treatment of the military disruptions on the highveld, often termed the *difaqane*, Chapter Five assesses his degree of dependency on Theal, as Saunders has charged.[212]

Saunders dismissed Molema swiftly, while concentrating on the rise of professional history, his book's project. Legitimate as his investigation of the professional stream was, he did little to show that alternatives to it existed. Insufficient work has been done on "amateur" historians writing outside the university system, who often address a more popular audience. The domain of amateur writing is vast, spanning an extensive field of historical writing.

Saunders and Smith have dismissed these writings as "amateur" or not "strictly historical".[213] Yet, used thus, the term "historical" becomes ambiguous: did Saunders mean that they did not treat historical topics, used "incorrect" methodology, or did not explain past events? Take Molema. He declared the intention of educating readers about African history. Admittedly, he used no primary sources (save himself), and his methodology was unorthodox, but his purpose was largely historical *and* ethnographical. It was also revisionist and corrective. Saunders and Smith's strictures, and the "professional limits" both critics applied to their historiographical studies, marginalised Plaatje, Molema, Alan Soga and JH Soga, Magema Fuze, and DDT Jabavu's attempts to re-tell African history from outside the academy, and to criticse the effects of British and Afrikaner colonisation.[214]

---

[209] Plaatje, 1916a. Du Bois, 1905 & 1913. Rubusana, c.1906.

[210] David Livingstone, 1857. *Missionary Travels in South Africa*. (London: John Murray); James Stewart, 1903. *Dawn in the Dark Continent or Africa and Its Missions*. (London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier). For Pringle, see Molema, 1920: 25, 33, 97-98, 101, and *infra*, pp.273-75 fns.275-79, 290-91 fn.385, 313, on Livingstone and Stewart, see *infra*, pp.323, 327-29. See also Jane Starfield, "'Wake! Ama-Xosa, wake!': Scottish Romantic Thomas Pringle, Dr SM Molema and the writing of an alternative South African History". Paper delivered at British Association of Romantic Studies Conference, "Romanticism's Debatable Lands", 27-31 July 2005, Newcastle Upon Tyne. Cf. p.290 & fn.385.

[211] See *infra*, pp.286-89.

[212] Christopher Saunders, 1988. *The Making of the South African Past.* (Cape Town: David Philip).

[213] Saunders, 1988: 41 & 109.

[214] Smith, 1988. See John Henderson Soga, 1930. *The South-Eastern Bantu*. (Johannesburg) and JH Soga, [1932]. *The Ama-Xhosa. Life and Customs*. (Lovedale); Magema Fuze, 1922 & 1979. *The Black People and Whence They Came*. (Pietermaritzburg [PMB]: University of Natal Press); Jabavu, 1920.

"NOT STRICTLY HISTORICAL": "AMATEUR" OR "NON-PROFESSIONAL" HISTORICAL WRITING[215]				
Praise Poetry & Oral History	**Viewpoint/ Standpoint History**	**Biography & Fictional Biography**	**Autobiography & Life History**	**Autoethnography**
Precolonial & After...	From a particular political/social view.	As distinct from professional biography.	Also collaborative autobiography & interviews.	As defined in this chapter.
Praises of many chiefs, eg. Shaka, Moshoeshoe. Oral Histories collected by Stuart, or, later, Hofmeyr, Opland.	Roux, Simons & Simons, Hirson, Basner, Marquard, Preller, Stewart, Jaffee, Stuart, Fuze.	Mweli-Skota, Molema, Head, Mofolo, DDT Jabavu, Pirow, HIE Dlhomo, Gordimer, G Slovo	Marks, Thema, Msimang, Mphahelele, Abrahams, Mandela, Hirson, J Slovo.	Molema, Mbeki, Matthews, Plaatje, Peregrino, Soga, Noni Jabavu, Kuzwayo, Kadalie, First, Magona[216]

One is not implying that Saunders and Smith peopled the "Life Genres" with black writers! The significant phenomenon is not that most amateur writers in Table 1 were black, but that black writers were so under-represented in professional history.[217] However, keeping these texts out of mainstream history, these critics missed an opportunity to represent more fully the powerful role of historical thinking and writing throughout South African society. Non-canonical, once-banned, underground and alternative texts have sought to explain the past in ways that university histories either cannot or *have* not. The racial "division" of historical writing was, in Saunders and Smith's studies, relegated to ancillary chapters, which did not interrogate either the generic or the institutional nature of this division.

Chapters Two, Three and Four expand on the nature and extent of these exclusions. JT Jabavu, Plaatje and Molema's generations were denied tertiary education in South Africa; even their secondary education was hard won. Despite the opening of an African tertiary college, Fort Hare (1916), few African professional historians or other social scientists were trained in the ways that historically-white universities trained historians. Fort Hare's Anthropology Professor, ZK Matthews became a recognised expert on the Tswana (especially the Tshidi), yet under apartheid few black scholars gained academic status in History or other social sciences. Only in the 1990s did black historians begin to feature more prominently as professional historians at universities.[218]

Neither critic reflected much on the relationship between race and generic difference in the writing of South African history. Smith noted the coincidence of race and genre in historical writing:

> [m]ost blacks who have articulated their views about the past have done so not in historical works based on research, but in political writings and autobiographies which convey an attitude towards the past.[219]

---

[215] Appendix B tabulates Saunders' analysis of professional historical writing. The dotted line between Col.s 4 & 5 indicates the overlap between autobiographical and autoethnography. In Col. 3, Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* is a "fictional" biography of Bram Fischer's family; Gillian Slovo's *Every Secret Thing* is a detective auto/biography (part biography, part autobiography) aimed at facing her mother's killers. Joe Slovo's *Unfinished Autobiography*, in Col. 4 under Autobiography, has Autoethnographic elements, indicating these categories' fluidity. Baruch Hirson's *Yours For the Union*, is a trade union history (Col. 2); his life story, *Revolutions in My Life*, is in Col. 4, but could also be in Col. 5.

[216] These are but a few examples, and obviously, many others may be included.

[217] Smith and Saunders' historiographies merely reflect mainstream practices up to the 1980s. Saunders did not discuss any black writers then working at a university, but Smith (1988: 162) did. Smith did not state that Prof. Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane had long been lecturing in the social sciences at the University of Connecticut. Smith dismissed *The political economy of race and class in South Africa* (New York and London, 1979), as "disappointingly superficial", Marxist-Leninist and called his logic specious for his terming whites "settlers".

[218] DDT Jabavu and ZK Matthews both taught at Fort Hare University College. Professor Bill Nasson, is perhaps an exception, having been at Cape Town University for many years. Dr Mgwebi Snail headed Vista University's History Department before the university's "unbundling" (2003). Chitja Twala is a professor of history at the Free State University. See Ken Walker, "The History of South Africa: A Twice-Told Tale". In *The Carnegie Reporter*, 2004, Spring 2, 4 (online) http://www.carnegie.org/reporter/08/southafrica/index2.html.

[219] Smith, 1988: 132.

Both Smith and Saunders associated political writings and autobiographies with "attitude" which, they believed, damaged the writers' credibility as historians: "autobiographical attitude" and "historical objectivity" were incompatible. Writing about the past through the prism of one's own experience showed "attitude", or opinion and, therefore, did not qualify as history.[220] To some extent, the boundaries they employed merely aligned local history with European and North American disciplinary "norms". Yet, in the South African context, these "standards" implemented disciplinary and discursive closure, effectively a form of racial segregation in local historical writing. While a strong critique of settler and liberal history did emerge from the 1970s, most participants were white; only in the mid-1980s did researchers begin reappraising the nexus of issues surrounding genre, race, historical writing and institutional structures more fully. During the mid-1990s, universities gradually began redressing racial and gender imbalances in their history departments.

Both white male writers did not understand history as a set of heterogeneous discursive practices, which many social factors, including a writer's race, class and gender, may influence. Neither had made this their project; each surveyed the discipline's major political tendencies from the late-1800s until the mid-1980s. In a sense, the results confirm Foucault's statement that "as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle".[221] The discourse of history contains its own struggles; the treatment of black historians is a major part of that struggle and one cannot understand the ways in which Dr Molema's work was received without understanding those struggles.

The works of neither Smith nor Saunders addressed the discursive frameworks of their own texts. In requiring "attitude"-free historical writing, they privileged the canonical (positivist, realist historical) text over historically-marginal writing.[222] In limited ways, they acknowledged ideological difference, following the accepted "genealogy" of South African historiography from Settler, to Liberal and Radical phases. Any sense that historians produced their texts as endeavours to subdue the "formidable materiality" of discourse was absent from their critiques. Intentionally or not, Saunders and Smith's marginalisations and omissions from these canonical "lineages", illustrated more than any statements they may have made about the discipline, or their own attitudes to race, power and historical writing.[223]

To be properly "historical" for both critics meant to adopt positivist modes of research and forms of realist representation, to the exclusion of indigenous or hybrid modes.[224] Positivism in history involved an attempt to treat the human phenomena with which history concerns itself to the same kind of scrutiny as that in which the natural sciences engage. If taken to extremes, positivism relies only on "'empirical laws'" or "'empirically well confirmed assumptions concerning initial conditions and general law'".[225] The realist mode of representation, based in Rankean positivism, involved creating an impression or reflection (and often interpretation) of lived reality.[226] In the hands of some, like Theal,

---

[220] Smith, 1988: 132.

[221] Michel Foucault, 1981. "The order of discourse". In R Young (ed), 1981. *Untying the text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*. (London: Routledge), pp.52-53.

[222] In focusing on African writing's marginalisation, one must state that other forms of marginalisation have occurred in the construction of the historiographical canon. For example, there is a tendency in these writings to slight some of the achievements of radical historiography on the grounds of its roots in historical materialism. These writers have also downplayed the importance of gender as a form of marginalisation in South African historical writing.

[223] Bundy observed how American historiography is fraught with the struggles of the marginalised for greater mainstream recognition. In "An Image of Its Own Past? Towards a Comparison of American and South African Historiography". (*RHR*, 1990, 46/7, pp.130, 133), he noted that in the 1970s, "radical, Marxist, and feminist approaches won larger acceptance within the [American] academic profession". Many left-wing historians aimed, wrote a US labour historian, "to be 'doing work that has some sort of meaning to politics and to the daily lives of working people'".

[224] To an extent, as Bozzoli & Delius (1990: 21) observed, South Africa's first historical materialists (Trapido, Legassick, Davies et al) also wrote in "realist" mode.

[225] Iggers (1975: 34) cited Carl Hempel, "Function of General Laws in History". In *Journal of Philosophy*, 39, 1942: 45.

[226] Bundy, 1990: 121, 124.

large sections ventured beyond realism into naturalism, a yet more scrupulous fidelity to surface events, often with little interpretation or investigation of underlying causes.[227]

> [t]he diverse inclinations or propensities of the central character even out, harmonise [and] temper each other in terms of some dominating tendency or faculty, because it is the same spirit and the same heart which has thought, prayed, imagined and acted, because it is the same general situation and the same innate nature which has shaped and governed the individual and diverse works, because it is the same seal which is differently imprinted on different substances.[228]

Theal's belief in essentialised racial characteristics and evolutionary determinism exhibited his ties to scientific naturalism, a late-nineteenth-century predilection, as Chapter Five argues. He included lengthy exegetical passages that entrenched moralistic, racist beliefs about black communities. Relativism found greater favour with Theal's early critics, Macmillan and De Kiewiet, who took particular events and trends as evidence of deeper underlying relations. They introduced "socioeconomic, relativist and reformist" approaches, pioneering early South African social history. Like their peers in the US, they "sought to probe beneath political events so as to reveal the 'real' social and economic sources of change".[229] Realism has remained the mainstream mode of narration in South African professional history. However, social historians' introduction of personal testimony obtained in interviews has introduced alternative voices into historical narratives, undercutting realism's "objective" stance.

Many African writers presented their history as personal testimony thus, as Saunders and Smith argued, opening themselves to charges of subjectivity, and the absence of empirical methodology. Plaatje and Molema, by reason of the more personal approach, lack of primary documentary evidence, or affiliation to academic institutions, were "amateurs". In countering this criticism, it must be stated that Molema relied on Eybers' *Selected Constitutional Documents illustrating the History of South Africa* [1918]; he appended excerpts from this Selection to the text of *The Bantu*. Indeed, their contemporaries in the historical academy tended not to regard them as "fellows" at all, making little reference to their work.[230]

Like Theal, Molema read widely, including many of his sources' arguments in his work. Unlike Theal, he acknowledged almost all of these contributions.[231] Again like Theal, Molema and Plaatje were self-taught historians, yet unlike him, could not devote their lives entirely to documenting southern African history. Their respective careers in medicine, journalism, and concomitant politics prevented Molema and Plaatje from spending more time researching and writing. In *The Bantu*, Molema relied more than Plaatje (in *Native Life*) or Theal had on secondary sources. His work thus offered interpretation and argument, rather than primary research.[232] At the interpretative level, he and Plaatje presented powerful critiques of segregation and, in Molema's case, of South African historiography.

In 1990, Bozzoli and Delius brought Plaatje and Molema into the historiographical mainstream, recognising their "pioneering" contributions to forming a radical critique of South African history: "[they]...provided rich portraits of Tswana history, while [JH] Soga published a survey of the history of Xhosa-speaking people".[233] Bozzoli and Delius' brief overview could not probe the ambiguities within the radical critique, which the present thesis attempts to do.

---

[227] French Historian, Hippolyte Taine and to a lesser extent, sociologist August Comte tended towards naturalism (eg Taine's *Origines de la France contemporaine* (1875-1894). In literature, one may contrast the works of Émile Zola (who practised a scientific naturalism in his writing), with those of Dickens and Trollope, both realists.

[228] Hippolyte Taine, 1892. "Préface", *Essais de critique et* d'*histoire.* 6e édition, (Paris), pp.VII-XVI.

[229] Bundy (1990:121-25) compared the projects of US "progressives" and South African "liberals".

[230] One exception, Eric Walker included *The Bantu* in the bibliography of his *History of South Africa* (London: Longmans, 1928), p.940, but did not discuss it.

[231] Chapter Five *passim,* discusses the central historiographical critiques of Theal.

[232] Being in Glasgow, far from home, hampered Molema's access to primary material. For later works, *Moroka*, *Montshiwa* and the unpublished *History of the Barolong*, he conducted interviews and archival research.

[233] Bozzoli & Delius, 1990: 14.

Tom Lodge declared Plaatje and Molema the foremost ANC historians: "Molema can be more conventionally considered a historian, while Plaatje was more conspicuous as a politician".[234] By profession, Plaatje was initially a court interpreter, a calling abandoned for journalism. As a "hands-on" man, he performed many journalistic functions simultaneously: editor, reporter, and researcher. He developed a particular expertise on the political debates about segregation. After the 1913 NLA's passing, his tours of the Free State led him to write *Native Life*, which presented graphic descriptions of the conditions in which he found African farm-workers. To his fieldwork, which neither Smith nor Saunders credited as such, he added highly politicised, allegorical and sometimes didactic passages against segregation, the abuses of power, and gender-discrimination.[235]

Lodge noted the importance of both writers' Congress involvements, emphasising that their political commitments stemmed from a profound consciousness of the Rolong and Tswana past. Unlike Saunders and Smith, he situated the two writers in the context of the ANC's development and, like Clingman, read Plaatje's "novel" *Mhudi*, as a complex literary and historical allegory; moreover, Lodge stood alone in providing a preliminary reading of Molema's *Montshiwa* on similar lines.[236]

Dubow's appraisals of Molema's writings stand out. He registered Molema's central contribution to South Africa's intellectual history, in the creation of early "racial narratives". He concentrated on Molema's deliberate reference to the knowledge that being an insider ("member of the race") afforded his ethnography. "His account has 'the advantage, as it were, of telling the story of my own life, relying much on my personal observation and experience, and more correctly interpreting the psychological touches which must be unfathomable to a foreigner.'"[237] Despite Molema's outspoken objections to Theal's backing of "Boer" causes, Dubow also thought Molema in Theal's intellectual debt; few contemporary writers were not. Dubow traced that descent more properly within the development of South African narratives of race.[238] Theal was but one — albeit a major — developer of the "linear narrative" of racial origin, he stated. That narrative became a "base line" for much of the history written post-Theal. In that respect, he even counted Olive Schreiner as one of Theal's progeny.[239] In order to assess these critiques of Molema, Chapters Five and Six investigate the early twentieth-century prevalence of racial narratives in South African historiography and ethnography.

Dubow identified two of Molema's paradoxical positions: in regard to colonisation and, hence, to Theal's historiography of colonisation. As importantly, Dubow investigated the period's intellectual climate subtly, briefly suggesting ways of situating Molema's views in context. While other historians regarded Molema's background as important — his Rolong history, missionary and medical education, and later ANC activities — Dubow's attention to the significant ethnographical discourses in which Molema was imbricated, has been unique. This insight enables one to compare Molema's treatment of the "grand narrative" of South Africa's habitation to Theal's, with its naturalist focus on the essential racial qualities of indigenous peoples. Molema used that discourse far more ambiguously — a matter requiring further examination, which this thesis undertakes. Chapters One to Four look, chronologically, to the family history and socio-political circumstances for the formation of Molema's ideas and affiliations, while Chapters Five and Six offer a diachronic interpretation of the ways in which he expressed this nexus of ideas in *The Bantu* and in other related writings.

---

[234] Lodge, 1990: 164.

[235] See Plaatje, 1916a: Chapters Five and Six.

[236] Lodge, 1990: 164-67. Sol T Plaatje, 1930. *Mhudi: An Epic of Native Life*. (JHB: Quagga). "Novel" is a convenient term critics apply to Mhudi, possibly because of its strongly romantic plot. However, it incorporates many aspects of traditional history (*ditirafalo tsa Barolong*) and tales (*dipólélēlo*), and its title attempts to Africanise the notion of "epic" form.

[237] Saul Dubow, 1995. *Illicit Union: Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*. (JHB: WUP), p.73.

[238] See Chapters Five and Six.

[239] Dubow, 1995: 71-72.

Theal's far-reaching influence in South African historiography is a bit of an "*eminence blanche*". There was a quasi-instinctual tendency in the 1980s and 1990s for liberal and radical historians to recoil in horror at the hint that any writer might have "Theal-ite" associations. There has been a tendency to judge the works of those betraying such leanings as "fruit of the poisonous tree": "damned" by association with him. Rather than deem Theal's influence as sufficient reason to slight his works, this thesis assesses the extent of Theal's influence on his writings. "Theal" should be read as a historical synecdoche, a "part" signifying the entire system of thought: the period's pervasive scientific racism.

The brief and dismissive treatment accorded early African historians may invite the conclusion that local historiography — the liberal critique particularly — has cultivated the ethnocentric fallacy that "behind every Third World theorist is a Western intellectual tradition". This line of fire was directed unproductively at postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said and Franz Fanon, behind whom some western critics detected the influences of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean-Paul Sartre.[240] To lob an equivalent of the "coconut" slur at Molema's writing is imperceptive and inaccurate; it ignored the multiple intellectual and social influences and relationships that Molema lived out. Moreover, it overlooks his rising rejection of Theal's pro-Boer stance in *The Bantu*, which he articulated openly in later works.[241] Lodge demonstrated a keen awareness of this nexus of relationships. Partly citing Molema himself, he observed:

> [m]ost early ANC notables shared a family background of wealthy peasant proprietorship, kinship with the chieftaincy, and an awareness of belonging to the vanguard of social progress, though at the same time remaining sensitive to the civic virtues of a "purely African outlook".[242]

Furthermore, the slur overlooked the writing strategies Molema deemed he should employ to avoid alienating readers who might feel "nervous" about a black man's addressing them on sensitive historical matters. He adopted a discursive tone to (at least initially) make them feel comfortable.

Biographers' Tales and the writing of Molema History:[243]

The re-vivification of biography and other life genres in South Africa in the 1980s has already been noted.[244] Indeed, four major biographies have greatly influenced this thesis: Shula Marks's *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa* (1986), Phyllis Lewsen's *John X. Merriman: Paradoxical South African Statesman* (1982), Brian Willan's *Sol Plaatje: South African Nationalist 1876-1932* (1984), and Tim Couzens' *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of HIE Dhlomo* (1985).[245] The worlds that these biographies represent have contributed to the re-creation of Molema's world.

Of these, Marks has been most concerned with biographical methodology and the representation of the individual. Largely under her ægis, the term "ambiguity" acquired a particular historiographical significance, which Chapter Four probes in relation to the insights of social history and cultural studies. Chapter Four is centrally placed, linking the earlier biographical chapters on Chief Molema, Silas and Modiri, to the later chapters on historical interpretation. In sketching the historical and intellectual climate in which Molema wrote *The Bantu*, Chapter Four draws on Marks's subtle texturing of social

---

[240] Bart Moore-Gilbert, Gareth Stanton & Willy Maley (eds), 1997. *Postcolonial Criticism*. (London: Longman), p.48.

[241] Moroka, 1951: 50-51.

[242] Lodge (1990: 166) cited Molema's summation of Chief Montshiwa's character, in Molema, 1966: 203.

[243] The reference is to AS Byatt, 2001. *The Biographer's Tale*. (NY: Random House).

[244] See *supra*, pp.6-12.

[245] Tim Couzens, 1985. *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of HIE Dhlomo*. (JHB: Ravan), Phyllis Lewsen, 1982. *John X. Merriman: Paradoxical South African Statesman*. (New Haven: Yale University Press), Shula Marks, 1986. *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa*. (JHB: Ravan), and Willan, 1984.

history, class, race and power in shaping individual consciousness.[246] Marks illustrated the advantages of reconstructing a four-generational history of a region, KwaZulu-Natal, through the lives of one central character per generation. In contrast, Lewsen examined the life of one significant individual across several political and cultural environments. She sought thereby to challenge the stereotypically "ethnic" ways of reading South African history:

> South Africans are too divided to share their past. Africans, Coloured, and Indians have their separate myths of subjection and struggle. English and Afrikaners share white supremacy; but still compete, though Afrikaner nationalism has triumphed economically. South African heroes derive from conflict, and it is for their part in dividing, rather than unifying, the country that men are mainly remembered.[247]

Lewsen's *Merriman* illuminated his contradictory personal and political behaviour (the "paradoxical" of her title), the manifold conflicts embedded in South African politics, and their historical unfolding. Place her *Merriman* beside Willan's *Plaatje*, and her point about divided and divisive South African history surfaces. Both are lives of "liberal" Cape politicians around the time of South Africa's union. Yet, their differential access to power places them in milieux that, on the country's social, political and economic continuum were virtual opposites. A major architect of Union, Merriman represented the current of history that swept all before it to consolidated the four colonies into one independent state.

Conversely, as the SANNC's Secretary-General and its most articulate communicator, Plaatje helped to lead African and "Coloured" resistance to Union. Merriman backed the so-called "compromise" of Union, ensuring that each province kept its own franchise laws, but that the Cape "Native Franchise" was not extended to the northern provinces. Plaatje and the enfranchised Cape Africans, together with the other provinces' African elite, opposed the "compromise" utterly.[248] But the compromise prevailed, though it was General Louis Botha's government — far more conservative than one Merriman might have assembled had he become Prime Minister — that implemented the Union constitution, laying the foundations of territorial and ideological segregation.[249] Plaatje and the SANNC soon became the government's most vocal extra-parliamentary opposition, laying the groundwork for Molema and Moroka's generation in subsequent years.[250]

Like the latter chapters of Willan's *Plaatje*, Couzens' portrait of Dhlomo provided great insight into African intellectual and artistic production in the early twentieth century. Couzens produced a biography of a biographer. Dhlomo not only wrote dramatic biographies, *Cetshwayo* (1936/7), an attack on segregation, and *Nonqause (or The Girl who Killed to Save)* (1936), but assisted TD Mweli Skota in compiling that collection of condensed biographies, *The African Yearly Register*.[251]

These four works have assisted in establishing the historical background to the period of Molema's youth. Several other biographical works contributed likewise, particularly the unpublished autobiographies in manuscript form by Richard Victor Selope Thema and Henry Selby Msimang.[252] These offer personal interpretations of the SANNC's founding and early years, a time during which Molema was a younger member, and his father, Silas, an Honorary Life Vice President.[253] The various

---

[246] See Marks, 1986: Chapter 1.

[247] Lewsen, 1982: 1.

[248] Lewsen, 1982: 312. Willan, 1984: Chapter 7.

[249] Lewsen (1982: 329ff) told how Merriman so nearly became Prime Minister, but eventually had to yield to Botha, and what this choice cost South Africa.

[250] See Walshe (1970 & 1987: 400-02) on Moroka's presidency.

[251] TD Mweli Skota, 1930. *The African Yearly Register: Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's Who) of Black Folks in Africa*. (Johannesburg). In Couzens, 1985: 3.

[252] See *infra*, pp.165 fn.9, 176 fn.81, 182, 196 & fn.207, on Thema, and for Msimang, p.43 fn.1.

[253] See *infra*, p.125.

biographical and autobiographical texts help to shade and texture depictions of the past that the many primary documents, the sources of this thesis, provide.

What follows then, is the biography of three generations of Molemas and the life-story of a significant book about the African past. Very probably — for none is known to have been written at an earlier date — *The Bantu* was the first large-scale history of South Africa written by an African South African. What this thesis amounts to is a biography, a history and the biography of the history that Modiri Molema wrote.

