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HISTORY WORKSHOP

THE TRADITION OF NON-RACISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

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AFRICANA

ELEANOR RATHBONE LECTURE, March 8th 1994.
'The tradition of non-racism in South Africa'
SHULA MARKS

It is a great honour and privilege to have been asked to give this year's Eleanor Rathbone lecture at Somerville College. In view of the occasion and the place, it seems particularly appropriate that March 8th is international women's day. And although Eleanor Rathbone was never - to my knowledge - involved in southern African issues, I believe that had she been with us now, she would be watching its negotiated settlement, constitutional developments and moves towards its first democratic non-racial elections with all the attention she gave to India's struggle for independence. She would certainly have approved of the number of women on the ANC's electoral lists. At the same time, with her passionate involvement in the fight against nazism in Europe, she would surely also be appalled by the evidence of the resurgence of racism and national chauvinism in our own times and have found it almost incomprehensible. My own view that it is perhaps one of the mst important issues facing us at the present time - a view I believe Eleanor Rathbone would have shared - has led me to the subject of my lecture this evening.

My choice of topic thus has a much to do with my concern with the history of our own time and place as it has with South Africa. For too long, South Africa has been a convenient scapegoat for a west - including a radical and feminist west - unwilling or unable to confront the ways in which as Catherine Hall has remarked, 'Racism, imperialism, colonialism ... are issues for white women [and indeed, one might add, white men] in Britain because they have shaped our histories, structured our stories, formed our identities'.[1] The spotlight on South Africa has perhaps often left major aspects of our own society in darkness. Eleanor Rathbone's indefatigable investigations into and admirable if at times painful (to a contemporary feminist) interventions in the position of what she termed 'coloured women of the empire', perhaps inevitably limited by the paternalism of her times, hovers on the brink of such an understanding.

Let me begin by subverting my own title: every substantive word in it would seem to need some explanation. Easiest perhaps is South Africa: at least in some of what follows my focus will be either narrower or wider than its contemporary boundaries -- in that I will be talking a good deal about the Dutch and British colonies at the Cape on the one hand, and (somewhat speculatively) about aspects of precolonial African societies in southern Africa on the other.

More problematic are the terms non-racism and tradition. To talk about racism is of course in no way to concede the reality of the category 'race': but as has often been pointed out, the non-scientific status of the category 'in no way undermines its symbolic and social effectivity'.[2] There is as you will know a huge and controversial literature on race and

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[1] C. Hall, White, Male and Middle Class. Explorations in Feminism and History (New York, 1992), 20.

[2] J. Donald and A. Rattansi , 'Introduction' in Donald and Rattansi, eds. 'Race', Culture and Difference (London, 1992), 3.

racism, and a growing literature on 'anti-racism' as political movement in this country and the USA: relatively little on 'non-racism'. The term is being widely used in South Africa today, especially in relation to the political demand for a 'non-racial' democratic state. What is meant by this? At a common sense level it is of course easy: it is the demand that an individual's citizenship, legal rights, economic entitlements and life-chances should not be decided on the basis of 'racial ascriptions'. This however simply defers the problem: for what then is meant by 'race' or racism? Again there is a common-sense answer: the definition of 'the other' in terms of assumed biological difference. And certainly from the 1840s to the 1940s the hegemony of biology meant that physical endowment was 'one of the principal determinants of attitudes, endowments, capabilities, and inherent tendencies among human beings. Race thus seemed to determine the course of human history.'[3] By race was meant a particular genetic endowment, which predicted not only physical appearance but also moral character.

The difference between biological 'race' and other modes of boundary drawing is often believed to be its inescapability. And of course insofar as the distinctions are being based on perceptible differences such as skin colour they seem even more inescapable - which is why assimilation has always been an easier option for Jews than for blacks. But while skin colour difference is in one sense a visible marker - it is not indispensable. As Sander Gilman has remarked, 'The very concept of color is a quality of Otherness, not of reality. For not only are blacks black in this amorphous world of projection, so too are Jews', an association that goes back to medieval iconography.[4] Nor should we assume that the differences between black and white are so clear cut, do not involve a fair amount of imagining. Quite clearly the terms black and white cover an infinite variety of light and dark skin tones, and the categories are largely social rather than natural. As Stuart Hall puts it, 'Black is not a question of pigmentation. The Black I'm talking about is a historical category, a political category, a cultural category.... Their histories as in the past, are inscribed in their skins.' But it is not

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[3]. P. Curtin, Image of Africa (London, 1965), 29. As Curtin points out, these ideas were not 'pseudo-scientific' in their beginnings: at the time they represented the cutting edge of science.

[4] Sander L Gilman, Disease and Representation, Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS (Ithaca and London, 1988), 30-1. See also his Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness (Ithaca, 1985). Hechter also cites the case of the Irish who were frequently regarded as racially inferior in the nineteenth century, though the lack of a colour difference was seen as somewhat puzzling. Charles Kingsley, for example, describing a visit to western Ireland remarked:

> ... I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe they are our fault. I believe there are not only many more of them than of old, but they are happier, better and more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours ... (Cited in M. Hechter, Internal Colonialism, The Celtic fringe in British national development, 1536-1966 [London, 1975], pxvii).

because of their skins that they are Black in their heads.' [3]

Since the 1940s - when the idea of scientific racism was thought to be totally discredited by the horrifying events of the holocaust - the dominance of biological racism has of course passed out of fashion, at least in educated circles and in western Europe; there has been a shift instead into the language of culture. Paul Gilroy has argued, for example - in what, to my mind is the most interesting and provocative work in the field - that in Britain what he terms the ' new racism' of the 1960s was distinguished by its capacity to 'link discourses of patriotism, nationalism, xenophobia, Englishness, Britishness, militarism and gender difference into a complex system which gives "race" its contemporary meaning.' 'The new racism' thus 'specifies who may legitimately belong to the national community and simultaneously advances reasons for the segregation or banishment of those whose origin, sentiment or citizenship assigns them elsewhere ...' Theoretically, of course, it is easier to challenge exclusion on the grounds of culture than of biology. Yet, as he continues, 'where culture, or sub-culture is defined as a fixed and impermeable property of human life' the shift in the balance of explanation for exclusion from biology to culture is a difference 'of degree rather than any fundamental divergence'.[4]

Thus, cultural or ethnic essentialism can be almost as difficult to escape as supposed biological markers; and I would argue that the blurring of these categories is as much a 19th as a 20th century phenomenon. Indeed, until the 1930s in South Africa the racial question for whites referred to the conflict between Boer and Briton, while among Africans too, the word seems to have referred to what we would now term ethnic or tribal difference. Moreover, until the 1940s and 1950s, and then for a relatively short time, Afrikaners, with their intellectual roots in neo-Calvinist notions of the divine sovereignty of nations, rarely used the language of biological inferiority, perhaps because the entire discourse of social Darwinism was anathema.[5] And today, in South Africa the discourse of difference has come to focus again on issues of culture so that racism is not infrequently disguised as a discourse about local autonomy. So - it turns out, racism is a rather more slippery concept than at it appears at first sight.

Is the demand for non-racism then a demand for a boundary-less society? Surely not. Nor, however, is it a purely formalist call for 'equal rights', although this is clearly the minimalist demand: necessary if not sufficient. There is - at least at top levels of the ANC - a recognition that a non-racial democratic society in South Africa will have to defend people's

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[3] Stuart Hall was talking of the category of 'Black' in contemporary Britain and the fact that no-one described themselves as 'Black' in the Jamaica of his childhood: 'Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities', in A. King, ed. Culture, Globalization and the World System (Basingstoke, 1991), 53.

[4] P. Gilroy, There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack (London, 1987), 31-4, 45.

[5] Saul Dubow, 'Afrikaner nationalism, apartheid and the conceptualization of "race"', Journal of African History, vol. 33 (1992) 209.

rights to be the same and their right to be different, as Albie Sachs has put it.[8] This is not, after all, a particularly Utopian demand: most of us do combine multiple identities which have salience in different contexts, and are perfectly comfortable with our hybridity. And we do expect to have certain basic human rights in common. Ultimately, then, I understand the politics of non-racism to be anti-essentialist politics, the politics of both/and rather than either/or which black writers like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have been calling for in this country in response to the limitations of anti-racism and multi-culturalism.[9]

And this is particularly important for South Africa if the environment of political tolerance, so necessary not only for the establishment of democracy, is to be established, but also if the anarchic violence that threatens all basic human rights in the Republic is to be reduced. This surely is the necessary first step if the years of dispossession, deprivation, discrimination and social dislocation are to be overcome and basic needs for food and shelter, health care and education, are to be addressed.

So much for racism and 'non-racism'. What about 'tradition'? Again let me start with a disclaimer: by tradition I do not mean the transmission of a body of statements, beliefs, rules and customs from generation to generation' as the Shorter Oxford Dictionary would have it; tradition - as we know from Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's wonderful The Invention of Tradition is very often remarkably recent.[10]

Nor do I share the optimism of Julie Frederikse who describes 'non-racialism' as 'the most pervasive and enduring ideological tendency in South African history'. Based on a clutch of rather selective documents and interviews with 'veterans of the liberation struggle', her recent book on the subject has the splendidly sanguine title The Unbreakable Thread.[11] It seems to me that there has not been one thread or tradition of non-racism in South Africa, but several; and that they weave themselves in and out of the ever changing tapestry of social thought and practice. Nor alas is it 'unbreakable'- s it not simply - as one of Frederikse's

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[8] See for example his 'Preparing for Freedom', Weekly Mail, 2 Feb 1990.

[9] Cf Gilroy, 'We need to be theoretically and politically clear that no single culture is hermetically sealed off from others. There can be no neat and tidy pluralistic separation of racial groups in this country. It is time to dispute with those positions which, when take to their conclusions, say "There is no possibility of shared history and no human empathy." We must beware of the use of ethnicity to wrap a spurious cloak of legitimacy around the speaker who invokes it. Culture, even the culture which defines groups as races, is never fixed, finished or final....' Paul Gilroy, 'The end of anti-racism' in Donald and Rattansi, Race, Culture, Difference, 57.

[10] Cambridge, 1983.

[11] Sub-titled Non-Racialism in South Africa (Johannesburg and Harare, 1990).

informants puts it - that the thread 'wears thin' on occasion'.[12] As in a tapestry, the threads cannot always be seen continuously; they are often broken; they change colour in different lights and contexts; and their texture is equally variable. as we shall see. Nor should this surprise us. Recent thinking about 'tradition', culture, identity has emphasized its contingency - and this is true whether the tradition, culture, identity are constituted around 'race'; its opposite - 'anti-racism'; or its negative - 'non-racism'. Culture, race, identity are all historically constituted, socially constructed and politically contested. Even in the sense of 'invention' then there is no single 'tradition' of 'non-racism' in South Africa, not least because racism itself is not homogenous; thus we need to be talking about traditions and non-racisms.

Even if one discounts the somewhat triumphalist views of Julie Frederikse, however, there is surely an irony in the fact that at a time of heightened racism and anti-semitism in Europe, South Africa, so long the world's pariah for its practice of apartheid, the systematic exclusion of the majority of its inhabitants from citizenship on the grounds of 'race', is about to contest an election on 27th April in which no major party openly espouses racism. Of course we should not be too sanguine about this: non-racism is always a fragile plant and it could easily be destroyed by the winds that blow in a rapidly changing society with scarce resources, and people hide racism behind alternative discourses. Nevertheless, the paradox remains and remains to be explained.

This is perhaps no surprise in the case of the ANC where the commitment to non-racism has an honourable history, even if it is more recent than Frederikse allows, and may be less than widespread beyond leadership levels. Nevertheless, it is important that such its explicit avowal of non-racism has not stood in the way of the ANC's popularity, and that its list of parliamentary candidates contains over sixty whites, coloureds and Indians: the ANC is likely to win a handsome majority, drawing its support from all sectors of the populace - although its non-racism may find it difficult to survive beyond the first election. Only the at-present small Pan Africanist Congress (AZAPO) with its somewhat chilling slogan, 'One settler , one bullet' has openly adopted a racist platform - and even that is contested within the ranks of its leadership. Remarkably, given the populism of its message it is believed to have the support of less than 10 per cent - perhaps no more than 5 per cent - of the black population.

The Inkatha Freedom Party - established by the Zulu Cultural movement, Inkatha ya baka Zulu which was founded to mobilise and promote Zulu ethnic nationalism has three white members of parliament and may now be supported by more whites than Zulu-speakers; President Mangope in Bophuthatswana is similarly sustained in his opposition to the post-apartheid constitution by white farmers in the western Transvaal, while far-right Afrikaners agitating for a white 'Volkstaat' do so in the name of Christianity, civilisation and cultural

[12] Tony Halliday, cited in Frederickse, Unbreakable Thread, 121. Although it is slightly ambiguous, to be fair Halliday was probably talking about the thread of ANC resistance after the Rivonia trial rather than non-racism per se.

survival - in alliance with Chiefs Buthelezi and Mangope.[13] The National Party founded to promote Afrikaner supremacy - and which for a long time excluded Jews and English-speakers from its membership - today courts black members, and is set to win a substantial share of the Coloured vote in the Cape and the Indian vote in Natal. As I understand it, that vanguard of Afrikaner ethnic mobilisation, the Broederbond - Band of Brothers - has recently agreed to include black brothers in its ranks but no sisters - regardless of the colour of their skins. Political interest has quite dramatically overshadowed any atavistic call of the blood.

How is it that in a country so long notorious for its racism even the far-right are being forced into if not non-racial, at least cross-racial, alliances? What lies behind the ANC espousal of non-racism - despite, one would have thought, the easy gain to be made from a more populist appeal to racial or ethnic emotion? And are there wider lessons to be learnt from this?

Part of the answer to these questions is of course to be found in pragmatic political calculations. Racism in South Africa has itself always been more pragmatic than the outside media which focuses on the antics of the far-right would have us believe. And cross-racial alliances, whether born of a common oppression or of self-interest - or a calculated combination of the two, go back in South African history almost as far as the much-cited thorn hedge its founding figure, Jan van Riebeeck, allegedly planted across the peninsula to keep the small Dutch East India settlement and the local Khoisan people apart. The hedge was ineffectual, but as early as 1659 15 slaves, 4 Englishmen, 4 Scotsmen, 3 Dutch Company servants, and a black convict plotted to escape the Company's stern rule by sea.[14]

In the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century white frontiersmen - such as the de Buyses, Prinsloos and Bezuidenhouts - attempted on more than one occasion to persuade the Xhosa chiefs on the Cape's eastern frontier to join them in driving out the newly arrived British. Poor if not landless, these were the families who had the most to fear from the extension of imperial law and order, and the encroachment of modernity represented by the new government officials on the frontier, whether sent by the Dutch East India Company, the short-lived Batavian Republic or the British who replaced them at the turn of the nineteenth century Cape.

Of these, the larger than life Coenraad de Buys is perhaps a fitting anti-hero for our time. As Noel Mostert describes him:

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[13] Since this lecture was delivered, Mangope has in fact been ousted by the black populace of Bophuthatswana, and his white right-wing support clearly revealed - and discredited. The importance of white right-wing support for Buthelezi - most importantly from within military intelligence and the police - has also been accepted by the Goldstone Commission, appointed by the government to enquire into the origins of political violence in South Africa.

[14] I am grateful to Stanley Trapido for this example, and for much that follows. See his unpublished paper, 'The Cape Dutch and the Problems of Colonial Identity', Institute of Commonwealth Studies, postgraduate seminar on the Societies of Southern Africa, 25 February, 1994. As he points out, one of the Englishmen was 'Pieter Barber of Hamstede', one of the Scots, 'Patricq t'Jock of Glasco'!

> Government outlawed and hunted him, and alternatively waived pardons; it never controlled him, any more than did the conventions of the society from which he came. ... the de Buys family ... were of a blood mixture uniquely composed of every possible strain. de Buys, paterfamilias had never married a white women. The children of his various wives, mixed blood [sic] and black, married across all the colour lines. The virility of the progenitor thus initiated every possible mutation from bloodlines crossed and recrossed, to produce a clan that wove his own Huguenot blood through every shade of the indigenous spectrum.[15]

Ultimately de Buys moved beyond the confines of the Cape Colony, gun-running to African peoples, and frequently living under their chiefs and marrying their women, to establish himself as the first Afrikaner in the Transvaal. To cement an alliance against the British, de Buys is said - in truly African fashion - to have offered his fifteen year-old daughter to the Xhosa chief Ngqika in marriage in 1799 ... while de Buys himself is said to have lived for several years with Ngqika's mother.[16]

Despite his reputation, in 1795 de Buys led his fellow Boers in forming the short-lived Graaff Reinet Republic; de Buys also married 'Elizabeth' 'geboren in het land v.d. Makinas ochter de Tamboekies' (born in the land of the Bakwena beyond the Thembu') i.e. a Kwena - or southern Sotho - women, and gave evidence against one of his neighbours in the 'Black Circuit' of 1812.[17] de Buys - perhaps not surprisingly - has never been accommodated within a later Afrikaner nationalist iconography. On the other hand, Frederick Cornelius Bezuidenhout, who pursued a similar life-style and also attempted to raise Boer-Xhosa alliances, and who was hanged in somewhat grisly circumstances for defying British orders on how to treat his 'servants' and for raising rebellion at Slagter's Nek, was by the late nineteenth century being cast as an early martyr in the nationalist cause.
Paradoxically these men who were the source of so much violence on the frontier in some ways established the most intimate relationships with Africans; they were also those who had

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[15] Frontiers. The epic of South Africa's creation and the tragedy of the Xhosa people (London, 1992), 611-2. Clearly fascinated by de Buys, Mostert's extraordinarily rich account of the Cape eastern frontier has perhaps the fullest historical account of his doings. Unfortunately it is not adequately annotated and on occasion is difficult to verify. Nonetheless, Mostert captures the mixture of brutality and intimacy of the Boer frontiersmen extraordinarily well.

[16] J. Peires, The House of Phalo. A history of the Xhosa people in the days of their independence (California, 1982), 54; Mostert, Frontiers, 368 for the daughter. According to Mostert (272-3), de Buys 'married' the Xhosa Queen Mother, then a widow: while many accounts allege that he formed a liaison with her, it is unclear what 'marriage' means in this context.

[17] Roger Wagner, 'Coenraad de Buys in Transorangia' in Collected Seminar Papers no 17, The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries, vol.4 (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, 1973), p.2.

the most to fear from the encroachment of the state on the existing order/ disorder. This is being repeated in contemporary alliances, and has its parallels in Charles van Onselen 's luminous study of a black sharecropper, Kas Maine, who lived in the south-western Transvaal, heartland of today's far-right. Van Onselen argues that, contrary to existing interpretations, in the first half of the twentieth century 'the behaviour of significant numbers of blacks and whites on the platteland often transcended the stark and restrictive code of race relations as it is generally understood and reached a surprising measure of accommodation in a sadly divided society'. He calls this process 'cultural osmosis between landlords, sharecroppers and bywoners, which, in turn, advanced notions of social equality in the countryside'. [18] This did not stop these very same white farmers from being amongst the most strident advocates of rigid segregation in the 1940s. In their rejection of the new 'rational' state and of modernity with all its ruptures and dislocations, both van Onselen's farmers - and the Cape frontiersmen - are perhaps the true progenitors of today's far-right in alliance with Inkatha. Like Eugene Terreblanche's Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) and the hostel-dwellers of Inkatha flourishing their cultural weapons, they present discomforting 'challenges to western visions of modernity'.

Bezuidenhout and Buys are not usually considered part of South Africa's non-racial tradition, and I grant you their record is shot through with contradiction. These - like their latter-day successors - were brutal men living in brutal times. Intermarriage, let alone sexual relations across the colour line, do not necessarily betoken relations of equality. I certainly do not wish to glorify or romanticise the tradition they left behind, or to suggest frontier society was non-racist, although I do want to use these examples to highlight the complexities of group identities and 'race relations' on the frontier in the 18th and early 19th century Cape.

Part of that complexity has also to do with the responses of African peoples in their initial encounter with this vanguard of European expansion, African responses to the 'other'. As Martin Legassick pointed out a long time ago, the frontier was a zone of mutual acculturation - in part perhaps because it was on the margins of the state, in which there was no single legitimate authority.[19] Frontier zones of this kind, however, long predated the advent of Europeans in southern Africa: they go back to the very origins of southern African societies in the encounters between the first farmers and herders and the earlier hunter-gatherer peoples of the region some two thousand years ago.

As the new culture spread and larger, more successful farming communities were established, in many areas the new way of life was adopted by the sparser hunter -gatherers. Thus, even in the apparently inhospitable and isolated Kalahari desert it is now clear that there was intense interaction and exchange between hunter-gatherers and food-producers and the

[18] 'Race and class in the South African countryside', American Historical Review, vol.95, no.1 (1990), 102, 107.

[19] M. Legassick, 'The frontier tradition in South African historiography', in S. Marks and A. Atmore, Economy and Society in Precolonial South Africa (London and New York, 1980).

development of complex amalgams of agro-pastoralism and pastro-foraging.[20] Who absorbed whom is a moot question: the contemporary Bantu-speaking peoples of southern Africa share the majority of their genes with the Late Stone Age people of Africa; their close relationship is also clear from the presence of "click" sounds and loan-words from the Khoisan languages in South Eastern Bantu and from the iron and stone tools, cattle and wild animal bones, pottery and ostrich shell beads on many early farming sites. The relationships established between hunters and herders and later agriculturalists over some 2000 years of social and economic change seem to have ranged from total resistance to total assimilation. These were not necessarily relations of equality, but they did leave the way open for mutual accommodation and acculturation. It is not only in the modern world that 'distinctions are [constantly] being destroyed and created'.[21]

Given the nature of the evidence it is difficult to talk with precision about how these relationships were forged. A recent book by Fritz Kramer on African perceptions of 'strangers' is, however enormously suggestive, though I am somewhat wary of its ahistorical character. Kramer looks at the distinctions made by a variety of people between what the Greeks termed xenos - who would be allowed residential, land and in some societies civic rights; and barbaros - 'who do 'not share the attributes of culture, language or of being human' and who could therefore denied basic human rights and be enslaved or forcibly incorporated through modes of adoption. He argues, however, that 'this scheme of contrasting the culturally identical stranger with the apparently uncultured barbarian ... by no means defines the ethnic categories of all African societies, The alternative pattern ... is based' he says 'not on the criterion of being human, nor on the similarity or dissimilarity of language and customs, but rather on the rules of exogamy: here a foreigner is anyone whose sisters and daughters one may marry. Whereas the one scheme of excluding the other form the politico-jural system justifies adoption and enslavement, here it legitimates marriage.'[22] The end results of the two systems are very different: in the first case it produces heterogenous and stratified societies; in the second far more homogeneous communities.

There is an ahistorical and schematic element in Kramer's arguments which leads me to be cautious. Nevertheless, interestingly enough one can find both patterns among the African population of South Africa: among the endogamous Tswana people (who straddle the Republic and Botswana) membership of political units was defined not so much by birth as by allegiance to a chief. In the 19th and early 20th century every such chiefdom contained communities [... meratshwana or 'little tribes'] as well as individuals who had broken away from their parent 'tribe' and sought refuge or had been absorbed into the chiefdom through

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[20] See, for example, J Denbow, 'Congo to Kalahari: data and hypotheses about the political economy of the western stream of the Early Iron Age', in The African Archaeological Review, 8 (1990) and E. N. Wilmsen, Land Filled with Flies. A political economy of the Kalahari (Chicago and London, 1989).

[21] See James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art (Cambridge, Mass, 1988); the phrase is on p.17.

[22] F Kramer, The Red Fez. Art and spirit possession in Africa (London and New York, 1993).

conquest or voluntary submission. These communities and individuals frequently retained their own customs and dialectical differences. According to Isaac Schapera, the doyen of South African anthropologists of the Tswana, writing in the 1930s and 1940s, 'The general rule is that a group of strangers coming together are, if sufficiently numerous, recognised as a separate ward by themselves, with their leader as headman.' They were granted land and full civic rights, but generally had less political influence than 'tribesmen of long-established stock', although these distinctions disappeared over time.

One should not romanticise this absorptive capacity, however. In addition to various Sotho-Tswana groupings, each chiefdom also contained people of wholly different origins - the so-called Sarwa or Kgalagadi, who formed an impoverished underclass of hereditary servants, probably created in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries. Historically, then while there was a real tension within these polities between egalitarianism and inequality, their internal structure made it 'equally easy for two or more communities to merge, or for a centralised polity to absorb immigrants and captives', but in ranked and discrete fashion. When the first white missionaries and traders appeared in the interior at a time of great turmoil, it is then perhaps not surprising that as the Comaroffs have remarked, they were also quickly categorised as 'other': Setswana ways and Sekgoa (European ways) came to be 'constructed in opposition to one another ' - 'each with its own cosmology, "customs" and conventions."

Among the Xhosa-speaking people on the south-east coast the process seems to have been somewhat different. Far less hierarchically structured, the Xhosa too had a long history of absorbing and incorporating captives and refugee communities. But the Xhosa were exogamous: as among the Tswana people who lived outside the range of Xhosa social relations were regarded as outside of the moral community - but this social distance could be reduced by marriage, or through the incorporation of aliens into the Xhosa nation, where, according to the historian, Jeff Peires, they 'would become bound and protected by Xhosa law and customs'. This had indeed happened for more than a thousand years on the 'frontiers' between Bantu-speakers and Khoisan, as we have already seen. Thus when the Xhosa encountered Europeans in the contested area of the eastern frontier, according to Peires, they

> saw no reason why Xhosa and European should not merge into a single society rather after the pattern of Xhosa and Khoi. They sought to include the Colony within their economic, political and social networks, They traded with the Boers as they did with other nations. Poor Xhosa wishing to acquire cattle for rich Boers, as they would have done for rich Xhosa. Politically Xhosa chiefs saw the Boers as potential allies or enemies, and they offered to help them in turn against the San and the English.[74]

Indeed, as we have seen, Ngqika even hoped to marry Coenraad Buys's daughter as a means of cementing their alliance.

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[73] Jean and John Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa vol.1 (Chicago and London, 1991) 194, et passim.

[74] House of Phalo, 53-4.

It does not seem wholly fanciful to me to suggest that it is in these very different ways of relating to 'strangers' - in the fluidity of these boundaries and the possibilities that existed for erasing them - that another of the 'threads' in my tapestry is to be found. Of course, at the time these expectations were to be frustrated, especially once British troops appeared on the Cape's eastern frontier in 1811, and the Xhosa too were to learn to distinguish between 'Xhosa ways' and 'white men's ways'. And ironically, it was precisely through what has often been seen as 'the unbroken thread' reaching from that time to this that they were to learn both the possibilities and the limitations of creating a single society: Christian mission and what the Comaroffs call 'the post-enlightenment process of colonization in which Europe set out to grasp and subdue the forces of savagery, otherness and unreason.'[24]

The enlightenment/post-enlightenment has suffered a number of hard knocks recently. As a number of writers from Fanon onwards have argued, for the colonial world the legacy of the Enlightenment was itself profoundly contradictory, and these ambiguities lie at the heart of the Cape liberal tradition. Clifton Crais has written recently of the Janus-face' of British liberalism at the Cape: side by side with 'ideologies and practices that allowed for a celebration of possessive individualism, political equality and a non-racial representative government on the hand, and, on the other the dispossession of innumerable communities, the extension of empire, and the creation of a range of disciplinary institutions and practices premised on the necessity of surveillance'. It was a 'world which spoke of freedom and at the same time invented race.'[25] Clearly these generalisations do not cover the earliest missionaries to the indigenous peoples of the Cape, Willem van der Kemp and James Read - both of whom scandalised the local populace and many of their missionary brethren by marrying black women, and were fearless protagonists of Khoisan rights; nevertheless, by the 1820s missionaries who demanded the abolition of slavery had, at the same time, constructed an image of the 'savage' which justified the latter's conversion and subordination, and confirmed their own superiority and 'ideology of social distance'[26]. Universalism - one may suggest - was indeed the particularism of the imperial colonisers, the way in which they defined themselves: they not need ethnicity, or at least did not recognise it as such.[27] Above

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[24] Comaroff and Comaroff, From Revelation to Revolution, 11.

[25] C.Crais, 'Race, the State and the Silence of History in the Making of Modern South Africa: preliminary departures', Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, July, 1992, cited in M. Legassick, 'The state, racism and the rise of capitalism in the nineteenth-century Cape Colony', South African Historical Review, no 28, May 1993, 336-7

[26] E. Elbourne, '"To colonize the mind": evangelical missionaries in Britain and the eastern Cape, 1790-1837' (D. Phil. Oxford, 1991), 189. For the missionary 'construction of the savage' see D. Stuart's forthcoming London Ph.D., '"Of heroes and savages": discourses of race, nation and gender in the evangelical missions to southern Africa in the early nineteenth century'.

[27] Cf Stuart Hall: 'One of the things which happens in England is the long discussion, which is just beginning, to try to convince the English that they are, after all, just another ethnic group ....ethnicity, in the sense that this is that which speaks itself as if it encompasses

all, Cape liberalism embodied the ideology of individualism, free trade and progress - with a capital 'P', the ethos of mid-nineteenth century confidence and global expansion. What was progress for the triumphant middle class had a rather different meaning for the underclasses at home, however - to say nothing of the subjects of empire."

Clearly then in the 1990s we can no longer hold the sanguine or singular a view of the role of the 'enlightened' British at the Cape of an earlier generation of historians. At the same time, 'progress' in a colonial context meant 'self-government'. And at the Cape - surely remarkably in the context of 19th century empire - it did mean a degree of political equality and non-racial government, even if it did not/ could not mean social or economic equality. As Stanley Trapido showed many years ago self-government at the Cape was granted in response to profound political upheaval at the Cape: partly a response to the European revolutions of 1848 and bitter colonial opposition to British proposals to land convicts at the Cape, which had rendered existing representative institutions unworkable, partly a response to war and uprisings on the frontier wars, and a threatened insurrection among the Khoisan in the western Cape. In the hopes of defusing the discontent from colonists and insurgent Coloureds, a low property, non-racial qualification for the franchise - lower indeed than existed at that time in Britain - was granted.[10] As the Cape Attorney General, William Porter put it in a much quoted statement:

> I would rather meet the Hottentot at the hustings voting for his representative

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everything within its range is, after all, a very specific and peculiar form of ethnic identity ... It is for a time the ethnicity which places all the other ethnicities, but nevertheless, it is one in its own terms.' ('The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity', in King, ed. Culture, Globalization and the World System, 21-2.)

[9] Several works shape my understanding: Martin Legassick's pioneering article, 'The frontier tradition in South African historiography', Stanley Trapido's work on Cape liberalism - both his original thesis on the subject and his more recent research on the Cape in the Atlantic world; Clifton Crais and Noel Mostert's very different works on the Cape frontier; Andre du Toit's fascinating account of 'the Cape Afrikaner's failed liberal moment' Elizabeth Elbourne and Doug Stuart's recent doctoral theses on early 19th century missionary endeavour, Jean and John Comaroff's analysis of Christianity. Most of these have been cited above.

[10] S. Trapido, 'Origins of the Cape franchise qualifications of 1853', Journal of African History, V, 1, 1964; see also Marks and Trapido, The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth century South Africa, (London and New York, 1987), 4-5. The electoral qualifications included anyone who occupied property worth £25 or earned £50 in wages.

than meet the Hottentot in the wilds with a gun on his shoulder."

Perhaps more surprisingly, as Trapido also showed, the non-racial, low property qualifications were supported by an alliance of local humanitarians and missionaries - and Afrikaners. Liberal values may initially have been a foreign transplant: by the mid-century, they were beginning to take root. Indeed it in a less often-cited quotation, Porter reflected also on this:

> The English minority [he complained] affecting to be afraid of Dutch preponderance, and whose strength might lie in the support of the Coloured population, are found depriving the Coloured population of those privileges which our liberal-hearted Dutchman holds forth with a free hand. I cannot comprehend this. It seems to me suicide."

Andre du Toit refers to this as 'the brief and puzzling moment' of Afrikaner liberalism; he sees no tradition of liberalism among Afrikaners, only a handful of unconnected individuals who have 'to be understood in relation to wider social and political forces'." Arguably, however, the 'moment' is longer than he suggests, and these individuals are no more unconnected from their social base than their English-speaking counterparts.[34] By the mid-century, prominent Afrikaners were talking in the language of universal human rights, usually regarded as the prerogative of British humanitarians. Thus in 1851, Christoffel Brand (whose son was later to become the president of the Orange Free State) roundly declared:

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[31] Marks and Trapido, The Politics of Race Class and Nationalism, p.5.

[32] Cited in A. du Toit, 'The Cape Afrikaners' failed liberal moment', in J. Butler, R. Elphick and D. Welsh, eds., Democratic Liberalism in South Africa. Its history and prospect (Middletown, Conn. and Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1987), p.45.

[33] du Toit, 'The Cape Afrikaners' failed liberal moment', 35.

[34] The individuals would certainly go back to H.C.D. Maynier the Company official on the eastern frontier in 1790s who, Mostert says, 'marks the beginning of the moral debate about the relations between whites and blacks in South Africa', and the complex Andries Stockenstrom. The son of the Swedish landdrost of Graaff Reinet who was killed in a frontier skirmish in 1811, Stockenstrom rose to the highest official position on the eastern frontier. Deeply involved with emancipation of the Khoisan and the slaves in the 1820s, and the treaty system with African chiefs in the 1830s and 1840s, he nevertheless identified himself as an Afrikaner. By the mid-19th century, Stockenstrom had emerged as one of the elected members of the Cape's Legislative Council which advocated the surprisingly low property qualification which would enfranchise large numbers of poorer Afrikaners in the western Cape - but also, as they well knew, substantial numbers of the Coloured community. (For Maynier, see Mostert, Frontiers, 248. For Stockenstrom, see also Frontiers, passim). As Martin Legassick has recently remarked, Stockenstrom is well overdue for a serious biography. ('The state, racism and the rise of capitalism', 336.)

> 'And gentlemen, why should [people of color] not be entitled to vote? Here in this municipality they enjoy the same privileges that we do, and what inconvenience has ever arisen? ... *These people pay their share of the taxes,* and why should they not have a voice in the appropriation of their own money? ... Shall we withhold from them the same liberties we ourselves *enjoy? If we have the slightest idea of such a thing we would* be unworthy of having a free constitution.' [35]

Nor was this simply the discourse of the urban elite. From the rural constituency of Clanwilliam, an Afrikaner delegation prepared an address to the governor protesting at the attempts by English-speaking merchants and officials to raise the franchise qualifications:

> We are unwilling to conceal ... that we shudder at the idea of the distinction made in the present Legislative Council between rich and poor, white and coloured, contrary to her Majesty's decision, as contained in the draft constitution ordinance [they declared]. We wish earnestly to impress [on you] ... *that the abolition of the £25 franchise and the introduction of a £2000* qualification for the Legislative Council will affect the same civil right [sic] which the coloured are as much entitled to enjoy as we, and would only give to the rich the whole influence in the Legislature ... [36]

Now it is true that Afrikaners had a direct stake in a low electoral qualification; and that after this, a degree of cynicism set in in relation to electoral politics in general, and the votes of Coloureds, many of them tied farm workers, were frequently determined by their white masters. Nevertheless, in the 1870s, when the British set out its terms for the confederation of South Africa, Cape opinion was outraged that it contained no provision for a non-racial franchise, and this included Afrikaner as well as English-speaking opinion; by the end of the century, the veteran Cape politician John X Merriman could remark, 'Habit has even made some of those who are not enthusiastic advocates of the policy take a pride in the superior liberality of the Cape Colony ... ' [37] In 1890, when a delegate to the Congress of the major Afrikaner political organisation, the Afrikaner Bond, *proposed the removal of coloured men* from the voters' roll, the discussion ended when J.H. Neethling asked rhetorically 'What would be said throughout the world if it were known that on the 15 March 1890, the

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[35] The Cape Mail 6 Dec 1851, cited in du Toit, 'The Cape Afrikaners' failed moment', p.43.

[36] Cape Daily Mail, 1 April 1852, cited in du Toit, 45.

[37] Trapido, '"The friends of the natives"; merchants, peasants and political ideological structure of liberalism in the Cape, 1854-1910', in Marks and Atmore, Economy and Society.', 253-4; P. Lewsen: 'The Cape liberal tradition, myth or reality?' in Collected Seminar Papers, no. 17, The Societies of Southern Africa vol.1 (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, 1970)

Afrikaner Bond Conference passed a resolution such as this.'[37]

With the polarisation of Cape politics after the Jameson Raid, both English-speaking and Afrikaner politicians began to woo the African vote, which determined the outcome of the election in seven out of some sixty seats: and after the war the Afrikaner Bond actually invited the leading African of his day, J.T. Jabavu to stand as their candidate in Kingwilliamstown although he declined to stand. In other words, the non-racial franchise had come to define the identity of a substantial number of the Cape's populace. And, as Phyllis Lewsen points out, this was in large measure a result of the existence of institutions which encouraged and entrenched non-racial attitudes to the franchise: yet this actually co-incided with the introduction of far more systematic social segregation in a variety of public institutions in late 19th century Cape Town, as Vivian Bickford Smith and others have shown.[38]

There is thus no straightforward 'progressive' narrative of liberalism to be told; at the same time, however, as the above has, I hope, indicated, any subversion of the 'grand narrative' of the enlightenment has to be partial. However 'elusive, ambiguous, rickety and hypocritical [the] structure'[40] of 19th century Cape liberalism, or mission Christianity, may have been, the universalism of its language - and the spaces which its ambiguities left open - 'enabled its contestation if not its capture by colonial subjects, whether white or black.

As Elizabeth Elbourne has remarked of 19th century mission Christianity, the value of mission Christianity for early converts was the malleability of Christian language and the universalism and inclusiveness of its message; these opened up real possibilities for contestations over meaning.[41] And this was true also of 'the universalism' of 'the Cape liberal tradition'. Nor did the limitations in practice necessarily invalidate the rhetoric, even if inequalities in power ultimately determined the outcome.

Here I follow Ernesto Laclau has recently remarked, 'it is one thing to say that the universalistic values of the West are the preserve of its traditional dominant groups; a very different one is to assert that the historical link between the two is a contingent and unacceptable fact which can be modified through political and social struggles.' He cites an example which I believe would have interested Eleanor Rathbone: in the wake of the French

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[37] Cited in S. Trapido, '"The friends of the natives"', 268.

[38] Lewsen, 'The Cape liberal tradition'; for increased 'systematic' segregation, see especially V. Bickford Smith, 'Commerce, class and ethnicity in cape Town, 1875-1902', Ph.D. Cambridge, 1988, and his 'The background to apartheid in Cape Town: the growth of racism and segregation from the mineral revolution to the 1930s', paper presented to the History Workshop, University of Witwatersrand, 1990.

[40] I owe this wholly appropriate phrase to J. Peires, 'Pinning the Tail on the Donkey', South African Historical Journal, 28 (19930, 321.

[41] Elbourne, '"To colonise the mind"'. *See especially the introduction.*

Revolution, when Mary Wollstonecroft was defending the rights of women she did not present the exclusion of women from the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' and citizenship as a proof that the latter are intrinsically male rights, but tried, on the contrary, to deepen the democratic revolution by showing the incoherence of establishing universal rights which were restricted to particular sectors of the population ...' [42] And the same could be said of black colonial subjects who were demanding their incorporation into civil society by the late nineteenth century.

Whatever the controlling purpose and ambiguities of the incorporationist strategy, then, for the black elite it opened up political opportunity and real material benefits. The expansion of Christianity and mission education had led by the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the emergence of a clearly defined group of Africans who identified themselves with liberal values. Although the spate of wars of conquest in the late 1870s placed strains on their aspirations, and the extent to which they accepted the norms of imperial hegemony has been exaggerated, their response to these tensions was in part to make use of the electoral machinery provided by the Cape government, in part to use the universalist discourse of imperialism to contest the increasingly racist measures being proposed in the last decades of the century as the earlier alliance which had buttressed the non-racial franchise was undermined by the rise of mining capital with social dislocations and insecurities and its demands for huge quantities of cheap, rightless black labour.
Out of the many possible quotations to illustrate these assertion, I have chosen - because it is after all International Women's Day - an editorial by Sol T. Plaatje, the African intellectual, writer and journalist who translated Shakespeare into his own tongue, Setswana, and Setswana proverbs into English, and who went on to become the first General Secretary of the ANC:

> We do not hanker after social equality with the white man. If anyone tells you that we do so, he is a lunatic ... The renegade Kafir who desires to court and marry your daughter is a perfect danger to his race, for if his yearnings were realised we would be hurrying along to ... the total obliteration of our race and colour ...
>
> All we claim is our just dues; we ask for our political recognition as loyal British subjects .... Under the Union Jack every person is his neighbour's equal. there are certain regulations for which one should qualify before his legal status is recognised as such: to this qualification race or colour is no bar, and we hope, in the near future, to record that one's sex will, no longer, debar her from exercising a privilege hitherto enjoyed by the sterner sex only.[43]

'Equal rights for all civilised men, equality of opportunity, equality before the law' - indeed perhaps even 'equal rights for all civilised women ...' - these were the elements of the

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[42] E. Laclau, 'Political frontiers, identification and political identities', paper presented to the conference on 'Nationalism, ethnicity and identity', Grahamstown, April 1993.

[43] In Koranta ea Becoana, 13 Sept 1902, cited in B. Willan, Sol Plaatje, South African nationalist, 1876-1932 (London, 1984), 111.

political creed imbibed by Plaatje and his fellows in the Cape; they were increasingly coming under fire at the end of the century in the Cape.[44]

By the twentieth century, then, the Cape liberal 'thread' in my non-racist tapestry had rather changed its colour: in the context of an industrialising South Africa, it was becoming an increasing black thread, whilst among the relatively 'small circle of white educationalists, missionaries and social workers'[45] who still saw themselves as liberal the thread had indeed become 'rather thin'. Increasing numbers of people who regarded themselves as 'friends of the natives' came to argue for segregation - either total separation or the establishment of parallel institutions -as the best way of defending African interests, and defusing potential class and racial conflict: this indeed was , as Sir Keith Hancock pointed out, 'the liberal orthodoxy'.[46]

It is true that by the late 1930s a number had withdrawn from this outright segregation, confronted as they were by its manifestly repressive nature, and there were always notable exceptions. [47] Old-style Cape liberals, for example, continued to defend the franchise and bitterly opposed the removal of Africans from the common roll in 1936, but a mere ten MPs - led by J.H. Hofmeyr - opposed the removal of Cape Africans from the common roll in

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[44] Willan, Sol Plaatje, 111.

[45] This is Paul Rich's description of who the 20th century white liberals were: see his White Power and the Liberal Conscience. Racial segregation and South African liberalism, 1921-1960 (Manchester, 1984), 1.

[46] In the first half century, liberalism was expressed through the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Joint Council movement. Yet according to Paul Rich, by following a policy of factual research devoid of political comment the Institute may have strengthened the conservative element in South African liberalism. He maintains that 'by the early 1930s, a new ideological consensus began to be formed between the more conservative intelligentsia centred around the Institute of Race Relations and the government policy of trusteeship'. Thus in many ways the story of mainstream liberalism in the first half of the 20th century South Africa has been even more ambiguous if not compromised than its 19th century precursor.

[47] Like, for example, the social historian, W.M. Macmillan, who appears to have been radicalised by his encounters with Africans in the Joint Council movement which had been formed as a meeting place for educated Africans and sympathetic whites. Macmillan quickly saw the dangers of the segregationism being advocated by the founders of the South African Institute of Race Relations: by the early 1930s however he had left South Africa, alienated by the entire trend of government and indeed liberal politics. For Macmillan, see the essays in H. Macmillan and S. Marks, ed. Africa and Empire. W.M. Macmillan, Historian and Social Critic (London, 1989), especially chapter 2, H. Macmillan, '"Paralyzed Conservatives": W.M. Macmillan, the social scientists and the "Common Society", 1923-48'.

1936; they were not supported by that world statesman, General Smuts.[49] Yet as Janet Robertson remarks in her essentially sympathetic study of South African liberalism even J.H. Hofmeyr, long the hope of the liberals within Smuts's United Party, was 'sufficiently the product of his own white world to delay as long as possible any open break with the United Party .... On almost every crucial occasion he took the line of least resistance.'[50]

When after Hofmeyr's death the Liberal Party was eventually formed (in 1953), Z.K. Matthews, one of the most 'consistently moderate' of the Congress leaders was to write:

> the question is whether they [the Liberals] have enough strength and enough ability to overcome the reluctance of the average liberal white South African to work with instead of for the African.[51]

Had I time to fully weave this tapestry of threads, the many threads of liberal conscience in South Africa since then would need to be woven in here. Since the 1950s, white liberals have undoubtedly borne witness to moral conscience; in the darkest days of apartheid they refused to remain silent. I think here of the indomitable Mrs Helen Suzman and her endless questions in parliament and activities on behalf of political prisoners and others, of the extraordinary women of the Black Sash who initially took their stand over purely constitutional issues and came to tackle the far wider range of social oppressions, of the handful of lawyers and judges and doctors who exposed torture and grotesque illegalities; of the churchmen who consistently raised their voices against social injustice; of the students both in NUSAS and in the Wage Commissions who first began to raise the issue of black wages in the late 1960s, even if it is not entirely clear that they have been able to work 'with' rather than 'for' Africans. Suzman's Progressive Party for example only accepted the notion of a universal non-racial franchise in 1978, and both the Liberal Party and the later progressives in their various guises found it difficult to identify fully with the struggles for

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[49] J. Robertson, Liberalism in South Africa, 1948-1963 (Oxford, 1971), 11.

[50] Ibid. 28.

[51] Cited in Robertson, Liberalism in South Africa, 118. Cf Nelson Mandela writing at much the same time:

> In South Africa, where the entire population is almost split into two hostile camps in consequence of the policy of racial discrimination, and where recent political events have made the struggle between oppressor and oppressed more acute, there can be no middle course. The fault of the Liberals ... is to attempt to strike just such a course. They believe in criticising and condemning the government for its reactionary policies, but they are afraid to identify themselves with the people and to assume the task of mobilising that social force capable of lifting the struggle to higher levels. ('The shifting sands of illusion' in Liberation, June 1953, cited in S. Johns and R. Hunt Davis, Jr., Mandela, Tambo and the African National Congress. The struggle against apartheid, 1948-1990. A documentary survey (New York and oxford, 1991), 40.

black liberation, whatever the stance of individual liberals.

What then of the 'non-racism' of the liberation movements? Here I have only time to talk about the ANC, which was founded in 1912, and which for most of this century has been the main black political organisation. From the very outset, the South African Native National Congress (as it then was) saw its goal
in forging a pan-ethnic African nationalism. Given its pan-South African character and its numerical weakness perhaps it could hardly do otherwise.[11] Moreover even in the first decade of the century, in the protests against the exclusive nature of the Union constitution, Coloured and African leaders had come together - a prospect of unity which was periodically to haunt the white rulers of South Africa. In 1937 Ralph Bunche noted how in the discussions over the name for the recently formed National Council of African Women, 'One speaker from the Cape made an appeal for keeping the doors open to all non-European women and was glad the term African instead of Bantu was adopted in the name of the organization'.[12] The incorporationist ethic of African societies and the fluidity of ethnic boundaries among Africans may well have facilitated this.

The middle-class male elite that dominated the ANC was remarkably tolerant at this stage - and for much longer - of white paternalism. There was no suggestion that whites become members of the ANC, however. To raise the question is in a sense to show how unthinkable it was to both sides by the early 20th century ... despite the sympathetic assistance which Congress received from a handful of whites like Harriette Colenso (daughter of the famous Bishop of Natal) who was one of the first to see the significance of its formation of the SANNC.[13]

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[11] Among the objectives of the first constitution of the SANNC in September 1919 contained two clauses advocating a pan-tribal organisation:

> ... To encourage mutual understanding and to bring together into common action as one political people all tribes and clans of various tribes or races and by means of combined effort and united political organisation to defend their freedom, rights and privileges;
>
> ... To discourage and contend against racialism and tribal feuds; jealousy and petty quarrels by economic combination, education, goodwill and by other means.

(T. Karis and G.M. Carter, From Protest to Challenge. A documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882-1964 (4 vols. Stanford, Ca. 1972-1977), vol. 1, 177.

[12] An African American in South Africa. The travel notes of Ralph J. Bunche, 28 September 1937- 1 January 1938 ed. by R. R. Edgar (Athens, Ohio and Johannesburg, 1992), 278.

[13] See my 'Harriette Colenso and the Zulus, 1874-1913', Journal of African history, vol.4, no.3, 1963.

(Had I the time I would like to have woven another thread into this tapestry - a female rainbow strand which would lead - albeit in broken and somewhat eccentric fashion - from Harriette Colenso, Olive Schreiner, Margaret Ballinger, Ray Alexander, Betty du Toit and Ruth First, to the Black Sash and Helen Suzman on the white side, through Josie Pama, Charlotte Maxeke, Sibusisiwe Makanya, Lilian Ngoya, Albertina Sisulu and Frene Ginwala on the black. But this story will have to await another time ..."

For the black men who founded Congress, however, what had to be overcome was the 'racism' between the different 'tribal groups' of South Africa, not the division between white and black. Indeed in the late 1910s and 1920s important members of Congress, (sometimes under the influence of the radical movement of the Jamaican Marcus Garvey, sometimes of the more conservative American ex-slave Booker T. Washington) were prepared to entertain ideas of segregation between black and white, provided the division of South Africa were on a more equal basis.

Nevertheless, to counter the racial policies of the newly unified settler state, African nationalism was to develop a broad non-racial nationalism that was to be very different in its implications for the future of South Africa. The racially exclusive nature of the South African state meant that they could not win power through the ballot box, or through an appeal to an exclusive ethnic group. For the new elite of western educated Africans, excluded from the body politic at union, it was therefore older African and imperial notions of incorporation premised on an alliance with whites, that permeated political thought.

Their claim was for incorporation in a unitary, non-racial, democratic state: at most the demands of social democracy. Nevertheless, as they found their attempts in the first fifty years of this century at even limited incorporation rejected, middle-class leaders were radicalised. Their structural vulnerability and the intimacy forged by their shared racial oppression meant that there have always been significant sections of the African petty bourgeoisie that were open to more radical ideas, whether from the African militant opposition of the nineteenth century, left-wing intellectuals, both socialist and communist, or American Garveyites."

Thus the relationship between African nationalism and the left -very much part of South Africa's contemporary politics - is an extremely important thread in the non-racial tradition in South Africa - indeed there are some who see this as the most enduring/endearing aspect of the contribution of the South African Communist Party to South Africa's tortured political inheritance. Nevertheless even this has not been without its contradictions, and tensions: on both sides. This too has been a somewhat knobbly thread. From its foundation in 1921, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) was frequently hostile to what it saw as the bourgeois nationalism of the ANC, while its 'tradition' of non racism was often ambivalent.

" The listis, of course, far from comprehensive and could be far longer.

" For these influences, see Marks and Trapido, eds. The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism, especially the essay by Pirio and Hill and the introduction.

Initially many white communists preferred not to emphasize the interest of black workers in the party 'lest they prejudice the work of the party among the segregationist white workers', whom they saw at least until the late 1920s as the 'vanguard of the revolution'. Until the 1930s non-racism was associated with specific individuals, with Cape Town traditionally more concerned with questions of black - African and Coloured - workers.[56]

Although for a brief period in the late 1920s these suspicions were overcome, and through the 1930s the Party itself came to have a majority of black members, many of whom had a dual membership, considerable tension remained. This was particularly marked in the 1940s when the ANC itself was divided 'between those who advocated a more inclusive nonracial nationalism and those who argued for an exclusively African nationalism'.[57] Nevertheless, the prolonged campaigns against state policies in the 1950s, with allies from all racial groups including white progressives and the outlawed Communist Party, the banning of black nationalist organisations in 1960, and the decisions to go underground and engage in sabotage and armed struggle all sharpened the radicalism and intensified the commitment to a non-racial South Africa of the Congress movement. This common engagement culminated in the Freedom Charter in which the ANC resolved that the liberation of South Africa was the task of all genuine democrats regardless of race and that - to quote the Freedom Charter 'South Africa belonged to all who lived in it'.[58]

This was no easy decision. It is sometimes alleged that the non-racialism of the ANC is purely instrumental and designed for outside consumption; even more cynically, it has been suggested to me that it is merely a way in which whites are able to script themselves into the liberation struggle in South Africa. While there was undoubtedly a pragmatism involved especially in the 1950s when alliance with other racial groups made good political but also material sense, I believe it goes far beyond this. Not only did non-racism lose the ANC support among blacks in the USA and Africa, who found its non-racial stance difficult to understand, and from western conservatives who objected to their alliance with white radicals; it also had to defend its position against the challenge of the Africanists and the later Black Consciousness movement. So much so that Eddie Daniels records that in 1979 fighting broke out on Robben Island between the ANC and the 'strong anti-white element' among the prisoners who came in after 1976: a number of the ANC prisoners were stabbed and hurt in the fracas.[59] Many of these Black Consciousness activists were persuaded 'to

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[56] S.W. Johns III, 'Marxism-Leninism in a multi-racial environment: the origins and early history of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932' (Ph.D. Harvard, 1965), 310.

[57] Johns and Hunt Davis, Jr. Mandela and Tambo, 18.

[58] For the Freedom Charter passed at the Congress of the People, Kliptown (Johannesburg) 25th and 26th June, 1955, see Carter and Karis, From Protest to Challenge, vol.3, 205-7.

[59] Eddie Daniels, account in Weekly Mail, 21-27 Mar 1986, cited in Johns and Hunt Davis,Jr. Mandela and Tambo, 158.

follow Mandela and non-racialism' on the Island.[80]

The extent to which this ideology had come to replace black consciousness - the result in part of the work also of white radicals in the resurgent trade union movement of the 1970s can be seen from the open display of ANC colours at the funeral of Dr Neil Aggett, the white doctor and trade unionist who was the first white to die in detention, and the work stoppage of over 200,000 black trade unionists to mark the occasion.

Of course the process has not been unproblematic: the tensions in Natal between Africans and Indians which manifested in ugly race riots in 1949 and more recently in Inanda in 1985; the breakaway of the Africanists from the ANC to form the Pan Africanist Congress in 1969; the rise of ethnic nationalisms in the state-created Bantustans; and the utter ruthlessness with which the far-right white-black alliance is prepared to go in destabilising the country and rendering the possibilities of even reasonably free and fair elections problematic forbid any easy optimism.

Moreover, as I hinted at the beginning whether - and how long -the non-racism of the ANC can outlast the difficulties of a post-apartheid South Africa is also far from clear. As in the nineteenth century Cape, it would seem that for the ANC at least non-racism has become a 'habit of mind': as an ANC leader in the Transvaal recently pronounced - 'We would not be ANC if were not non-racist.' Nevertheless, if we look back on this complex history of non-racism in South Africa - as well as the resurgence of racism internationally - the threads remain eminently breakable. Indeed some are already beginning to fray. A beleaguered state, the heir to massive black-white inequalities and limited resources in an unpropitious international economic climate, is going to find non-racism far more difficult in the face of the demands of its followers for redistribution and positive discrimination. Much will depend on the resources available, and the institutions set up to distribute them. Nevertheless, the renewed hegemony of ideals of non-racialism and pan-tribalism in a country which seen more than a century of the entrenchment of racial separation and racial privilege and the manipulation of ethnicity on an unprecedented scale is surely remarkable and remains truly inspirational.

[80] Seth Mazuhuko, account in Newsweek, 23 June 1986, cited in Ibid. 160.