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THE ROOTS OF ETHNICITY : DISCOURSE AND THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE CONSTRUCTION IN SOUTH-EAST AFRICA.

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"The question of boundaries is the first to be encountered, from it all others flow. To draw a border around anything is to define, analyse and reconstruct it, (to) select, indeed adopt, a philosophy of history."

F Braudel, The Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II (New York, 1978),1, 18

"Scholarship needs to pass from the making of myths to the study of the making of myths and, even, to the study of the people who make those myths."

J Pocock, "British history: A plea for a new subject" in Journal of Modern History 47, 4, 1975, 614.

The boundary most frequently used in the analysis of African society is that which defines the ethnic group. Historians as much as other social scientists focus on the ethnic group as their basic unit of study. Yet, as a growing body of work is beginning to show,[1] ethnic boundaries that are today a concrete reality did not exist, even in a conceptual form, before the end of the 19th century.

If there is one criterion advanced in support of the various notions holding ethnicity to be historically constant, it is that of language. A common, shared language defines if not determines an ethnic group; a Tsonga-speaker is a Tsonga

* This article has benefitted greatly from the critical skills of Molly Bill Theo Schneider and Leroy Vail. They are only partially responsible for what follows

just as a Zulu-speaker is a Zulu. It is the extrapolation of these self-evident differences back into the past that has given rise to the belief in a primordial ethnicity. This idea, that linguistic differences are historically bounded and immutable, has become a cornerstone of South African political culture, a popular wisdom that lies at the conceptual heart of bantustan and federalist/pluralist solutions to South Africa's problems. However, while the origin and development of European languages has been carefully studied, the history of the delineation and growth of African languages has been sadly neglected.[2] Linguistic studies in Africa have concentrated on morphology and syntax and history has been relegated to the murky realm of glottochronology and the search for hypothetical , ancestral language forms.

This article attempts to show that the conceptualization of African languages as bounded and static entities was, rather than a reflection of an objective African reality, a product of 19th century European discourse. One of the first reactions of European explorers and colonists, on being confronted by a world that was wholly novel and outside the bounds of their experience, was to reorder the world around them according to their belief system. This entailed imposing an intellectual grid on the unfamiliar in order to restructure it in a more comprehensible way. Linguistic and other borders and boundaries accepted in Europe as "scientific", and hence incontrovertible givens, were applied to Africa. The reasons for the emergence of these historically discrete categories were explained in terms of

European concepts of cause and origin. Unable to break out of the conceptual realm of their age, linguists sought to 'discover' clearly discernible languages that were bound by regularities of grammar and vocabulary and rooted in history. The world view of these experts was a product of a specific system of knowledge rather than a basic self-interest. Nevertheless their linguistic work, through its effects on peoples' perception of reality, produced a pattern of domination. Definitions of language, as much as those of sexuality, madness and other aspects of knowledge, introduced new social controls over the way in which people acted.

A language that would become common to the people of one extended region had to be forged out of disparate linguistic forms. As is revealed by the debate within the Swiss Mission over the delineation and codification of separate Ronga and Thonga/Shangaan languages, the criteria determining the boundaries of language and dialect were subjective, rather than scientific. Linguistic borders were more a product of the missionaries' late 19th century European world view and belief system, than of any objective criteria. The construction by Swiss missionaries of the early Tsonga language thus has many parallels with other missionary-devised lingue franche, like Union Ibo and Shona.[3] The intention of the missionaries was not to create a regional cultural marker that could serve as a vehicle of ethnic unity and consciousness; this was only to emerge later as the colonial state sought to neutralize a growing class and national consciousness and a local elite, trained in

European linguistic discourse, sought to mobilize a political following by stressing shared cultural characteristics.

The aim of this article is to examine the early stages of the creation of one particular African language in order to understand its role, as a politicized cultural marker, in the emergence of an ethnic consciousness. Of fundamental importance to this process in the north-eastern Transvaal, was the establishment of the Swiss Mission.

* * *

The Free Church of the Canton of Vaud (FCV) started its mission endeavours in late 1872 when Paul Berthoud and Ernest Creux were sent to assist the Paris Missionary Society (PMS) in Basutoland. Both sending agencies were francophone and Protestant and the FCV had for several years sent missionaries to join the PMS in an individual capacity, notably in Basutoland (Lesotho). In May 1873 one of these, Adolphe Mabille, undertook an exploratory expedition to the eastern Transvaal as numerous Pedi migrant workers passing through Basutoland on their way to the Cape had called for the establishment of a mission in their country. Paul Berthoud was designated to accompany Mabille as he had arrived in Basutoland nine months after Creux and had not as then mastered Sesotho, the language constructed by the PMS to evangelise the conglomeration of refugees gathered under the control of Moshoeshoe. The direction of mission expansion was determined by linguistic association, for the

people called Pedis were considered to occupy "most of the north-eastern Transvaal [and to] speak dialects related to Sotho".[4] But when the expedition to the area dominated by the Maroteng Pedi paramountcy in the eastern Transvaal proved a filure, Mabille and Berthoud pushed northwards to a point south-west of the Zoutpansberg mountains where the Cape Dutch Reformed church ministered to various other chiefdoms described as Pedi.

To their north, the Berlin Missionary Society worked maong a people known to the local Boers as Bergkaffers (Mountainkafirs) and to the local Africans as Basuetlas or, after one of their chiefs, Makatis/Makatees. To Africans who had recently immigrated from the east coast they were Bvechas. The Spelonken foothills to the south of the Zoutpansberg had been settled over the previous forty years by these immigrants. They had initially trickled eastwards as traders operating from the vicinity of Lourenco Marques and Inhambane and had later been pushed westwards by ecological upsets and wars. In the Transvaal, many fell under the command of Joao Albasini, a Portuguese hunter and slaver who had built up a considerable following. Neither the German nor Cape missionaries had extended their work to these outsiders, partly because they spoke what a Cape missionary referred to as "Cafre ... an extremely difficult language".[5] The Missionaries agreed that the evangelisation of these heathen immigrants should be allocated to the Swiss. Three African missionaries of the PMS who had been trained and educated in the use of Sesotho, Asser

Segagabane, Eliakim Matlanyane and Josias Molepo, were left in charge of the mission and its outstations.

On their return to Basutoland the two Swiss missionaries asked for the PMS to take over this new mission field which, they envisaged, "in all forms: language, literature, native workers to train, would always more or less depend on the Lesotho mission".[4] But the French mission was excluded from working in the Transvaal because of a lack of available field-workers and because of bad relations with the Boer government. Instead, the new mission field was entrusted to the Free Church of Vaud whose two missionaries continued to study the PMS's Sesotho as they intended to use this mission language and literature as the lingua franca of their operations in the Spelonken. It was envisaged that the Spelonken Mission would become "a sort of linguistic province of the Lesotho mission"[5] and in this way would save the Swiss missionaries both the time and money needed to learn and record a new language and literature. Paul Berthoud believed that the mission would be able to start preaching and teaching in Sesotho as the language was understood by most of the "Cafre-speaking" Africans in the Zoutpansberg and Spelonken hills. His intention was to use Sesotho as a lingua franca that would allow the mission to spread its work beyond merely the immigrants in the Spelonken. But a fleeting familiarity with contemporary linguistic hypotheses that attempted to order the African interior in the minds of Europeans, had fostered an illusory comprehension of the people with whom Berthoud and Creux were to work. When the two Swiss missionaries returned to

the Spelonken in mid 1875 they discovered not a composite, culturally-united people, but a dauntingly confusing ethno-linguistic pot pourri of refugees drawn from the length and breadth of coastal south-east Africa. The immigrants in the Spelonken lived in scattered villages that were independent of one another. They had few important chiefs and no concept of themselves as a community. However, the indigenous peoples of the area defined and excluded these immigrants as a group and applied to them a number of genericisms.

The people amongst whom the missionaries were to work were thought by the indigenous inhabitants to be the descendants of an 18th century chief who, from his base near Inhambane, had traded with the Zoutpansberg. His followers had been called Gwambas by the locals and the term had subsequently evolved into a synonym for easterners: a name then given to all immigrants from the east coast. To the south of the Zoutpansberg soundshifts caused the word to be pronounced Koapa. The immigrants were also sometimes referred to as Tongas, a perjorative term applied by the Zulus to the people living along the coast to their north. In the mouths of the Pedi this word was modified to Toka. Various other popular genericisms were applied to the Spelonken immigrants; local Boers referred to them as Knobnoses, despite the fact that not all practised nasal scarification. In the Zoutpansberg they were also given the nickname of Tcheke because of their long tradition of wearing cotton clothing instread of skins and to the south-east in the Palaborwa area of the Lowveld they were known as Bonos. On the diamond fields they were roughly classified as

Shangaans, after Shoshangane, the founder of the east coast Gaza empire. The missionaries soon realized that these were terms of exclusion rather than inclusion, used in much the same way as the Greeks, Romans and early Christians had used the term "barbarian" to define themselves in contradistinction to outsiders.[9] Generic terms like Tonga and Gwamba implied no linguistic unity or political identity. However, when, soon after their arrival, the missionaries were unable to make themselves understood, they sought to find the language of those people called by their neighbours Gwambas, Tongas, etc.

The missionaries, plucked from their well-structured lives in Europe and plunged into an unfamiliar and confusing world, soon adopted the local mode of classification. Within weeks of her arrival, Paul Berthoud's wife Eugenie wrote that the local language was "Shigwamba...(of which)...we cannot understand a single word...(as it)...is completely different from Sesotho." Clinging to the missionaries' desire for a vehicular language and trapped within the bounds of existing linguistic knowledge, she postulated that Shigwanba was "more related to the Zulu of Natal" than to Sesotho.[9] But within three months it had become clear to the missionaries that Shigwamba did not fit into the existing schema of African languages. Paul Berthoud informed his church head-quarters that "we speak Sesotho but no-one understands us. We must learn (what in Sesotho is called) Sekoapa", the language of the Gwambas.[10]

Well over a year after his arrival Paul Berthoud was still evangelizing in Sesotho and using a translator when addressing an audience.[11] The two missionaries were fully occupied with the establishment of their station and this left little time for linguistic research. In February 1877 Creux wrote, "I have been able to spend more time in studying ChiGwamba. It is very difficult to learn a language whose grammar one has to gropingly create. And it would be even more laborious if we did not know sesotho."[12] Disheartened by the difficulties presented by this new language, Berthoud wrote almost a year later that "sigwamba is neither Cafre nor setchwana, it is a cousin, perhaps a brother of Zulu" and he suggested replacing the PMS's Sesotho as the basic reference for Shigwamba with that of the American Board's Zulu.[13] Nevertheless by May 1878 Berthoud reported that he and Creux had produced some hymns, a few translations and were about to start a book in Shigwamba. Despite these small beginnings of a local, Spelonken language, the mission continued to operate largely in Sesotho. There were several reasons for this.

A major obstacle to the recording of the language was the proliferation of mission orthographies. The PMS (Sesotho), London Missionary Society (Setswana) and Berlin Mission Society (Sepedi) all used orthographies that differed from each other and from those used by government officials and travellers. This problem was only partially solved when Berthoud persuaded his mission to adopt the Standard Alphabet of the German linguist Lepsius. Another problem arose because of the composition of the mission party. Creux

and Berthoud had been accompanied by about 20 PMS Christians who, including Asser Segagabane and Eliakim Matlanyane, had been born and educated in Basotoland. These people acted as a link between the missionaries and the local population and provided them with students who were conversant with Sesotho. Local minorities such as the Lemba understood Sesotho and, as the language was the only medium of education in the Spelonken, its teaching attracted a number of supporters. But the inability of the missionaries to converse with people in their own language hampered evangelical work. This was poignantly expressed by a Gwamba woman who complained to Eugenie Berthoud that

> I do not know how to pray. If God were able to understand Shigwamba I would try, for I cannot speak to him in Sesotho.[14]

The missionary's wife, who seemed unaware of the political implications of this statement, merely encouraged the woman to improve her Sesotho.

Paul Berthoud was more aware of the dangers of creating an elitist, mission language that would remain, as had Latin in medieval Europe, incomprehensible and foreign to the majority of the local population. But with their time consumed by the physical establishment of the mission station, the missionaries had to rely on the Gwamba linguistic skills of their PMS-trained evangelists. All the early translations undertaken by the Swiss missionaries were refracted through these two Basotho evangelists as well as two Spelonken converts, Mbizana (Gideon Mpapele) and Zambiki (Timothee Mandlati) whose linguistic roots lay, respectively, in the coastal area north of the lower Limpopo

and the immigrant Nkuna chiefdom in the eastern Transvaal. Creux particularly remained dependant for many years on the linguistic skills of two evangelists, Yosefa and Yacob Mhalamhala, who had grown up in the Khosen area of the coastal plain between the Nkomati and Limpopo rivers.[18]

* * *

From their base in the Spelonken, Berthoud and Creux gradually became aware, through information brought to them by workers travelling to and from Kimberley, the Cape and Natal, of the existence in the Transvaal of other east coast immigrant communities. These lived in independent chiefdoms strung out along the Levubu river and to the south of the Spelonken where communities had settled under Modjadji and other Pedi chiefs. The people on the coastal plain east of the Lebombo mountains, to whom the Spelonken immigrants were related, were loosely divided by the missionaries into the Hlengwe and the Amatonga who lived, respectively, to the north and south of the Limpopo river. Under the influence of Bleek's Comparative Grammer, which they used as their basic reference work, the missionaries continued to view Gwamba as a "Cafre" language, distinct from Setswana, Sepedi and what they started to refer to as Shivenda.

The Swiss missionaries rapidly laid claim to this entire diaspora of east coast immigrants whom they referred to as the Gwamba. This claim was entrenched by what the Swiss referred to as the bismarkism of their Berlin missionary neighbours who laid claim to, and excluded the Swiss from,

all the autochthonous chiefdoms in the northern and eastern Transvaal. Berthoud believed that it was the God-ordained duty of his mission to save all the Gwambas: as one of the official mission histories records, the Swiss mission "dedicated itself uniquely to the Gwambas and had to create a literature in that language".[14] The delineation of a Gwamba mission field was to become increasingly distinct after Paul Berthoud, who had lost his wife and three children to fever, returned to Switzerland on furlough and was replaced by his brother Henri, the man who was to do more than any other in establishing the Gwamba language.

Henri Berthoud immediately linked the development of the Gwamba language to the work of the mission. He considered a thorough knowledge of the language essential to the work of evangelisation and devoted each afternoon to its study. By June 1882 Henri Berthoud and a Christian assistant, probably Mpapale (Mbizana) or Mandlati (Zambiki), were engaged in translating parts of the Old Testament from Sesotho into Shigwamba. But without a Shigwamba grammar, dictionary or even a reader, translation was slow and often erroneous and the missionaries had still to rely on the Sesotho publications of the Paris Missionary Society.[15] Three months later Berthoud had started gathering material for a vocabulary and was engaged in what he referred to as "a task of systematizing" Shigwamba. He stressed the need to create a Shigwamba literature as the only available books were in Sesotho, with the result that all teaching was still done in that language.[16] By April 1883 Berthoud was teaching the Ten Commandments in Shigwamba rather than Sesotho and had

handwritten a rudimentary grammar and vocabulary. In Switzerland his brother Paul oversaw, in the same year, the production of the first book in Shigwamba, a Bible reader and collection of hymns that became known locally as the buku. The following year he published an elementary school reader and a thirty page article on the structure of the Gwamba language. Paul Berthoud also corresponded with Lepsius in order to "standardize" the Shigwamba orthography while the notes he drew up for a grammar course were published in an elementary form as Lecons de Sigwamba. But the compilation, or "task of systematizing" the Gwamba language as Henri Berthoud called it, in fact meant the choice, or rather the construction of a special dialect as the written lingua franca of the mission in the Spelonken.

Gwamba was a mixture of the different dialects spoken by refugees or immigrants drawn from throughout southern Mozambique. It was, according to Henri Berthoud, "a fruit-salad of Hlengwe, of Djonga, of Boer, of English, of Nwaloungou, of Hlavi, of Venda, of Sotho." Gwamba was an artificial construction, a high language belonging to the mission. Immigrant faamilies came from "all parts of Gaza and the south" and their linguistic differences reflected their diverse geographical origins.[19] Many of the forms of speech current amongst the refugees in the Spelonken were barely mutually comprehensible. Some six months after his arrival in the area, Henri Berthoud wrote despondently that

> Despite my utmost I cannot yet preach in sigwamba; I can make myself understood depending on the intelligence and goodwill of those listening to me. As far as understanding the natives, it is altogether another thing; each one has his own particular dialect

> and often I cannot understand a word of what they are saying. That is what slows down the understanding of the language, that one has to learn numerous different dialects before understanding a conversation.[20]

The Spelonken was an area of particular linguistic heterogeneity as its population was made up of immigrants from the extensive coastal plain where the numerous small chiefdoms had always been independent of one another. In the south, west and north the coastal languages had been influenced, to a fluctuating degree, by Zulu, Swazi and Gaza. Because of the political cleavages and the low degree of social and economic intercourse between the chiefdoms, the peoples east of the Lebombos had never needed a common, unifying language. Indeed, the different chiefdoms stressed their independence of one another by magnifying their differences of language and accent. Consequently when the people from the coastal area entered the Transvaal as immigrants or refugees they employed a number of speech forms and, as they settled in the Spelonken, this linguistic diversity grew under the influence of the indigenous languages of the area. As the Swiss missionaries became aware of the extent of the Gwamba settlements in the northern and eastern Transvaal, together with the size of the "home" population on the coast, they were struck by the enormity of their prospective mission field and by its prodigious linguistic diversity.

In July 1880 one of the mission catechists, Yosefa Mhalamhala, called for the evangelisation of the coastal areas.[21] The following year he embarked on an exploratory tour of the Khosen area between the Nkomati and Limpopo

rivers where in April 1882 he established a mission. At the same time Creux undertook small expeditions to assess the extent of east coast settlement, particularly in the area to the south of the Spelonken where many refugees had settled under or near Modjadji.[22] During the winter of 1883 Henri Berthoud undertook the first of a series of voyages of discovery in order to familiarise the mission, and the world in general, with the peoples and geography of the area between the Zoutpansberg and the sea. This expedition revealed that immigrants from the east coast had settled all along the Levubu river from its confluence with the Limpopo to the Spelonken and confirmed the existence of Gwamba communities in the Haernertsberg and as far south as Sekukuniland. Berthoud portrayed the settlement of East Coasters in the Transvaal as a long peninsula, stretching along the Levubu and the edge of the escarpment, separated from the coastal "homeland" by the dry and largely uninhabited Lowveld.[23] A second expedition two years later led Berthoud to estimate the size of the "Gwamba nation" as three to four million and confirm earlier hypotheses that its homeland lay in the area west of 31 degrees east and between 27 degrees south and 18 degrees south, roughly from the Zulu border to the Zambezi.[24]

In 1884 Paul Berthoud wrote that "several dialects are to be found in the Gwamba language, and their variations are sometimes very remarkable".[25] The following year his brother Henri divided the language into eight branches, each of which possessed "its own territory and particular dialect". He stressed that these dialects were "sufficiently different

from one another to need an interpreter" and recommended that the mission concentrate its energies on the central Djonga area, where Yosefa Mhalamhala had established his mission. This was because the Gwamba dialect used by the mission in the Spelonken was "basically sidzonga" with the addition of terms borrowed from Zulu, Sesotho and English. The language of the Lourenco Marques area (Ronga) was also sufficiently close to Gwamba to allow evangelization to begin, but linguistic differences precluded the spread of the mission into the Maputo area south of the Tembe river. As the term Gwamba was unknown outside the Spelonken, Henri Berthoud recommended that the mission abandon the term and replace it with the widely accepted genericism, Tonga/Thonga.[26] In 1887-88 two missions were established on the coast, one at Lourenco Marques under Paul Berthoud and the other 30 kilometres north-east of the town at Rikatla. This division of the mission field into coastal and Spelonken sections, divided by the wide, arid Lowveld and an international border, was to cause political tensions within the church. It was also to lead to a serious questioning of the hegemonic role within the mission field of the language defined and recorded in the Spelonken.

Henri Berthoud's final expedition, in anticipation of the mission's expansion into the Gazaland area north of the Limpopo, was undertaken in 1891. After visiting the Gaza capital at Mandlakazi on the lower Limpopo, Berthoud readjusted his earlier classification of people north of the Limpopo who spoke what he increasingly referred to as Thonga rather than Gwamba.[27] The classification by Henri Berthoud

of the Thonga as a linguistic group divisible into eight sub-groups defined the Swiss mission field and was popularised by Henri Junod who used it as the basic unit of study in his Life of a South African Tribe. As the historical roots of the Thonga [Tsonga] as an ethnic group straddling southern Mozambique, south-eastern Zimbabwe and the north-eastern Transvaal may be traced to this linguistic classification, Berthoud's taxonomy is worthy of closer analysis. As he was the first to admit, it was far from scientifically watertight.

The parameters of Henri Berthoud's linguistic classification were not altogether new. Frederick Elton who had explored the lower Limpopo in 1871, had claimed that the entire area stretching north of Zululand to the Busi river was occupied by the Amatongas who "resembled each other in manners and custom (and) variation in dialect".[28] But St. Vincent Erskine, the great explorer of southern Mozambique had immediately rejected these attempts "to define the limits of the Amatongas, Butongas, Tongas etc. These are not tribal appellations - (Elton) might as well try to define the limits of the 'Kafirs'. Tonga simply means something which is not Zulu." Erskine believed that the different chiefdoms of southern Mozambique, what he called "tribes or nations, were at one time and in fact are now as distant from each other as the English and French and can understand each other's language as little as those European nations can."[29]

Berthoud never claimed that his linguistic divisions were scientifically defined. The Ronga in the south, he believed,

"properly speaking do not form a specific tribe, and their name is a geographical designation rather than an ethnographic one. They could be considered to be a transition between the Thonga to the north of Lourenco Marques and the (southern) tribes of Tembe and Mapouta". Hlanganou to the south around Lydenburg and Tswa in the extreme north were linguistically sufficiently distinct to be classified as dialects. The Gwamba of the Spelonken he considered a special case as they were a heterogeneous linguistic group composed of refugees. But "all the other Thonga", although exhibiting regional differences, "speak a language sufficiently homogeneous that our books can be read and understood from the Sabi to Lourenco Marques." Berthoud stressed the mobility of oral language and opposed the view, prevalent in the rising tide of late 19th century European nationalism, that a linguistic relationship was an expression of a shared social, and latent political, unity. "The Baloyi clan", he wrote, "can serve as new proof of the falseness of the system that determines race according to their languages (for it was) a Tshwana tribe that transformed itself into a Thonga one and to-day speaks Gwamba."[30]

It can only be imagined that Berthoud's information about the languages of the coastal plain came from hearsay as he had neither the time to travel throughout the length and breadth of southern Mozambique nor to enter into comparative linguistic studies. Furthermore the nomenclature he used to distinguish the Thonga linguistic sub-groups indicates a false degree of separation and cohesion, for most

genericisms were merely terms of exclusion applied by people to neighbours from whom they wished to distinguish themselves. They were not categories of linguistic inclusion. Berthoud probably derived the terms that he applied to his linguistic categories from his assistant, Timothy Mandlati, whose home lay on the lower Limpopo, for they referred to Rongas (easterners), Nwalungus (northerners) and Djongas (southerners).[31] It is obvious that Berthoud's dialect zones were not defined according to linguistic criteria; they were created in an extremely subjective manner and their borders, like those of the Gwamba language itself, were entirely a social construct.

The social disorder presented by the welter of different chiefdoms and languages found by the Swiss missionaries, could no longer be ascribed, as during an earlier age, to the will of God. Late 19th century Swiss missionaries were the product of an age obsessed by theories of causation and origins; they were part of the intellectual wing of a class whose economic triumphs were deeply rooted in a belief in logic and rationalism. The missionaries, as much as their industrial peers, were the children of Descartes and Positivism.

* * *

Europeans could not describe the wholly new, in this case African societies, other than in terms of their own structure of knowledge. It was only by employing pre-existing codes of analysis and understanding that Europeans

were able to make sense of the bewildering mass of detail with which they were confronted. African society was consequently seen through a prism or filter of late 19th century evolutionist and Cartesian thought. Thus what we are dealing with in much of early European discourse is a perceived, not objective reality and it is in these terms that we must understand the rationale of ethno-linguistic classification. Many of the givens and truths perceived by the Swiss missionaries as scientifically incontrovertible were, in fact, social constructs whose roots may be traced to 19th century European codes of thought.

Social Darwinism told the missionary pioneers that the African societies around them were at an early stage of human evolution - roughly equal, in terms of development, to the gentes or clans of pre-feudal Europe. It was thus self evident and in the natural order of things that African societies exhibited, however hidden, the same structure as their early European counterparts. The missionaries used the social terminology of the European classicists; like their pre-feudal German counterparts, the different African "clans" made up the "nation" or "tribe". It was the work of European classicists who believed the German clans to have passed through a matrilineal phase, that led Junod to ascribe the importance of the mother's brother to a hypothetical matrilineal stage in Thonga prehistory.[32] Perhaps most importantly, African linguistic differences were explained in terms of a variant of the European volkewanderung thesis.

Contemporary European philologists and classicists employed the notion of vast pre historic population movements to explain European language differences. These ideas were introduced into southern Africa by the German linguist Wilhelm Bleek who propagated the idea of a southward drift, during pre-historic times, of a language group to whom he applied the neologism Bantu. The concept of a colonization of the subcontinent by these Bantu-speakers was popularized in the 1890s by the colonial historian G.M. Theal. This theory also came to influence other people, such as the Swiss missionaries, who used it to explain the linguistic differences, and geographically diverse myths of origin, of the Gwamba. From within this conceptual box, they hypothesized that foreign invadors, on entering the coastal area in the 15th and 16th centuries, had blended their languages with that of earlier, Gwamba-speaking immigrants.[33] The roots of the Gwamba language thus appeared lost in prehistory. This belief in the primordialness of language dovetailed with the writings of Herder and Fichte who taught that language was the major determinant of modes and patterns of thought; people speaking a common language formed a people, sharing a national or tribal ethos. The Swiss missionary anthropologist, Henri Junod, invoked language as the single, historically constant and shared cultural form defining what he variously called the Thonga [Tsonga] tribe, people or nation. Referring to the linguistic sub-groups delineated by Berthoud, Junod wrote

> The Ronga of Delagoa Bay do not believe that they are any more related to the Khosa of the Nkomati and the Hlengwe of the Limpopo than the Zulu or the Sotho and on closer examination one quickly notices that all the clans forming the Thonga people have in common only a

> few customs tending to disappear. The only thing that they possess in common is a language that is characteristic, old and rich. The unity of this tribe is very much more linguistic than national.[34]

Elsewhere Junod wrote that "the Thonga language ought to be considered as the oldest element in the life of the tribe ... the great bond which bound the Thonga clans together in past centuries". By purifying the language and recreating the original, proto-Thonga, scholars would arrive at the ethos of the tribe. "Beneath the manifold manifestations of the Life of the Tribe," Junod believed, "the ethnographer tries to discover its soul."[35]

The division of the mission field along linguistic lines exacerbated the proclivity with which people linked language to cultural stereotype. The French and German-speaking missionaries were quick to define the social characteristics of <u>their</u> people. The difference between the Gwamba [Tsonga] and Batsoetla [Venda] was conceptualized in starkly oppositional terms, often reminiscent of Franco-German rivalries. To the Berliners the difference was comparable to that between the French and Germans, to the Swiss the two "races" were comparable to the Athenians and Spartans. Berthoud believed that the Germans disdained the uncentralized Gwambas and admired the authority and despotism of the Basoetla/Venda. He himself thought the Basoetla to be cannibalistic and hostile to the gospel.[36]

It is in this light that one has to decode the discourse of a man like Paul Berthoud who in 1884 wrote that

> As a rule a large tribe has not, as such, any proper and general name. But the tribe being divided into a certain number of clans, each one of these smaller communities goes by its proper name; where it is encumbent on the foreigner, either black or white , to apply a generic name to all the people and clans which belong to the same tribe. The propriety then, of such a generic name, has in its being related to the special character of the tribe, and in its being taken from the tribe's own language. This is the case with the name "Ma-Gwamba".[37]

The point is that by the early 1880s Gwamba was not just the term used to describe a hypothetical linguistic group: it had become the name of a people conceptualized in the European mind, because of their perceived linguistic affiliation, as a tribe or nation. By imposing their European world view and logic on the confusing array of peoples surrounding them, the missionaries had created political and linguistic categories that were derived more from their specific epistemology than from any local social reality.

Henri Berthoud's explorations had opened a linguistic pandora's box. His response to this new linguistic disarray had been to create order and logic by classifying, as dialects or patois, the coastal conglomerate of languages enclosed within the linguistic borders defined by the American Board missionaries (Zulu in the south and Tswa in the north) and the Berlin missionaries (Pedi and Venda in the west). Simultaneously he took Gwamba, the vehicular language of the Spelonken and lifted it to the status of the standardized language of a "nation" (ethnic group) that included all the "clans" (chiefdoms) stretching from the Zulu border to the northern Sabi river. The inspiration and

terminology is clearly European classical antiquity. The uniformity and standardisation of Gwamba was then defined in opposition to written "foreign languages", in this case Zulu and Pedi (north Sotho) and oral "dialects" and "patois" such as Ronga, Hlanganou and Tswa.

Linguistic work was accompanied by a discourse on the "standardization", "systematization" and "purification" of Gwamba. This indicates that the missionaries believed in the existence of a standard linguistic form that could be purified. It also implies that the purification and standardisation of language, the prime historic cultural marker, would strengthen Gwamba self-identity. But as we have seen, this discourse was a fiction based on European-derived ideas on the classification and origin of languages. 'Codification' and 'standardization' did not mean the homogenizing of dialects on the basis of some mythical proto-Tsonga standard, but rather the imposition and adoption of Thonga/Gwamba as the tribal/ethnic language and the relegation of other (oral) languages to the status of dialects and patois. In this way a lingua franca that had been created to serve the mission's early heterogeneous Spelonken congregation became a "national" language. Through the prism of 19th century evolutionary thought the Thonga clans constituted a 'nation' or 'tribe' because they, like the pre-feudal German clans, shared a common language.

This linguistic taxonomy was part of an intellectual heritage, influenced by Positivism and Cartesian logic, that the missionaries brought with them to Africa. It was

essentially a way of making sense of the world; the triumph of order and reason over chaos and disorder. Linguistic classification was merely part of the science of taxonomy that brought order and understanding to a world becoming increasingly disordered, as much through the breakdown of religion as through the discoveries of travellers and scientists. Classification meant imposing order on a multiplicity of facts through the discovery of constants in a profusion of variables. But as with all ideological expressions, that of linguistic taxonomy had a very real material base.

The reasons for the development of one written Thonga language were very different from similar movements in Europe where, for economic and political reasons, a triumphant industrial bourgeoisie imposed its ('national') language on provincial linguistic minorities. The emergence of African written languages like Tsonga was not, as in Europe, a product of the class needs of an emerging bourgeoisie. Unlike the European bourgeoisie, the people defined as Tsonga-speakers had no need for a common language; their pre-capitalist economic activities were too restricted and localized to require the development of a common language that would facilitiate and defend their commercial transactions. Instead the delineation and development of the Thonga language was the product of the evangelizing drive of foreign missionaries. Thus whereas in Europe it was the vanquished who learnt the language of the victor, in Africa it was the victor, in the shape of the various branches of the colonial state, who learnt the

language of the defeated.[38] But because of their power, the victors were able to reshape and adapt African languages - which had a number of important political and social consequences.

The Swiss missionaries saw the Tsonga language as a means of spreading the gospel within their linguistically-defined mission field. But in addition to its utility as a means of communication, the language soon acquired a crucial political significance. A linguistic monopoly gave the Swiss an important competitive edge over other missions in their drive to save African souls.[39] Their Bible reader, the buku, was a powerful instrument of evangelisation. People were impressed by reading as a means of communication, particularly when this was in an idiom with which they had some familiarity. Bible readings immediately resulted in conversions to Christianity. As the only example of vernacular literature, the buku was in great demand by people who had managed to acquire a modicum of literacy in the Lourenco Marques area or as migrant workers in south Africa. There was also a constant wish to provide a literature for, and link-up, the numerous scattered Gwamba Christian communities that had been "fertilized" by migrant workers converted in the British colonies.[40] Literacy allowed the mission to spread without incurring evangelisation costs and appealed to converts as it allowed them some independent interpretation of the Christian faith.

Hymns written and sung in Gwamba/Thonga were a particularly important means of evangelization in a non-literate society

whose songs were a crucial political medium. Based on European folk melodies, such as those of the American composer Sankey, they were readily accepted into the oral culture of the African population. With their Gwamba/Thonga texts they spread far and wide, introducing people to the Christian ethic, and the Swiss Mission and its language, producing new converts and reinforcing and encouraging the faithful. Hymns were a vital arm in the struggle against the old order; the chief was largely replaced by the missionary as the father of his people and his God, rather than the ancestors with whom the chief mediated, became the invisible power.

Gwamba or Thonga as a written language was the foundation of the unity linking the Swiss Mission's growing number of far-flung stations and outposts. But Gwamba/Thonga was not just a means of communication, it was to be the basis upon which a "new society in the heart of the tribal bantu" would "progress in the collective spiritual life".[41] The expansion along the same route of the Thonga language, writing and Protestantism, "the printing of the word of God" as Henri Berthoud expressed it, would lead directly to "a new people emerging from darkness".[42] The linguistic revolution set in motion by the diffusion of Thonga would be the basis of an intellectual revolution. "Thonga grammar was elaborate, logical and on the whole regular", it would "train the(African) mind to understand the process of thought." Sentence parsing was "a very good exercise which will accustom their minds to analyse and classify".[43] By working in a written language structured by regularities of grammar

and orthography, Africans would come to think, and perceive of the world, like Europeans.

The missionaries not only controlled the written language but, in a manner that combined endearment, loyalty and possession, they almost owned it; Gwamba/Thonga was "our" language with "our orthography".[44] A written language provided a new vocabulary, with which not only to express Biblical, educational and liturgical ideas, but also widesweeping new concepts. Of immediate importance was the introduction of terms like Gwamba/Thonga, Ronga and Tswa to express the existence, at the conceptual level, of linguistic and political groups ('tribes', 'nations') that had never existed in the mental world of the societies upon which they were imposed. The Christian background of Thonga authors, all of whom were missionaries to 1938, and the monopoly held by the mission and later the government over the publication of Thonga books, crucially shaped and determined what Africans read.[45] Printing itself was of central importance as it made tangible a community that otherwise could only be imagined. It allowed disparate peoples, for the first time, to visualize themselves as a community.[46] The control exercised by missionaries over vocabularies and later dictionaries gave them enormous power over the conceptual world of the "new society", the "new people emerging from darkness". Thonga soon became the linguistic medium of the local African elite, many of whose members were later to find it beneficial to take on and expound a Thonga identity.

The missionary linguists constructed a hierarchy of languages in which they divided "Thonga", the written language worthy of study, from what they defined as (subordinate) "dialects" and "patois". The importance of this difference becomes clearer if we take a modern dictionary definition of the term dialect, "a regional, social or subordinate variety of a language, usually differing distinctively from the standard or original language" and patois" a provincial dialect other than the central, standard or literary dialect".[47] To the missionary linguists Thonga was "the standard or original language" or "central, standard or literary dialect" and they often used the term standardization" or "purification" for what was in effect the construction of the Thonga [Tsonga] language. For the missionaries were of course the creators of the standards or givens which produced simultaneously not only a language but also dialects and patois. This linguistic hierarchy was imbued with a spatial political identity as Thonga was conceived of as the ethnic, or as they called it the "tribal" or"national" language. It was the pivot or standard whose status was fixed by surrounding regional variations and ambivalences defined as "dialects" and "patois". Under the influence of the German philologists and nationalists it was believed that to purify the language meant ridding it of its foreign influences, which were then relegated to "dialects" and "patois". Once the language was reduced to its original state, the identity of the tribe/nation would be able to reawaken and re-emerge from the unconscious . In this way linguistic differences took on a core-periphery relationship. Henri Berthoud knew that the "dialects would be forced ipso facto into the position of patois destined to disappear with time".[47] While oral languages were highly mobile and dynamic and observed no frontiers in space or time, a written language was bound by rules that delineated and fixed it both spatially and historically. Thonga was an instrument of modernisation, construed by the missionaries in terms of Christianity, in contradistinction to the atavistic "dialects" and "patois" that embodied all the beliefs and superstitions of "pagan society". The dialects were then conceived of as the historical base out of which grew the national language, a natural process rather than a social construct. Homogeneity replaced heterogeneity, unity and reason replaced disunity and confusion.

While Thonga was the product of the mission, the subordinate dialects and patois were linked to the chief, the embodiment of the old order and the major barrier to evangelization. The Tsonga print language provided the missionaries with a means of subverting the cultural dominance of the chiefs. The songs linked to the chiefdom were assailed by Christian hymns and oral language was gradually pushed into the background. The grammar and orthography of a written language provided the reader with a stable and enduring cultural marker independent of the chiefs, the printed word took on the power of non-perishable truth while at the same time providing people, whose economic and social horizons were rapidly expanding, with a means of communication and expression. A written language opened up a new conceptual world. The power of the written word was much respected. A powerful coastal chief, when first shown the buku declared, "Ah! This is the book they spoke about! Look after it. Thus we are conquered by this book alone!"[48] In a similar vein, Henri Junod recounts that

> One day one of my neighbours was arranging to start for Bilene to 'follow his goods;' he came and requested me to give him a letter. "What for? Your debtors do not know how to read and I do not know anything about your affairs." 'It does not matter', said he. The important point is that I should have a paper in my hand. They will be afraid. They will think that I come from the White people with their authority....' I believe the sight of the mysterious paper was not without influence in the transactions that ended in the recovery of his property.[49]

Thonga rapidly came to take on a civic sensitivity that extended beyond the isolated mission station. Stemming from the work of the Physiocrats, it was generally believed by the missionaries that language was the fundamental cultural marker;

that words were the basis of the social relations linking people and the prism through which they perceived their world. A common language thus indicated a common culture. The linguistic opposition between language and dialect was thus a social expression of the contradiction between Christian and Pagan or between those who accepted a restructured view of the world and the stagnant perception of the traditionalists. It increasingly embodied the difference between high/popular culture and élite/masses. But at ground-level it remained the distinction between inclusion and exclusion.

For those excluded as <u>them</u> to become <u>us</u>, they had to subordinate their dialect or patois to the central, dominant language. This entailed a restructured perception of the world and a shift of political loyalty away from the chief and towards the mission and, in the long term, to those people who shared a common constant, the Thonga language. This transformation was linked firmly to modernization or the process that determined that the benefits of speaking the language surpassed those of speaking the dialect/patois. Thus the division or cut-off point between a language and a dialect/patois was defined socially rather than scientifically. However, these man-made linguistic borders were legitimated by being portrayed as the product of a science whose objective criteria, the laws of grammar and orthography associated with the pre-historic proto-Thonga [Tsonga], had been discovered in much the same way as microbes, river mouths or constellations. It was again their 19th century world view that led the missionaries to believe not that they had created a linguistic category, but that they had "<u>recognized</u> the Thonga as a tribe".[50] The

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language and associated 'tribe' (ethnic group) had always existed in the unconscious; they merely needed to be reasserted and reawoken

* * * *

By the early 1890s Thonga was gradually emerging as the literary language of the north-eastern Transvaal and southern Mozambique. In 1891 Henri Berthoud finished a reading primer ~~that~~ he had been working on for the previous two years. Enormous frustrations and considerable delays were generated by debates between the missionaries over questions of orthography. Translations were only sent for publication once they had been accepted by both the Spelonken and Coastal mission conferences. As in reality there was no single language linking the disparate mission stations, linguistic problems had often to be referred to experts in Berlin or Geneva or to the mission headquarters in Lausanne which oversaw printing. The impatience of fieldworkers like Henri Berthoud, who saw their evangelical work restricted as their precious translations disappeared into a bureaucratic fog are attested to by the frequent acerbic letters sent to mission headquarters.[51] Because bible translations were communally undertaken by all the stations in the Swiss mission field, the Thonga New Testament took eight years to appear. An ABC finished in 1890 was only published in 1894 and an elementary school reader prepared by Paul Berthoud took almost seven years to be published. These problems, together with the social and political criteria that had given birth to the Thonga language were to bring about its division when in 1893 the coastal branch of the Swiss mission called for the establishment of a separate Ronga language.

Dissent over the policy of linguistic centralization had first been voiced by the Coastal mission at the end of 1889 but developed into a major debate with the arrival of Henri Berthoud's reading primer on the coast. Although at first accepted with reservations, in 1893 the coastal section of the mission repudiated what they called the Gwamba dialect and called for the establishment of a separate Ronga language within the context of the Thonga language group. The major proponent of this division was Henri Junod. He was initially of the opinion that "the dialect of the north and that of the south were different, even very different - but there existed sufficiently common expressions in the one and in the other, that the books, reedited with the addition of local words, would be understood in the north as in the south." But after further study he concluded,

> I do not think it possible nor desirable to proceed with a single book i.e. that of shigwamba. The two dialects are so essentially different that I am of the opinion that our mission in the Ronga country will not be able to develop in a normal manner until it possesses its own books, books in shi-ronga.[52]

After a long analysis of the differences between the two "dialects", Junod detailed the socio-political basis of the question. The floundering coastal church was being rejected because its evangelists spoke a foreign dialect, "a special Christian language". This caused the local people to call them deprecatingly ba-Kalanga or foreigners from the north. Instead of looking to the Swiss Mission, local converts were attracted to the Wesleyan church whose African evangelist, Robert Mashaba, had been raised in the local dialect. While

working in Port Elizabeth, Mashaba had been converted to Methodism and, after a Lovedale education, had returned to Lourenço Marques where he undertook mission work, established a school and, in 1893, helped the local British consul at Lourenco Marques edit a 31-page wordlist.[53] He had also started on a number of books and had produced a collection of hymns in the local dialect. Alarmed by the growth of these Wesleyan rivals who were not so much as accompanied by a white missionary, Junod claimed that Paul Berthoud had not realized the extent of the difference between the languages because he had been surrounded by Gwamba-speaking evangelists and because the Christians in Lourenço Marques considered it polite to use Gwamba when addressing the missionaries. Junod carried the Coastal Mission with him and in 1893 they decided to create a literature in what they referred to as the Ronga idiom.[54] In order to avoid further time-consuming debate Junod then circumvented the mission hierarchy by publishing a Ronga reading primer at his own expense.[55] In this work, published in 1894, he referred to Ronga as a dialect. Two years later, when he published a Ronga grammar with the aid of the Portuguese government, he used the term 'dialect' interchangeably with that of "language". This book outlined "the laws of the Ronga language" and provided a short vocabulary, conversation manual and an appendix on Ronga folktales. Junod's unilateral declaration of independence of Ronga from Gwamba was driven home when in 1896 he published a collection of folktales and the following year a long anthropological monograph on the Ronga.[56] Junod had never travelled north of the Nkomati and

hence made few changes to Berthoud's linguistic classification of that area. The area he knew best was Lourenço Marques and it is the debate over the status of Ronga that best shows the arbitrary nature of linguistic classification.[57]

Henri Berthoud saw Ronga as a transitional linguistic group with numerous variations, midway between Djonga and Maputo. Junod distinguished only between the people of chief Manaba in the extreme south, who spoke a mixture of Ronga and Zulu, and stated that the "real Ronga" was that spoken by the clans living around Lourenço Marques who claimed Zulu origin. He noted that translating the Ten Commandments from Gwamba to Ronga required the changing of 130-50 of the 400 words. Of 150 pronominal forms, 70 changed entirely from Gwamba to Ronga. The Portuguese were also aware of the linguistic differences in the Lourenço Marques area and used a shibboleth to distinguish between friendly and foreign Africans who, picked up on the streets of Lourenço Marques, were press-ganged into their colonial army.[58] Through his 1897 monograph, Junod portrayed the Ronga as a culturally homogeneous group, easilly distinguishable from the more northerly Thonga clans. It was only later, probably under mission pressure, that he redefined the Thonga"tribe" to include both the Ronga and what he referred to as"the northern clans." Berthoud completely rejected this cultural classification. It became obvious in the ensuing debate that the division between Ronga and Gwamba/Thonga was a product of the rivalry between the Spelonken and coastal branches of the Swiss Mission and that their two linguistic representatives, Henri Berthoud and Henri Junod, represented the two poles of contemporary linguistic classification

Junod argued entirely from a scientific perspective. He believed that an "almost mathematical" relationship existed between the different "branches of the African linguistic tree"

and that linguistics was a branch of science in much the same way as geology or palaeontology.[59] But at base was the problem specific to the coastal mission; their evangelic work could not progress or compete with the Wesleyans without using the local speech form. Nor were they competitive in terms of successful evangelization with their colleagues who held the linguistic monopoly in the Spelonken.

Henri Berthoud criticized Junod's formulation of a separate Ronga language from an entirely pragmatic perspective. A double literature would drastically increase the costs of printing. It would divert to translating and editing, time and energy that missionaries should invest in evangelical work. A double literature would lead to a "schism" in the mission by driving a wedge between the African congregations in the Spelonken and on the coast. Perhaps Berthoud unconsciously associated a multiplicity of languages with the biblical myth of the tower of Babel as a punishment and that one unifying language would erase this fault or crime. Perhaps more conscious, but left unsaid, was the fact that Ronga's challenge to Gwamba was synonymous with the coastal mission's challenge to the dominance of the parent mission in the Spelonken. Berthoud's discourse highlighted the importance of social criteria and politics in the classification of languages. Junod's linguistic constructs, he believed, were pseudo-scientific and their origins were as artificial as were those of the Gwamba. There were no objectively scientific grounds for the creation of a separate written language. If each mission station were to devise its own written dialect the mission field would become irretrievably fragmented.

Gwamba was similar to the language spoken 60 kilometres north of Lourenço Marques and was not much more different from Junod's 'pure ronga' than the language spoken south of Lourenço Marques. Its similarities with ronga and the other Thonga dialects was sufficient for it to be accepted, through its role as the language of schooling and literacy, as a language unifying the church. But although Berthoud's primary concern was the future unity of the church, he was also aware of the implications for the local people of a double literature. It was one thing for missionaries like Henri Junod to publish scientific linguistic studies on a language that had no documents but it was another thing

> from a missionary point of view to turn this language into a language with a right to survive, to exaggerate its importance and create a scission within the nation and the church ... 'Linguistic knowledge' and science, do they have the right to cheapen the spiritual condition of the natives for whose sould we work? What are our rights and duties towards the different dialects of one language and the natives who speak it? What will be the results of one or other decision on the future of these people and the mission work that is undertaken amongst them? Because they had not considered these questions the missionaries of South Africa, to mention them alone, have taken several wrong turnings and have slowed down, without a doubt, the advance of God's kingdom and the unification of Christian missions. There has been too much personal chauvinism and the wish to see one's own particular dialect triumph.[60]

Berthoud recalled that the Sesotho of the Paris Mission Society had played a central role in unifying the Basotho nation, "a nation that was far from possessing the homogeneity that it has since acquired." In the eastern Transvaal the Berlin Mission Society had abandoned the use of [Sesotho], and the language of "the Pedi of Lydenburg" had been accepted over a wide area, rich in particularistic dialects, as the single

written language. This successful imposition of one literature could be contrasted with the situation in the Zoutpansberg. There the BMS complained of the disunity resulting from the two separate elementary readers, compiled by the early missionaries, and from the limited but successful implantation of Pedi.

Henri Berthoud's view of the future was entirely shaped by the European experience where languages like High German, Jacobin French and Castilean had played a central role in the creation of the German, French and Spanish nations. To underline the importance of a single literature and the validity of historical comparison, Berthoud recounted an anecdote told to him by a plaintive Berlin missionary. "One day", Mr Gottschelling had said, "five of us German missionaries from different provinces, met and each told a story in his (German) dialect; we did not understand each other, but despite that we have only one Bible, that of Luther, for all of Germany."[61] In a similar vein Berthoud warned that as the Swiss Mission expanded its work north of Lourenço Marques using Thonga/Gwamba as its linguistic medium, Ronga would be reduced to the status of Basque in France; an isolated, "foreign language spoken by an antagonistic ethnic minority."[62] The only positive result stemming from the linguistic split between Ronga and Gwamba/Thonga was, he felt, that it brought to a halt the interminable debates between the Spelonken and coastal mission stations.

In January 1898 Henri Berthoud attempted to reach a compromise with Junod and his supporters. In this he had the backing of the Spelonken mission and the three African evangelists who

had helped establish the mission on the coast. He proposed that the Djonga dialect of the Nkomati-Limpopo area of southern Mozambique be accepted as the Thonga language and that both Ronga and Gwamba be abandoned by the mission. But by then the coastal mission had outgrown the Spelonken and replied that if one literature were needed, it should be Ronga. They considered Berthoud's unifying language to be 'utopian' and repeated that to abandon the local Ronga dialect would slow down their evangelizing and disadvantage them in their competition with Wesleyans, Ethiopians and the newly-arrived Anglicans, all of whom used Ronga as their medium of instruction.[63] The secession of Ronga from Gwamba was confirmed by a shift in the support of Henri Berthoud's brother Paul, the head of the coastal mission. Paul Berthoud had on his arrival on the coast initially used Gwamba but by 1896 had become convinced of the necessity to employ Ronga as the local mission language. But he entirely lacked his brother's foresight when he wrote that the double literature would not create a schism between the two mission fields and that "perhaps one day when the tribe is unified (as in Lesotho at present), that is to say, a long time from now, we might be able to abandon one of the two literatures."[64]

The debate over the two literatures ended when Henri Berthoud contracted yellow fever and died in 1904. After spending several years in the Transvaal, Junod published in 1907 an Elementary Grammar of the Thonga/Shangaan language. Two years later he added his short grammar to the vocabulary edited by Charles Chatelain, upon which Henri Berthoud had been working during the last decade of his life.[65] This splendidly Swiss piece of concensual politics was rounded off when, the following year, Berthoud's supporters edited and published his posthumous

Shangaan Grammar. These two works marked the final displacement of the word 'Gwamba' by the term 'Thonga/Shangaan'. Within a few years distinct Ronga and Thonga/Shangaan languages, within the Thonga language group, had been established on the basis of separate grammars and orthographies.[66] Ronga as an independent language no longer competed with Thonga/Shangaan. But another threat to the Ronga language was soon to emerge from a new quarter. Portuguese was pushed by colonial administrators and assimilationist African nationalists grouped around the newspaper Brado Africano. They saw the European language as a means of social and political integration and discouraged the teaching of Ronga in schools. Once again Junod took up the cudgels to defend Ronga against "stupidity and short-term utilitarianism."[67]

The concept of a single, unificatory Thonga language flickered on for at least another five decades, perhaps most forcefully in the mind of Henri Junod's son Henri-Philippe. In 1934 he wrote

> Unhappily (Henri Junod) did not have a precise idea of the extent of the (Tsonga) country. Which is what brought him to defend the Ronga dialect and to make it a written language. If Henri Junod had been able to understand the problem in its entirety, if he had been able, as a true intellectual, to pay more attention to the observations of his northern colleagues, particularly those of the late regretted Henri Berthoud, if he had been able to verify through extensive voyages, like the latter, the information given by the natives, it is probable that we would to-day have one single language. In fact the passage of time allows us to pay homage to Henri Berthoud. He had understood that the Ba-Ronga only formed a small part of the great Tsonga tribe, and that this eccentric dialect could not reasonably be allowed to grow at the expense of the fundamental unity of a language spoken by more than one million individuals.[68]

Noble sentiments that confirm the importance of socio-political

criteria in the definition and classification of African languages. Henri Berthoud's prophecies have been borne out. Ninety years after the debate over the separate languages, Ronga and Tsonga/Shangaan have become the central cultural markers in an emerging ethnicity. By 1971, almost ninety years after Berthoud's refutation of the existence of the Ronga as a discrete group, an American anthropologist was able to write that

> The Ronga are a tribe because they have a delimited territory, a common language, common political structure, cultural unity; and an awareness of themselves as a distinct group.[69]

Samora Machel described how, in the early phases of the struggle for national liberation, men arrived at the Frelimo camp at Nachingwea in Tanzania "as Makondas, Makuas, Nyanjas, Manikas, Shangaans, Ajanas, Rongas or Senas, and left as Mozambicans." He described colonial Lourenço Marques as "a centre of conflict between ethnic groups and races...

> ...between blacks: conflicts between Shangaans and Rongas. Conflicts between Shangaans and Rongas, who despise the Vatswa...[70]

Ethnic differences whose roots, although certainly not responsibility, may be traced to an obscure linguistic debate between two Swiss missionaries.

1 See particularly Leroy Vail (ed.) .....(London ...). See also J-L. Amselle et Elikia M'bokolo (eds.) Au Coeur de l'Ethnie: Ethnies, tribalisme et etat en Afrique (Paris, 1985).

2 From an extensive literature I cite only those volumes that have guided my research. M. de Certeau, D. Julia and J. Revel, Une Politique de la Langue. La Revolution Francaise et les Patoise (Paris, 1975); Tzvetan Todorov, La Conquete de l'Amerique: La Question de l'autre (Paris, 1982); M. de Certeau L'Ecriture de la Histoire (Paris, 1975) ch. 5; Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: an archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York, 1970). But for a chronological treatment of the establishment of written African languages in South Africa, see C.M. Doke and D.J. Cole, contribution to the History of Bantu linguistics (Johannesburg, 1961). A far more analytical treatment is Johannes Fabian, Language and Colonial Power: the Appropriation of Swahili in the former Belgian Congo 1880-1938, (Cambridge, 1986).

3 Terence O. Ranger, "Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika: the Invention of Ethnicity in Zimbabwe" in Vail (ed.) .....

4 H.A. Junod, Ernest Creux et Paul Berthoud (Lausanne, 1934) 81.

5 Ibid, 40; Swiss Mission Archive, Lausanne (SMA) 8.10.B Paul Berthoud to Council 18 Sept. 1873.

6 Junod, Creux et Berthoud, 42.

7 H.P. Junod, Henri-Alexandre Junod: Missionaire et Savant 1863-1934 (Lausanne, 1934), 81.

8 See also Guatamalan Indians, who use the term ladino to qualify "all that is foreign to the indigenous culture and civilization", J.C. Buhrer and C. Levinsohn, Le Guatemala et ses populations (Brussels, 1980), 141-42.

9 M. et Mme. P. Berthoud, Lettres Missionaires (Lausanne, 1900), 246.

10 SMA 8.10.B Paul Berthoud to Council 30 Sept., 1875.

11 Berthoud, Lettres Missionaires, 334.

12 Ibid 81.

13 SMA 8.10.B Paul Berthoud to Council 14 March 1878.

14 Berthoud, Lettres Missionaires, 259.

15 SMA 8.10.B Henri Berthoud to Council, 6 June 1889.

16 SMA 8.11.B Paul Berthoud to Council, 2 September, 1886; Junod, Creux et Berthoud, 55.

17 SMA 8.10.B Henri Berthoud to Council 17 May 1882.

18 Ibid, Paul Berthoud to Council, 20 September 1881.

19 Henri Berthoud, "Quelque remarques sur la famille des langues Bantou et sur la langue Tzonga en particulier" in Xe Congres International des Orientalistes, 1894 (Leiden, 1896), 173.

20 SMA 8.10.B Henri Berthoud to Council 25 February 1882.

21 Jan van Butselaar, Africains, Missionaires et Colonialistes: les Origins de l'eglise Presbyterienne du Mozambique (Mission Suisse) 1880-96 (Leiden 1984) 167.

22 SMA 8.11.C Ernest Creux to Council 20 January, November, 1880.

23 SMA 8.10.B Henri Berthoud to Council, 9 October, 1883.

24 SMA 1255/B "Rapport sur l'expedition chez Magud", 6 October, 1885.

25 Paul Berthoud "Grammatical Note on the Gwamba language in South Africa", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 16, 1884, 47.

26 To the south of Delagoa Bay lay the Maputo, to the west and north of the Bay the Ronga while the Djongas occupied the area between the Nkomati and Olifants rivers. The Baloyi or Nwalungu lived to the north of the Olifants river while to the west, the Hlanganos straddled both sides of the Lebombos. To the north of the Limpopo the Chopi and Makwakwa lived along the coast. The Hlengwe lived to their west and what he called theTsonga (Inhambane Tonga) to their north. See SMA 1255/B "Rapport sur l'expedition chez Magud", 6 October, 1885. On the present-day Tsonga dialects, see E.J.M. Baumbach, Introduction to the Speech Sounds and Speech Sound Changes of Tsonga (Pretoria, 1974).

27 He reclassified the Makwakwa and added the Malouleke as a sub-group of the Nwanati; dropped the classification Tsonga and, no doubt under the influence of the American Board missionaries at Inhambane, conflated the Hlengwe with the Tswa (Tsou); the central group, the Hlavi, was linguistically closely related to the Nwanati.

28 Natal Mercury, 10 October, 1871.

29 St. V, Erskine, "Journal of a Voyage to Umzila - king of Gaza, 1871-72" in Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, 259.

30 SMA. 548/D Henri Berthoud to Mission secretary, 14 December, 1899. See also note 20.

31 SMA 543/F P. Loze to Council, 2 May 1900. The term Hlengwe was used by Lourenco Marques traders and not by the people to whom it was applied.

32 Alex C. Murray, Germanic Kinship structure (Toronto, 1983) 17-37; Patrick Harries "The Anthropologist as historian and liberal; H.A. Junod and the Thonga" in Journal of Southern African Studies, 8, 1, 1981.

33 Paul Berthoud "Grammatical Note on the Gwamba language in South Africa", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 16, 1884, 47.

34 Grammaire Ronga (Lausanne 1896), 5.

35 Life of a South African Tribe, I, 32-33; II, 153.

36 SMA 8.11.B Paul Berthoud to Council, 7 April 1878, 24 July 1880, 5 August, 1888. Junod, Creux et Berthoud, 55; Berthoud, Lettres Missionaires, 396, 422.

37 "Grammatical Note", 47.

38 The ideological apparatus of the colonial state included the missions. This is not to argue that the missionaries were an (unwitting) tool of colonial conquest and oppression. For the ambiguous position of one particular Swiss missionary, see Harries "The anthropologist as historian and liberal". For a more forceful rejection of the instrumentalist role of missionaries, see Van Butselaar, Africains, Missionaires et Colonialistes.

39 SMA 8.10.B Henri Berthoud to Council, 22 April 1890, 10 January 1892.

40 Berthoud, Lettres Missionaires, 122, 130, 249, 317-18, 371; SMA 8.10.B Paul Berthoud to Council, 25 March 1885.

41 Junod, Life of a SA Tribe, II, 617-18.

42 H.P. Junod, Henri Junod, 84.

43 Junod, Life of a SA Tribe, II, 618.

44 SMA 548/D Henri Berthoud to Council 14 December 1899.

45 M.C. Bill, Tsonga bibliography 1883-1983 (Johannesburg, 1983), 20-21.

46 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London, 1983).

47 SMA 548/D Henri Berthoud to Council 14 December 1899.

48 SMA 8.10.B Paul Berthoud to Council 2 Sept., 1886.

49 Junod, Life of a SA Tribe, I, 339.

50 SMA 1255/B Henri Berthoud, "Rapport sur l'expedition á Magude 1885.

51 SMA 8.10.B Henri Berthoud to Council, 22 April 1890.

52 SMA 1254/B Junod "Etude Comparative", Resumé in "Thonga, Gouamba, Djonga, Ronga" in Bulletin de la Mission Suisse en Afrique du Sud, 114, April 1984; Grammaire Ronga, 41 - 44, 78 - 82.

53 South African Weekly, March - April 1949; Jan van Butselaar, Africains, Missionaires et Colonialistes, 167.

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54. SMA 1254/A Rapport de la Conference du Littoral.

55. Sipele sa Sironga: abécédaire et livre de lecture en dialecte Ronga parlé aux environs de la baie de Delagoa (Lausanne, 1894).

56. Grammaire et Manuel de Conversation Ronga (Lausanne, 1896); Les Chants et les contes des Ba-Ronga (Lausanne, 1897); "Les Baronga", Bulletin de la Société Neuchateloise de Geographie, X, 1898.

57. For this debate, see SMA 1254/B Junod, "Étude Comparative"; Junod, Grammaire Ronga; H. Berthoud, "Quelques remarques sur la famille des langues Bantou"; SMA 543/F P. Loze "Au sujet de la double litterature". Also notes 60 and 63.

58. University of South Africa, Junod Collection. "Les Causes de la Rebellion", lettre à Virgile Rossel, 1895.

59. Grammaire Ronga, dedication and p.41.

60. SMA 548/D Henri Berthoud, "Réponse à la note de M. Junod sur la question de la double littérature".

61. SMA 8.10.B Henri Berthoud to secretary, 22 February, 1898.

62. SMA 548/D Henri Berthoud to Council, 14 Dec., 1899.

63. SMA 584/D Henri Junod "La Question de la double littérature", 5 April 1898; 543/F P. Loze to secretary, 2 May 1900.

64. SMA 543/F Paul Berthoud, appendix to P. Loze to secretary 2 May 1900.

65. Ch.W. Chatelain and H.A. Junod, A Pocket Dictionary, Thonga (Shangaan)-English; English-Thonga (Shangaan) preceded by an Elementary Grammar (Lausanne, 1909).

66. Junod, Bukhaneli bya Xirjonga (Lausanne 1903); W. Benoit, Gramatica portuguesa em lingua ronga (Lausanne 1914, 2nd ed.); Antonio Lourenço Farinha, Elementos de gramatica landina (shironga) (Lourenco Marques, 1917); Paul Berthoud, Elementos de grammaire ronga (Lausanne 1920).

67. SMA 597/A Junod to Council, 11 Nov., 1894.

68. Henri-Philippe Junod, Henri Junod, 20. See also the correspondence between G.P.Lestrade and the Swiss Mission on the orthographic and general linguistic unification of Tonga, Ronga and Tswa. University of Cape Town, MSS and Archives, Bc255, AI.84-AI.98.

69. Martha Binford, "Stalemate: A Study of Cultural Dynamics", (PhD., Michigan State University, 1971) 43.

70. President Samora Machel: Address in Independence Square, Maputo, 5 November 1981, cited in Spectator, "For the Nation to live the Tribe must die" in African Communist, 89, 1982, 30; Samora Machel, Situacao Colonial" in Desalojamos o Inimigo Interno do Nosso Aparelho de Estado (Maputo, 1980).