THE AFRICANIST SCHOOL, 1970-1999: A STUDY IN

SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

By

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work, and has not previously in its entirety or in part, been submitted at any university for a degree.

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20 - 07 - 2001

DATE

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband and my four children namely Godwill, Godfrey, Gladstone and Glenda.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREFACE

This study is historiographical. The approach is critical in the sense that the basic assumptions and theories which underpin the Africanist historical practice in South Africa are interrogated.

The study is made up of six chapters. The first chapter, which is introductory, focuses on the emergence and development of Africanist history in Africa. The break from colonialist history and the focus on African initiative and activity is explored. The main themes which have characterized Africanist history are analysed. In the chapter, it is demonstrated that the main themes were related to such issues as state creation, resistance to colonial rule and African nationalism.

In Chapter Two, the beginnings of Africanist history in South Africa are explored. Three forms of Africanist history are analysed; amateur Africanist history, liberal Africanist and radical Africanist history. The emergence of these forms of history is placed within the context of the political and intellectual environment which existed in South Africa.

In Chapter Three, themes are selected for close treatment. These themes are: the rise of the Zulu Kingdom, the creation of the Basotho Kingdom and the emergence of the Pedi state. The main purpose of the chapter is to explore the basic assumptions which underpin Africanist historical practice, particularly, in its treatment of state creation.

Chapter Four tackles the post-conquest period in South Africa. The main purpose of the chapter is to critically analyse the manner in which Africanist history has approached the reaction of Africans to the establishment and consolidation of colonial rule.

Chapter Five is primarily a critique of Africanist history in South Africa. The method and theory of Africanist history is explored. The main purpose is to bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the Africanist history historical practice.

The last Chapter is a general conclusion to the study and focuses on the general weaknesses and strengths of the Africanist historical practice as a whole.

ABSTRACT

The Post-Colonial Africanist historiographical revolution attained maturity, on the African continent, in the 1970s. This revolution was, essentially, an attempt to put the African back into African history, a phenomenon which had been completely neglected by colonial and other forms of Eurocentric histories. Africanist history focused mainly on African agency in the making of the African past. African achievements and contributions to the development of world civilization were explored, described, analysed and revealed. Major themes emerged and are related to issues and problems such as pre-colonial state/empire creation, resistance to the establishment of colonial rule, colonial rebellions/uprisings and the rise of African nationalism and the struggle for independence and freedom. These themes were essentially nationalist; making Africanist history, essentially, a nationalist history. Towards the end of the 1970s a sense of crisis began to be felt. This was tied up with the ongoing crisis of Africa's political economy.

The Africanist historiographical revolution did not have the sort of impact on the writing of the South African past as it had north of the Limpopo. The repressive political and intellectual culture created by the Apartheid system ensured that Africanist history would not blossom into a major school of history within South Africa. Despite this repressive environment, however, professional Africanist history started to emerge in the 1960s. Themes similar to those explored north of the Limpopo were explored mainly by liberal Africanists and other African nationalist inclined historians. Processes of pre-conquest state formation, primary resistance, rebellion against European rule and African nationalism were analysed. The basic assumptions of African initiative and agency have structured Africanist history in South Africa. There is no sense of crisis, yet, in South

Africa. Indeed, the collapse of the apartheid system has given a sense of hope to those who champion the Afrocentric approach.

The general shortcomings of the Africanist approach are evident in the Africanist historical practice in South Africa. The empiricist method and its focus only on facts and its avoidance of theory is evident. There have not been any serious attempts by Africanists themselves to problematize this method. Furthermore, the nationalist assumptions and ideology which structured Africanist history tend to bias the reconstruction of the South African past towards nationalist themes, for instance, state creation, resistance and nationalism. African history tends to be viewed as movement towards the creation of African nation-states. Other developments are ignored. Also evident is the impact of the related ideology of modernization. This has tended to cast African historical development in the image of historical development in Europe. Categories of analysis such as entrepreneurship, the role of the individual, progress and the enlargement of scale have been deployed in the study of the African past without any modification. This has actually defeated, in most cases, the intended Africanist objective of writing an independent history because the categories in use are those which were developed in the study of European historical experience.

The key merit of Africanist history in South Africa is that the "neglected" and the forgotten African factor is once more being given recognition. This is bound to alter, in future, the character of South African historiography as a whole.

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

There are at least four different approaches to the history of history writing.[1] The first approach, descriptive historiography, accepts what professional historians do and describes their procedures and methods. Marwick exemplifies this approach.[2] A second approach, historical historiography, traces historical writing from the time of Herodotus, regarded as the father of history, to the present.   In most cases changes in procedures and methods of history writing during this long period are brought out. There is also an attempt to periodise these changes.[3] The third approach,   exemplified by the work of Burke, may be regarded as historiographical survey[4]. This genre surveys the different types and modes of extant historical writing. Burke, for instance, mentions labour history, women's history and history of the family, to mention only three. The fourth approach, critical historiography, problematises the assumptions, methodologies and theories which historians have utilized in reconstructing the past.   A good example of this approach in the field of African historiography is A.J. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History: A critique Post-colonial   Historiography**

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1. J.H. Hexter, **On Historians: Reappraisals of some of the Markers of Modern History**. (London, 1979), p.7.

2. A. Marwick, **The Nature of History**. (London, 1970).

3. H. Butterfield, **Man on his Past: The Study of the History of Historical Writing** (Mass., 1960).

4. P. Burke (ed), **New Perspectives On Historical Writing**. (Cambridge, 1991).

Examined (Zed Press. 1981).[5] This approach overlaps with philosophy of history written mostly by philosophers.[6] Temu and Swai borrow and utilize the concepts and methods of philosophy in their study of post-colonial Africanist history. They are not satisfied with merely describing the historians procedures, tracing changes in the writing of African history and surveying what is available. This study is therefore a critical analytical study of Africanist history in South Africa.

1.2 THE EMERGENCE OF AFRICANIST HISTORY IN AFRICA

The first problem which has to be dealt with concerns the definition of the concept "Africanist".[7] This concept is a subject of heated controversy and there is as yet no consensus among historians as to what the concept entails. The statement or self-definition in 1968 by Ranger replying to critics in which he observed that the "Africanist historian, who follows up the suggestions of Professor Ajayi or Dr Lonsdale and who emphasises African activity, African adaptation, African choice, African initiative, will increasingly find his main adversaries not in the discredited colonial school but in the radical pessimists", has become a reference point for most discussions on the concept, Africanist.[8] What Ranger, a pioneer in this genre, was getting at is that an Africanist historian is one who focuses on the role and contribution of Africans to the processes of change and transformation in the African past.

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[5]. A. Temu and B. Swai, Historians and Africanist History: A Critique. **Post-Colonial Historiography Examined**, (London, 1981).

[6]. For an excellent example of philosophy of history, Sec., R.E. Atkinson, **Knowledge and Explanation in History** (London, 1978).

[7]. The main features of Africanist History are examined in Chapter Two and Three of A. Temu's and B. Swai's book, see A. Temu and B. Swai, Historians and Africanist History.

[8]. T.O. Ranger, "Towards a Usable African Past" in C. Fyfe (ed), **African Studies since 1945: A Tribute to Basil Davidson** (London, 1976), p.24.

To place this matter in proper perspective it must be remembered that colonial historians had portrayed the African as barbaric and incapable of contributing anything to the fund of human civilization. Africa, the colonial historians argued, was stagnant until the whiteman came. Africanist historians have concentrated on destroying colonial myths, falsehoods and prejudices which it is claimed, have "concealed the true history of Africa from the world at large".[9] The main targets are "myths", propaganda, inter alia, by Hegel, Johnston and historian Trevor Roper to the effect that Africa was a dark continent without history.[10] To demonstrate that Africa had a history attention has been directed towards African achievements. Ancient Egyptian civilization has been reclaimed for Africa. Greek civilization, which colonial historians regard as the cradle of western civilization, has been "found" to have borrowed from black Pharaonic Egypt.[11]

Empires such as Ghana, Mali, Songhai and Zimbabwe were cited as examples of African initiative, rationality and wisdom. Resistance to the establishment of colonial rule, colonial rebellions, nationalist movements were reconstructed to demonstrate the continuity of the African struggle for freedom.[12] The findings and work of archaeologists such as S.B. Leaky have been used to demonstrate that Africa holds the solution to the mystery of the origins of the homo-sapiens.

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[9]. A.M. Bow, "Preface" in UNESCO, **General History of Africa, 8 Volumes**. Vol., p.xviii.

[10]. These myths have been written about so much that it is not necessary to cite the different forms in which they appear. They justified colonial rule and the exploitation of the colonized.

[11]. See, G.G.M. James, **Stolen Legacy. Greek Philosophy as Stolen Egyptian Philosophy**. (Africa World Press, 1992).

[12]. A critical analysis of this theme is available in A. Temu and B. Swai, Historians and Africanist History, pp.22-31.

Africanist history has also been viewed as history from "within", that is "a history not measured by the yardstick of foreign values".[13] Research on the African past is viewed as a process of self-examination leading to the creation of a "collective memory".[14] Ki-Zerbo, however, cautions that the process of self-examination should not consist in artificially abolishing Africa's connections with other continents. He argued that such connections have to be analysed in terms of mutual exchanges and multi-lateral influences in which something will be heard of Africa's contribution to the development of mankind.[15]

This history has also been characterised as "history from the bottom up".[16] This was interpreted to mean the history of ordinary people since it was argued that even the despotism of some past dynasties was tempered by the distance and absence of the means and capacities to centralize power.[17] Village democracies in which the elders sat under a tree and continued to discuss until consensus was attained are said to have been a permanent feature of the African past.[18] Thus the West cannot claim monopoly over the origination of democratic governance.

It is clear from the above that Africanist historians viewed themselves and their history as playing a positive role of rehabilitating African self-esteem which had been dented by

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13.   T. Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction" in **General History of Africa**, Volume 1. p.18.

14.   Ibid.

15.   Ibid, p.19.

16.   Ibid, p.20.

17.   Ibid.

18.   Ibid.

colonial oppression. They also viewed themselves as responding to a practical political need; building African nations. The nationalist movement and the first leaders of independent Africa had called for a relevant history, a history that will inculcate nationalism and patriotism in the African people so that they could participate actively in the various processes of nation building. Leaders such as Kwame Nkurumah and Julius Nyerere, the first presidents of Ghana and Tanzania respectively, had argued that the history which was available was dysfunctional to nation building.[19] They appealed to practising historians to write a history which was appropriate and suitable for the dignity of independent nationhood. Nkurumah, for instance, demanded that historians "... should write our history as the history of our society in all its fullness".[20] In 1968, Nyerere, addressing an international conference of African historians at the University of Dar-es-Salaam also urged historians to write an African history which will contribute to the liberation of the continent.[21] Africanist historians were responding to the demands of the time as articulated by the petty-bourgeois leadership of the 1950s and 1960s.

In the 1970s and 1980s, when economic and political conditions on the continent deteriorated with recurrent coups, rebellions and civil wars, the label Africanist became a derogatory epithet reserved for a school of historians whose work had failed to break

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[19]. The analysis of the relationship between nation - building and Africanist History is conducted in T.O. Ranger (ed), **Emerging Themes of African History. Proceedings of the International Congress of African Historians held at University College, Dar -es-Salaam, October, 1965** (Heinemann, 1968).

[20]. Quoted in Jean-Francois Bayart, **The State in Africa: The politics of the Belly** (Long., 1993) p.6.

[21]. J. Nyerere; "**Speech**" in T.O. Ranger (ed), **Emerging Themes** ... pp. 1-6.

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completely with colonial history, thus contributing to neo-colonialism.[22]   Africanists who had viewed themselves and were viewed by others as intellectual heroes and liberators were now ridiculed and hated as agents of imperialism.[23]   These critics either operated within theoretical and methodological frameworks drawn from the radical traditions of Marxism or neo-Marxism.[24]

This negative valuation of Africanist history was strengthened by the fact that some of the pioneers of Africanist history were white European historians teaching and doing research in Europe as well as Africa.[25]   If such Africanists were black Africans like Ajayi, they were suspect because they had studied in Europe and continued to maintain strong ties with their universities and colleagues in Europe. The negative attitude towards Africanists was funned by some playwrights writing in the 1960s. Conor Cruise O'Brien had this to say about Africanists:

> Mr Bonham is what is called an Africanist ... not an African - an Africanist ... As far as we European businessmen are concerned, an Africanist is a specialist whom we employ in order to get the better - of Africans.[26]

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22. The theme of crisis in Africanist history is examined in A. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History ...** Chapter Three.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. T.O. Ranger, C. Fyfe, G. Bender and A. Isaacman are some of the wellknown historians in this category. Some of these historians' work can be gleaned in T.O. Ranger (ed) **Emerging Themes ...** C. Fyfe (ed), **African Studies since 1945**.

26. Quoted in B. Freund, **The Making of Contemporary Africa**. p.30.

Viewed from this standpoint, the Africanism of Africanist history is seen as similar to orientalism which, according to Edward Said, is a category of Western thought whose ultimate function was to perpetuate Western cultural hegemony.[27] This study views and defines Africanist history in this critical tradition. It views Africanist history as an attempt to write an independent history which was aborted. This view will be fleshed out in the remaining part of this chapter and subsequent chapters.

1.3   The Emergence and Development of Africanist history: Dominant trends

The Africanist historiographical revolution was essentially a post-World War Two phenomenon. The period 1960 to 1970 is regarded as the "Golden Age" of Africanist history.[28] It was the period in which the basic elements of this genre were established. Africanist history may be said to have come of age by 1970.[29] However, the roots of Africanist history have been traced far back to the 18th and 19th centuries. Anthony William Amoo, an African philosopher who studied in Germany and taught in the Universities of Jena, Wittenberg and Halle in the 18th century, was forced to defend the dignity of Africa and the Africans against the racial prejudices he encountered.[30] In his philosophical treatise, **On the Nature of the Human Mind** he argues:

> Great once was the dignity of Africa whether one considers natural
> talents of mind or the study of letters, or the very institutious for
> safeguarding religion. For she had given birth to several men of the

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[27]   E. Said, **Orientalism**, (London, 1978).

[28]   See, T.O. Ranger, "Towards a Usable African Past" in C. Fyfe (ed), **African Studies**, pp.17-20.

[29]   Ibid.

[30]   A. Temu and B. Swai; **Historians and Africanist History**. p.20.

greatest pre-eminence by whose talents and efforts the whole human knowledge, no less divine knowledge, has been built up ... Though in our times, that past of the world is reported to be more prolific in other things than learning.[31]

Amoo attacked those who sought a theoretical justification for slavery and the slave trade. He argued that this was a product of the European's ignorance of the history of Africa.[32] Blacks in the United States whose ancestors had been torn away from Africa and sold to slavery in America, also reacted in a similar way.

Their scholars sought to educate white Americans about African's achievements. The obviously brilliant civilization of pharaonic Egypt and the Empires of Ghana, Songhai and Mali were cited as a proof of African contributions to human civilization.[33] The patriotic spirit embedded in the Pan-Africanism of Africans in the diaspora had the same object in view: the glorification of African achievements and the renaissance of African dignity.[34] The basic ideas of Pan-Africanism were later woven into the African nationalism of the western educated elite on the continent.[35] It will be demonstrated below that African nationalist ideology pervaded Africanist historical practice.

The roots of Africanist history must not be traced only to Africans in the diaspora but

[31]. Quoted in A. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History ...** pp. 19-20.

[32]. Ibid. p.20.

[33]. Ibid.

[34]. Ibid.

[35]. Ibid.

also to the amateur historical productions of blacks on the continent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[36] Samuel Johnson constructed the history of the Yoruba (Western Nigeria), Carl Reindorf of the Gold Coast (Ghana), Akiga Sai of the Tiv (Nigeria), Sir Apolo Kagwa and John Nyakura of Uganda.[37] These writings were constructed out of oral traditions and focused on the indigenous people of Africa, unlike colonial racist historians who rejected these traditions as viable sources for historical writing and also completely ignored indigenous people. It will be noted below that "scientific" Africanist historians would adopt the same approach in the post-war period.

This brief excursion into the works of Africans in the diaspora and those of amateur scholars on the continent is meant to demonstrate that the post-colonial Africanist historiographical revolution did not spring out of "thin air" but emerged out of protest scholarship stretching back two centuries.

Post-War Africanist historical practice was initially concerned to prove the viability of African history, and in particular, that this practice could be as scientific as any other.[38] According to Professor Ajayi and Algoa, initiators of this revolution, pioneers of African historical studies faced "a largely sceptical academic world".[39] Opposition to the idea of an African history was derived from "pure" racial prejudice, ignorance, imperialist propaganda, genuine scholarly doubt, or varying combinations of these.[40] They had to

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[36]. Ibid.

[37]. See J.F. Ade Ajayi and E.J. Alagoa "**Sub-Saharan Africa**" in G.G. Iggers and H.T. Parker (eds), **International Handbook of Historical Studies. Contemporary Research and Theory** (London, 1979). p.406.

[38]. Ibid. pp. 404-409.

[39]. Ibid. p.403.

[40]. Ibid.

overcome, for instance, Trevor-Roper's contention that the possibility of writing a history of Africa was inconceivable because in Africa there was nothing but "unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe".[41] It must be remembered that Trevor-Roper was an Oxford pundit. His views were bound to have respect in academic circles. It was therefore difficult to dislodge or undermine such views.

Pioneers had, among other problems, to deal with the complex issue of the sources and methods of African history.[42] Since the time of Ranke the idea that history can only be written from written documents became accepted without question.

Besides Ancient Egypt and other parts of the Mediterranean littoral, Africa did not have indigenous written documents.[43] The only sources available were oral traditions and oral histories. This is particularly so during the pre-Arab and pre-colonial periods. Though written documents abound for the colonial period these were treated with extreme circumspection because they were thought to embody an external view of Africa.[44] What Africanist historians demanded were sources unpolluted by external influence. Oral traditions and histories were the only sources which embodied the authentic voice of the African. These were regarded as "by far the most intimate of historical sources, the most rich, the one which is fullest of the sap of authenticity".[45] They quipped that the "mouth

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[41]. Quoted in J.F. Ade Ajayi and E.J. Alagoa, "**Sub-Saharan Africa**" p.403.

[42]. Ibid. pp.404-409.

[43]. Ibid. p. 405.

[44]. Ibid.

[45]. J. Ki-Zerbo, "**General Introduction**".

of an old man smells bad, but it says good and salutary things".[46] Such was the belief

in the efficacy of these traditions in the reconstruction of the African past that doctoral

theses based mainly on oral traditions were produced by Ogot, Were, Kimambo and

Kiwanuka to mention only a few.[47] It was argued, during that time, that the failure of

previous history (colonial history) to mention African achievements was a product of

the colonialist refusal to recognise such oral sources as a valid base for writing history.[48]

Methods for decoding the truth embedded in oral traditions were sharpened. In this

specific aspect, the studies and ideas of Alagoa, Ogot and Vansina, to mention only three,

are well known.[49] Related to this question of oral sources was the insistance on a multi-

disciplinary approach.[50]   The findings of anthropologists, archaeologists and linguists

etc. were regarded as valuable. Of particular importance as working partners were

archaeologists. Some Departments of History in African Universities began to employ

archaeologists or created Archaeology Units which would generate or deliver the valuable

archaeological information. [51] In Africanist historical practice oral traditions have thus

been catapulted to centre stage. These traditions are no longer treated as a supplement

to written documents. They have become central to the Africanist project of

rehabilitating African self-respect. A doctoral thesis on African history which does

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[46].   Ibid.

[47].   T.O. Ranger, "Introduction" in T.O. Ranger (ed); **Emerging Themes ...**

[48].   J. Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction" p.20.

[49].   E.J. Algoa; **A History of the Niger Delta: An Historical Interpretation of Ijo Oral Tradition** (Ibadan, 1972): B.A. Ogot, **A History of the Southern Luo: Migration and Settlement** (Nairobi, 1967): Jan Vansina "Recording the Oral Hsitory of the Bakuba", in **Journal of African History I** (1960).

[50].   J.F. Ade Ajayi and E.J. Alagoa, "**Sub-Saharan Africa**", p.408.

[51].   Department of History at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria has an Archaeology Unit. A.V. Dhliwayo, Supervisor.

not use oral traditions is regarded as incomplete.[52] An important training of any student of African history is Oral History and the methods of handling such history.

Particular themes have tended to dominate the content of Africanist history. Since the discoveries of the Leakeys at Olduvai George in East Africa, the problem of the origins of man has become very important.[53] In fact, the African continent has been declared as the cradle of humanity.[54] Cheik Anta Diop, a prominent pioneer, has argued cogently that early man was ethnically homogeneous and negroid.[55] He was also engaged in trying to trace the migration of early man from East Africa to other continents.[56] Related to the question of early man is the question of the origins and character of Egyptian civilization.[57] Colonial history had propagated the Hamitic hypothesis to explain the origins of civilization on the African continent. The hypothesis was that civilization was initially brought to the continent by a white race of Hamites.[58] Diop in his various works has been engaged in undermining or destroying the Hamitic hypothesis.[59] Using a

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[52]. This training is important because Africa has a lot of Oral History which can be used for historical reconstruction.

[53]. M.D. Leaky, **Olduvai George: Excavations in Beds I and II**, 1960-1963 (Cambridge, 1973).

[54]. C.A. Diop; **The African Origin of Civilization** (Lawrance Hill and Co., 1974).

[55]. C.A. Diop, "Origins of the Ancient Egyptians" in **General History of Africa** Vol. II, p.42.

[56]. Ibid.

[57]. For a thorough discussion of the character and nature of the Egyptian Civilization, see G.G.M. James, **Stolen Legacy** ...

[58]. The Hamatic hypothesis has been proved to be unfounded. See, C.A. Diop, **The African origin of civilization**. p.24.

[59]. Ibid.

multidisciplinary approach, Diop has demonstrated that Pharaonic Egypt, which created the now fairly well known ancient civilization, was black.[60] He used the presence of melanin in the skin fragments of Egyptian mummies as an indication of the black identity of the ancient Egyptians. He discovered that melanin was found in the skin of blacks and not in that of whites.[61] He also used Egyptian iconography to establish that Egyptians referred to themselves as black.[62] Olela has tried to trace the civilizing influences of Ancient Egypt on other parts of the African continent.[63] To these scholars, Egypt was to Africa what Greece was to Western Europe. Also emerging out of this study of Egyptian civilization is the meticulous research on the connections between Egypt and Greece.[64] Some Africans have tried to demonstrate that "there is no such a thing as Greek philosophy".[65] Greek philosophy according to this view was "stolen" from Egyptian philosophy. The well-known Greek philosophers from Socrates to Aristotle were, according to these Africanists, all educated in Egypt by black priest philosophers.[66]

The point in all this was to show that, far from being a "Dark Continent", Africa was the cradle of human civilization. The theme of Egyptian civilization is woven into the theme

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60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. H. Olela, "The African Foundations of Greek Philosophy" in R.A. Wright (ed); **African Philosophy: An Introduction** (University of America Press, 1984) p.81.

64. Ibid.

65. G.G.M. James, **Stolen Legacy** ... p.1.

66. Ibid. p.9.

of state or empire creation.[67] African glory and achievements were demonstrated by the existence of large and enduring Empires such as Ghana, Mali and Songhai. Such creations were compared to European creations. Europeans, it was argued, did not have a monopoly in the creation of sophisticated well administered polities.

The colonial period was dominated by the themes of resistance, rebellions and the rise of African nationalism.[68] This was meant to demonstrate that Africans were not passive. They were active participants in the developments of the colonial period. There have been attempts to show the connections between what is referred to as primary resistance and modern nationalism.[69] Among other things, this was meant to show the indigenous roots of African nationalism. The traditions of primary resistance were continued by the modern nationalists. Critics have viewed this as an attempt to legitimize the present leadership and nation-states.[70] To this extent, the critics argue, Africanist history was nationalist history. This argument will be elaborated below where the issues of methodology and theory are critiqued.

What may also be noted is that early Africanist history tended to be divided into schools corresponding to the various national divisions. Thus there emerged the Ibadan, Nairobi, Kampala and the Dar-es-Salaam Schools of Africanist history. This was a product of the different peculiarities of the various nations. Though there were

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[67]. For a thorough critique of the theme of empire creation, see C. Neale, **Writing "Independent" History. African Historiography**, 1960-1980. (Greenwood Press, 1985).

[68]. See A.T. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History**. Chapter II.

[69]. Ibid.

[70]. A.V. Dhliwayo, Africanist History and the Crisis of Africa's Political Economy. A critical evaluation. A paper presented at a History Conference, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa, October 1998 (Unpublished).

differences, these schools were primarily interested in political themes. They were primarily interested in nation-building themes and to demonstrate African continuity, initiative, adaption, achievements and nationality.

As mentioned above, by the 1970s with the deteriorating economic, political and social conditions, criticism of the Africanist genre began to surface. The bubbling confidence of the Africanists began to wane. The crisis of Africa's political economy and nation-state, as evidenced in the coups détat, civil wars, increasing numbers of refugees etc. led to the questioning of a history which had celebrated "independence" and the African nation-state.[71] It was contended that there was something fundamentally wrong with a history which had failed to read the contradictions of societies which were now crumbling as a result of the crisis.[72] Critics argued that Africanist history was itself in crisis.

1.4   Method, Theory and Crisis in Africanist History

In the 1970's a few dissenting voices began to emerge in the Africanist camp. At the root of this dissidence was the crisis which engulfed African social formations.[73] The ideas of progress and development which had underpinned Africanist thinking about African history could no longer be entertained in the face of civil wars in many parts of the African continent.[74] Africanist historians themselves, though they conceded that there

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[71].   Ibid.

[72].   Ibid.

[73].   For an idea of the various aspects and features of this crisis, see, F. Cheru, **The Silent Revolution In Africa. Debt, Development and Democracy** (Zed Publishers, 1989).

[74].   A.V. Dhliwayo, **Africanist History and Crisis of Africa's Political Economy: A Critical Evaluation**, A Paper presented at a History Conference, Cape Town, October 1998 (unpublished).

were problems, did not view the problems as those requiring an overhaul of the entire Africanist historical practice.[75] For them, what was needed was a sharpening of the tools and concepts they were already using.[76] This would involve, for instance, the search for more rigorous methods of handling oral traditions and other sources.[77] They also suggested the search for more facts on the African past.[78] Other Africanists viewed the problem as having to do with too much concentration on political institutions and issues.[79] They suggested that economic and social facts must also be tackled. This led to the emergence of Africanist economic and social history.[80] And yet others felt that the problem concerned the narrow themes which, hitherto, had characterized research.[81] While such approaches contributed to lots of details about the African past, the larger continental picture was not yet available. It was therefore suggested that works of synthesis which brought out broad patterns on a continental scale were needed. This gave birth to the idea of a general history of the African continent to be planned and produced by experts. Eight volumes have already been published by UNESCO.[82] This publication is a veritable monument of Africanist History.

Radical critics of the Africanist School insist that the crisis is that of the method and

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[75]. A. Temu and B. Swai; **Historians and Africanist History. A Critique. Post-Colonial Historiography Examined**. p.113.

[76]. Ibid.

[77]. Ibid.

[78]. Ibid.

[79]. Ibid.

[80]. Ibid, p.3.

[81]. Ibid.

[82]. Ki-Zerbo, "Methodology and African History", **General History of Africa**, Heinemann (UNESCO)..

theories which structure Africanist historical practice. Most Africanists regard their practice as scientific. In the general introduction to the UNESCO history mentioned above, Ki-Zerbo actually points out that history is a human science. Referring specifically to the actual production of what he calls an authentic history of Africa, he contended that a Corpenican revolution was needed which would be "semantic in the first place, and which, without denying the demands of universal science, would take up the whole historical flow of Africa and guide it to new moulds".[83] Science would lead to a new cultural awareness.[84]

Africanist historians, like sociologists and political scientists, had an exalted view of science. The crucial question, however, concerns the Africanist historian's conception of science, particularly the logic of scientific explanation. The Africanist historians conception of science is derived from empiricism and partly from positivism.[85] Empiricism refers to the broad spectrum of epistemological positions to the effect that all our knowledge and concepts are wholly or partly based on experience through the senses and introspection.[86] Positivism initiated by Comte and systematized and developed by the members of the Vienna Circle in the 1920s into logical positivism

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[83] Ibid., p. 20.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Studies of positivism have multiplied over the years. One study which is very clear is D.C. Phillips, **Philosophy, Science and Social Inquiry. Contemporary Methodological Controversies in Social Sciences and Related Applied Fields of Research** (Pergamon Press, 1987).

[86] Ibid., p.39.

incorporated these insights.[87]   Positivists held that the method of the natural sciences was applicable to the investigation of human affairs or society.   The sciences focussed on observable objectively determinable phenomena.[88]   Their goal was to develop universal laws.   Scientific explanation took the form of subsuming that which had to be explained under an empirically derived law and some antecedent conditions.   This came to be called the "covering law" model of explanation.[89]

However, the most distinguishing characteristic of positivism was the verifiability principle of meaning or empirical verificationism.[90]   This involved the idea that meaningful propositions are only those which are either empirically verifiable or falsifiable or are true by definition. Propositions about unobservable "structures" are at best instrumental, that is, they are merely tools which serve to arrange and organize primary facts, or convenient fictions which do not have any truth content.[91]   Any synthetic a-priori propositions, which are statements of fact made prior to any experience of the world are ruled out of court completely.[92]   They therefore took a non-realist stand towards unobservable structures.   In formulating the varifiability principle they were forced to grapple with the issue of what counts as a satisfactory verification.   In answer

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87.   Ibid.

88.   Ibid.

89.   Ibid.

90.   Ibid. p.40.

91.   Ibid.

92.   Ibid.

to this they often made reference to elementary observation statements.[93] To them, verification or validation had to be in terms of "rock bottom" elementary, direct and indubitable description of sense experience. Positivists also held that theory and observation were completely distinct. Observation was the testing ground of theory. Observations were not determined by theory but were theoretically natural.[94]

With respect to the problem of causation, positivists subscribed to Humean theory which held that establishing causal relations was a matter of establishing invariant temporal relationships between events.[95] Their primary concern was the temporal sequence of observable events. Unobservable processes were completely ignored.

Professional academic history emerged in the 19th century and has since then developed in the context of the empiricist positivist conception of science. While most academic historians, Africanist historians included, do not subscribe to the need to search for laws and the covering law model of explanation, they have on the whole accepted empirical verification, the idea of separation between theory and observation and the Humean theory of causation. For professional Africanist historians, following Leopold von Ranke, the limits of historical reconstruction were determined by the availability of written documents and oral traditions from which facts could be extracted, and the historian's detachment which ensured objectivity.[96] Detachment, neutrality, impartiality

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93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid. p.41.

96. A. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History** ... p.115.

or objectivism was regarded as an important precondition of the historian's craft.[97] Facts and facts alone were important. Once the facts were ascertained, through various techniques which ensured their authenticity and reliability, they were presented clinically in order to reconstruct a solid piece of original history. These facts speak for themselves. In line with positivism the processes of the collection and presentation of data were regarded as neutral.[98] The search for facts did not entail the projection of theoretical schemata. Theory was important only in so far as it was derived from facts. Induction rather than deduction was the key to historical science. Facts ruled over and directed theory. This approach is thoroughly objectivist and empiricist. Indeed most Africanist historians were suspicious of theories. Theories were cloudy but facts were certain.

It must also be noted that empiricism developed within the context of a bourgeois liberal cosmology which was atomistic and a conception of change which was gradualist and evolutionary.[99] Lloyd captures the substance of this approach when he observes that "What unites all historical empiricist approaches is overt commitment to the autonomy of factual evidence and methodological individualism, and they sometimes have a tacit commitment to psychological behaviourism which is based on empiricism".[100] They all object to notions about the reality or autonomy of social structures with irreducible powers, and also the theory ladenness of observation about evidence and actions.

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[97]. Ibid.

[98]. Ibid.

[99]. Ibid.

[100]. C. Lloyd, **The Structures of History** (Blackwell, 1993) p.73.

The empiricist method can only provide a limited, partial and superficial understanding of the nature of the African past and present. A few examples will be cited to demonstrate this view.

First is the atomism and the billiard ball universe which characterizes their conception of society. Africanists, as noted above, have concentrated mainly on politics and political change. They have upheld the nineteenth century holy trinity of politics, economics and culture as, presumably, three autonomous spheres of human action with separate logics and processes.[101] History tends to be seen as past politics which can be abstracted from the totality of the society (whole) and treated without reference to economic and social cultural processes. Those attempts made at reconstructing Africa's economic past excluded politics or viewed politics as relatively unimportant for their object.[102] This fragmented view of society led to an approach to historical reconstruction which produced a fragmented and partial knowledge.

Perhaps, the most serious shortcoming of empiricism is its focus only on observable phenomena and its rejection of the notion of the reality of unobservable social structures with irreducible powers. Thus most Africanists were incapable of bringing out the contradictions which existed in the societies which they investigated.[103] They also have

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[101]. The pitfalls of this conception of society are clearly brought out in C. Lloyd, **The Structures of History ...**

[102]. See, A.G. Hopkins, **An Economic History of West Africa** (Lon, 1973).

[103]. A.V. Dhliwayo, Africanist History and Crisis of Africa's Political Economy: A Critical Evaluation, A Paper presented at a History Conference, Cape Town, October 1998 (unpublished).

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no concept of exploitation as defined, for instance, by the notion of the extraction of either surplus labour or the surplus value of producers.[104] Exploitation is not observable and therefore not real. Yet the concept of exploitation tries to come to grips with the relations of production between groups in class divided societies. It allows one, for instance, to grasp the specific character and the dynamics of particular societies.

Closely related to the weakness of the Africanist historians empiricist methodology is the poverty of theory. This poverty exists in two senses. First, influenced by empiricism and positivism, they have tended to view theoretical reflection as not being part of the historian's craft.[105] This is evident in the contention that facts speak for themselves. This issue has been discussed above. What is important is to note that this view is incoherent and fallacious. All research is conducted within some sort of theoretical and conceptual framework.[106] The selection and collection of facts cannot be theory neutral. All research is theory laden. Theory is therefore unavoidable. What is important is to articulate one's theory clearly. It might then turn out that the theory used is bankrupt, in which case it has to be abandoned.

The second sense of theory poverty relates to the incapacity of the Africanist conceptual framework to come to grisp with the process of change and transformation in the African past. In discussing this issue there is a serious problem. There are no clearly articulated theories on which we can easily focus. This is a product of the empiricist historian's aversion to theoretical reflection. It is therefore necessary to tease out these theories or

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104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

reconstruct them. In this process misinterpretations and misrepresentations are likely. This has to be noted. But there are leads. In connection with these, it may be noted that in their quest for multi-disciplinarity, Africanists have extensively borrowed notions and concepts from adjacent disciplines such as economics, sociology and political science. Using such concepts it is possible to reconstruct, though broadly, the theory/theories which have influenced Africanist history.

A theory or perspective which tends to dominate Africanist historical reflection is modernization.[107] This perspective was constructed out of the empiricist reading of the historical experience of Western Europe and cast in the form of a general theory purporting to explain the mechanism of change and development in human history. This has serious implications for historical practice. By adopting the modernization paradigm one commits oneself, ab initio, to its methodology and the values which go with it.[108]

There are several features of this perspective which can be isolated and used to demonstrate that Africanist history has been influenced by modernization. The notions of nationalism and nation building which have structured Africanist historical practice are apt.[109] Within this perspective nationalism is viewed as a system of ideas in which the central place is given to the nation. In most cases it is common culture and shared historical experiences which define the content of nationalism.[110] There is a tendency

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[107]. Ibid.

[108]. Ibid.

[109]. Ibid.

[110]. For an understanding of nationalism and nationalist ideology, see, E. Kedourie, **Nationalism** (London, 1960). For a critique of African Nationalism, See. B. Davidson, **The Black Man's Burden. Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State**. (London, 1992) Chapter VI.

to view the division of humanity into nations as natural or "God given". Politically, nationalism aspires to the creation of a nation-state.[111] Nationalists argue that the only legitimate type of government is national self-determination.[112] The domination of one nation by another is regarded as unnatural. The nation also constitutes, it is contended, the only framework within which social, cultural, political development can take place.[113] The supreme loyalty of the overwhelming majority of the people to the nation is thus demanded.

Nationalist ideology has certainly structured Africanist scholarship. The very definition of the object of study is nationalist. This is clear in the focus on the "African factor" in the development of human civilization and the insistence that contact with Europe should figure in it (African history) from the viewpoint of African experience and also the contention that African developments must not be measured by the yardstick of foreign values.[114] Afrocentrism is nationalist in its essence.

Freund's observation that "modern" Africa was almost entirely interpreted in the light of the nationalist movements which assumed state power in the 1960s is pertinent to this discussion.[115] The existing national units and what then was judged to be their current

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111. B. Davidson, **The Black Mans Burden**, p.156.

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid.

114. J. Ki-Zerbo, "**General Introduction**" p.18.

115. B. Freund, **The Making of Contemporary Africa** ... p.7.

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and future needs influenced what to select in the past. Since the crucial problem was that of nation-building, this in effect, became the criterion of significance in the assessment of the events of the past. Indeed, since nationalism tended to regard the division of humanity into nations as natural or "God given", it seemed sensible for nationalist Africanist historians to look into the past for the beginnings of such nations. Facts actually were made to fit the nationalist framework and those which did not fit were ignored. This produced a distorted picture of the African past.

A teleology is also evident in this type of approach. The end point of development (change and transformation) having been defined as the nation-state, African historical development came to be viewed as progress towards the development of the nation-state. When the nation-state and its legitimacy started to collapse under the weight of its contradictions, Africanist history, whose whole approach had legitimized this form of polity came under critical fire. Radical critics operating with various Marxist and neo-Marxist frameworks declared Africanist history as completely inadequate. However Africanist history has not lost its popularity and potency in South African history. To this our discussion now turns.

CHAPTER II

THE EMERGENCE OF AFRICANIST HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 **Introduction**

What has come to be known as the post-colonial Africanist historiographical revolution, which unfolded in the 1960s in the West, East and Central Africa had little impact on the writing of history in South Africa. K. Smith and C. Saunders have noted, perceptively, that this revolution stopped short of the Limpopo.[116] The reasons for this are not difficult to determine.

While the rest of the continent was experiencing the process of decolonization, South Africa was sinking deeper into the quagmire of the oppressive apartheid system. Indeed, the 1960s saw the elaboration of the basic elements of the apartheid system. The oppressive political environment thus created was not conducive to an Africanist historiographical revolution. The dominant schools of history, the Afrikaner Nationalist and Liberal Schools regarded South African history as mainly as an extension of the history of Western Europe.[117] South African history was regarded as the march of Western civilization. The racial undertones which underpinned this thinking made it

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[116]. On the problems of writing African history from the perspective of the African, see, Ken Smith, **The Changing Past. Trends in South African historical writing** (Southern Book Publishers, 1988): (Saunders, **The Making of the South African Past. Major historians on race and class** (David Phillip, 1988)

[117]. For a critical analysis of Afrikaner and Liberal Schools, see, K. Smith, **The Changing Past** ... Chapter 4 and 5.

virtually impossible to view the Black African majority as having any history. The predominantly White historians 'forgot' the black majority.[118] In a few cases where the African was mentioned in the Afrikaner and Liberal histories, it was to indicate that Africans were an obstacle to the spread of Western civilization. Africans emerged in these histories, as a negation of civilized society, and a people without a history.[119] Africans were viewed simply as barbarians, rebels, terrorists and cattle thieves who were supposed to be eliminated in order to prepare the way for civilization.

Smith identifies another reason for this dearth of Africanist history in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.[120] He observes correctly that blacks did not have the same sort of access to education as whites did. What was taught in black schools was tightly controlled by the Apartheid state and the syllabi were designed and developed under white racist control.[121] The education Africans got was Western and Eurocentric and tended to be anti-African in its basic essentials. Smith observes:

The history "that they learn in the schools [did] not give them a sense of pride" in past black achievement, for the white had colonised this past.[122]

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118. The Liberal school tended to be more sympathetic to the African. This is particularly the case with Liberal Africanists. On Liberal Africanists, see, C. Saunders, **The Making of the South African Past** ... p. 143-153.

119. Ibid.

120. K. Smith, **The Changing Past** ... p.4.

121. Ibid.

122. Ibid.

He cites the Black Conscious Movement which urged that the White rulers of South Africa "were not satisfied merely with holding a people in their grip and emptying the native's brain of all forms and content, they turned to the past of the oppressed people and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it ... no wonder the African child learns to hate his heritage in his days at school".[123] This colonial mentality had to be overcome if the Africanist historiographical revolution had to start in South Africa. The dehumanized African had to be humanized again if he/she had to feel a sense of pride in the African past, a condition which at a minimum, is necessary if Africanist history has to be written.

The racialized education system also blocked the emergence of radical professional/African historians who could champion the decolonization of the writing of history. Indeed there are very few black senior professional historians in South Africa today.[124] It is not being claimed that only black historians can decolonize the writing of South African history. In fact, white historians (British, French, American) participated in the post-colonial historiographical revolution north of the Limpopo.[125] Whites were also to participate in the production of Africanist history in South Africa as will be shown later on. What is being suggested however is that no Africanist historiographical revolution would be complete without the participation of historians from the formerly colonized community. This is what happened in the case of the Ibadan and Dar-es-Salaam schools of Africanist history. It was when prominent black historians like K.O.

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[123]. Ibid.

[124]. Ibid.

[125]. On non-Africans who participated in the Africanist revolution, see, Amadou-Mahtar, M' Bow, "Preface" in J. Ki-Zerbo, **General History of Africa. Vol. I. Methodology and African History** (Heinemann, UNESCO, 1981) p.xvii.

Dike, Ade Ajayi, A.J. Temu and B. Ogot, to mention a few Africanists from the colonized communities, that Africanist history became mature.[126] Africanist history was nationalist and very few whites could afford to be nationalist, particularly in Apartheid South Africa with its efficient repressive machinery. It would be noted, later that the few whites who wrote Africanist history were in exile working in universities in independent Africa, Europe and America.[127] It must be remembered that even liberal historians found Apartheid South Africa too oppressive for the type of historical reconstruction they would have liked to engage in. Eric Walker, the doyen of liberal history had, at one point, to leave South Africa for Europe to continue his work.[128] In South Africa anything which tended to undermine the white supremacist ideology was not tolerated. Any form of opposition to the system was equated with the hated communism.[129] It is therefore, indeed, phenomenal that forms of Africanist history emerged in Apartheid South Africa. This is explained by the fact that the repressive and oppressive Apartheid state and its apparati gave birth to black resistance and opposition. The first African nationalist movement was born as early as 1912. Other black opposition groups emerged later. One form of resistance to apartheid was historical writing. The beginning of forms of Africanism must be traced to the recovery of the South African past.

126.   Examples of their works which are Africanist are: J.F.A. Ajayi and M. Crowder, eds. **History of West Africa**, 2 Vols (London, 1976), A.J. Temu and I.N. Kimambo, eds. **A History of Tanzania** (Heinemann, 1969); B.A. Ogot, **A History of the Southern Luo: Migration and Settlement** (Nairobi, 1967).

127.   C. Saunders, **The Making of the South African Past** ... p.148.

128.   Ibid, p.115.

129.   Ken Smith, **The Changing Past** ... p.156

2.2   Amateur Africanist History

The use of the concept amateur, to refer to early writings which focussed on Africans is meant to bring out the essential character of this early history. These were historical writings which were not based on the now well-known canons of professional historical writing as they emerged in the 19th century. For instance, most of these writings were not very critical of the sources used and were too committed. They were not objective in the sense of being detached from the object of their investigation. A lot of the writings were openly propagandistic and were written to arouse emotions and please the sensibilities of the constituencies for whom they were written. Some of them were actually meant to mobilize their constituents to undertake particular projects. This will be demonstrated below.

Most of these early writings were not written by academic historians.[130]   Most writers were members of other professions who had an interest in the past of Africans. In most of these works sections on history are interspaced with sections which are anthropological, ethnological and political. Most of these works can actually be regarded as sources for the writing of history rather than works of professional history. It has been necessary to include them in this section because in them, are the first tentative steps in the direction of full blown Africanist history.

It must also be pointed out that not any writing on Africans is Africanist. Only those works which regard Africans as independent actors, initiators and contributors to the

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[130].   Ibid., p.155.

development of human-kind are Africanist. It has been noted earlier on that Afrikaner and early liberal history did mention Africans. But Africans, as noted earlier on, came out negatively. African society tended to be viewed as immobile, changeless and backward.[131] Such writings then cannot be regarded as Africanist. Mature Africanist history, it must re-emphasized, was nationalist.

Writings of a historical bent which focused on Africans and African society in its own right can be traced to the 19th and early 20th centuries.[132] With the incorporation of African society into the expanding commercial capitalist system and the resultant socio-economic changes and transformations (including conflict and cooperation between differing communities at different stages of development), curious people (white and black) in these communities began to make investigations of a historical nature. A.T. Bryant, a Trappist missionary at Marianhill in Zululand, published in 1923, a work entitled, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal, containing the Earlier Political History of the Eastern Nguni clans*.[133] Bryant regarded his work as the foundation on which the future history of the Zulu would be written. The Zulu come out in this work as having not changed since time immemorial.[134] As a missionary it is not surprising that the various aspects of Zulu society he studied - politics, customs, traditions etc. are viewed as not worthy of preservation. They are viewed as impediments to the

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131. Ibid., p.6

132. Ibid. p.155

133. A.T. Bryant, **Olden Times in Zululand and Natal, containing the earlier Political History of the Eastern Nguni Clans,** (London, 1929) p.10.

134. Ibid.

introduction of civilization. Saunders describes the work as insufferably patronizing.[135]
This work is Africanist only in so far as African society is regarded as worthy of
investigation. However, its generally negative valuation of Zulu society detracts from its
Africanist credentials. This can also be said about the work of James Stuart, a magistrate
in various Natal districts.[136] This work on the Bambata Rebellion published in 1913
started the practice of demonizing the Zulu ruling class.

The first attempt at positive valuation of African society, in the context of a
reconstruction of African activity, were made by a new christianized educated African
elite.[137] Most of these elite were products of mission schools, in particular, Lovedale and
Fort Hare in the Cape, Adams College in Natal, Kilnerton in the Transvaal and the
German mission at Pniel.[138] Most of these people established contacts with each other
and tended to express similar views about their people and they also had similar
aspirations. It is not possible to mention and discuss all the works of these early
christianized elite. Only the works of Solomon T. Plaatjie, Silas Modiri Molema and J.H.
Soga will be mentioned and discussed.[139]

Plaatjie published *Native Life in South Africa before and since the European War and
the Boer Rebellion* in 1916.[140] This work is partly polemical but is also characterized by

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135. C. Saunders, **Making of the South African Past** ..., p.108.

136. Ibid.

137. Ibid.

138. Ibid.

139. Ibid.

140. S.T. Plaatjie, **Native Life In South Africa, Before and since The European War and The Boer Rebellion.** (Johannesburg, 1982).

a detached analysis of the changes that were unfolding during first decade of the 20th century. It was mainly a product of his observations and the information he collected from his contemporaries. It contained chapters on Armed Natives in the South African War, The Boer Rebellion of 1914 and the effect of the Natives Land Act of 1913.[141] Of particular importance for the purposes of this study is the chapter on the effects of the 1913 Land Act in the Orange Free State.[142] He examines, in detail, the discussions and the debates leading to the promulgation of the Act. He points out that the political and economic interests of the Africans were completely ignored despite the promises which had been made by the British that black interests would be protected as a reward for their sacrifices in defeating the Boers. In the description of these events he portrays the betrayal which the African felt in all these events. The events which followed the passing of the 1913 Act are described in a masterly fashion.[143] The traumatic experiences of peasants who suddenly saw themselves torn away from their homes with nowhere to go to are graphically described. Pictures of death, starvation, cold and hopelessness come out clearly in his work. The Boers and the British come out as villains oppressing the rightful owners of the land. It must be remembered that Plaatjie was a journalist and the first Secretary General of the South African National Congress which was formed in 1912.[144] The book was partly an attempt to put the case of the African - the necessity for fair treatment-forward and to win the sympathy of all fair minded people. It was written in the hope that the British government, in particular, would be influenced by the injustices of the Act to come to the defence of the African.

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[141]. Ibid.

[142]. Ibid., Chapter xvii.

[143]. Ibid.

[144]. Ibid. p.14.

Sol Plaatjie's history was thus written with an openly political objective. It was a contemporary history written for the purpose of mobilizing opinion to come to the aid of the oppressed African. In it are found the reasons for the formation of one of the oldest nationalist movements on the African continent, the African National Congress. It is Africanist in the sense that its underlying message is the liberation of the African from the oppression of the Whites.

Molema during this time also wrote *The Bantu, Past and Present: An Ethnographical and Historical Study of the Native Races of South Africa*.[145] This work was based on personal information. Its weakness was that it also contains the ideas of colonialist historians like Theal and other Eurocentric sources uncritically leading to the reproduction of myths found in those sources. Some myths reproduced in this work are: the Bantu arrived in South Africa in the sixteenth century, the Bantu were barbaric and incompetent, Shaka was a tyrant and Mzilikazi was a drinker of blood.[146] It appears that Molema was influenced by the missionaries and fully accepted Western values and civilization. He hoped that Africans would assimilate Western values. Like liberals he believed that this would benefit the Africans. He was a manifestation of the corrosion of African values which was the lot of those who had graduated from the missionary colonial school.

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[145]. S.M. Molema: **The Bantu, Past and Present; An Ethnographical and Historical Study of the Native Races of South Africa**. (Edinburgh, 1920)

[146]. Ibid.

Rev John Henderson Soga published the **South Eastern Bantu** in 1930.[147] It was initially written in Xhosa but was later translated into English. While the work tries to reconstruct the history of the Bantu in general its main contribution was the study of the South Eastern Bantu. The editor's introduction describes the book as a "cultural document of importance"[148] because among other things it "keeps alive the memory of the (Natives) past, it will help form their attitude towards their white fellow citizens, it will build up and strengthen their racial consciousness as natives".[149]

In the words of Soga himself, the primary object of the book was to place in the hands of the rising generation of the Bantu something of the history of their people, in the hope that it might help them to a clear perception of who and what they are, and to encourage in them a desire for reading and for studying their language.[150]

The book deals mainly with the tribal constitution and movements, leaving the wider field of customs, laws, religion folklore, etc to others to explore.[151] It contains twenty four chapters, ranging from the origins of the Bantu to the histories of important historical figures such as Hintsa and Shaka.

Soga was self-consciously African and respected the African heritage. He was consciously proud of his Africanness. He was acutely aware of White prejudice against

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[147]. J.H. Soga, **South Eastern Bantu**. (Johannesburg, 1930)

[148]. Ibid. p.xii.

[149]. Ibid.

[150]. Ibid.

[151]. Ibid.

the blackman. His history was aimed at showing that Africans had a rich culture and past which it was the duty of his generation to preserve and keep in memory. Like his father, Tiyo Soga, he believed that the "Kafirs will stand high when compared in all things with the uncivilized races of the world"[152] and further that "they have the elements out of which a noble race might be made".[153]

What is particularly important for the purposes of this study are the basic assumptions which underpinned the historical reconstructions of this elite. They had a lot of respect for Western christian civilization. Their ideal was to uplift and educate the blacks so that they could eventually obtain political equality with the whites in a non-racial unitary state. They tended towards view that traditional culture is a passing phase in the march towards civilization. They were therefore not hostile to western civilization as a whole. They were only opposed to white racism and segregation. They were closer to the Cape Liberal tradition which had instituted a "colour-blind" franchise.[154] They believed in the progressive equality and unity of all civilized mankind. Their Africanism was a liberal one.

2.3   The Professional Liberal Africanists

Most early white liberal historians in Africa were primarily interested in reconstructing the expansion of Western (white) influence in South Africa. They hardly bothered about

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[152]   Ibid. p.xiii.

[153]   Ibid.

[154]   C. Saunders, **The Making Of The South African Past**, p.144.

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the activity of the African. The situation changed in the 1960s and 1970s.[155] There was then a reorientation of liberal history. There was an attempt to recover African experience in the South African past. Those who turned in this direction regarded themselves as liberal Africanists. This turn was a product of developments north of the Limpopo. These historians were influenced by the Africanist historiographical revolution mentioned earlier on. Another factor was the deepening of Black resistance to white supremacist rule in both the urban and rural areas in South Africa. Liberal historians were forced to take account of the African in the making of the South African past.

The key liberal historian who began to take account of the African in the making of the South past was Leonard Thompson.[156] According to Saunders, Thompson wanted to "accomplish for South African history what was being done for the history of tropical Africa: to decolonize it".[157] Together with Arthur Keppel-Jones, they visited the Ghana of Kwame Nkurumah to learn what was being done there.[158] Thompson also attended a History Conference at the University College of Rhodesia. On his return to South Africa he encouraged his colleagues at the University of Cape Town, where he was teaching, to emulate what was being done north of the Limpopo. Apart from several lectures he gave on African societies, he published a biography of Moshoeshoe of Lesotho whom he portrayed as an innovator diplomat and African statesman.[159] Monica

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155. C. Saunders, **The Making of the South African Past** ... p.143.

156. Ibid.

157. Ibid.

158. Ibid.

159. Ibid.

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Wilson, though an anthropologist, was another liberal who focused on African activity in South Africa.[160] Together with Thompson, they planned what was to be known as the *Oxford History of South Africa*".[161] The **Oxford History** has come to be regarded as the quintessence of liberal Africanist history.[162] The preface of the first volume of this work brings out clearly their conception of the history of South Africa. They point out that they intended overturning some misleading assumptions commonly made about the South African past in the existing historiography. South African history did not start with the arrival of Portuguese sailors or the Dutch East Indian company in 1652.[163] Pre-colonial African societies were not static and timeless. Wilson and Thompson brought into the existing liberal tradition the idea that South African history was made by all its people: Bantu, Boer, Briton and Khoisan. The history of South Africa was a product of the interaction of its people. In this interaction, however, the Europeans, particularly the English, provided the leadership in the march of Western civilization. The Bantu and the Khoisan were still behind because of their backward institutions but might catch up in the distant future. The **Oxford History** was certainly an advance on anything that had been written up to then by the liberals. It also constituted a significant ideological break-through considering the oppressive environment of Apartheid at this time. This is why Afrikaner historians such as Van Jaarsveld criticised the first volume as pro-Bantu[164]. Other critics criticized the work for exaggerating the role of the blacks in

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160. Ibid.

161. Ibid.

162. Ibid.

163. M. Wilson and Thompson (eds), **The Oxford History of South Africa**, p.15.

164. F.A. Van Jaarsveld, **The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History, Simondium**, Cape Town, 1964. pp20-25.

shaping the South African past while minimizing the roles of other groups[165]. Other criticism point to the synchronic nature of Monica Wilsons chapters[166]. This is not surprising since Wilson was an anthropologist and the dominant anthropology at this time tended to view its object of study synchronically.

The radicals criticized the **Oxford History** for its focus mainly on ideas - race and racism - as the motive force of history[167]. Radicals chided the **Oxford** historians for ignoring the material base of South African society in the reconstruction of the past. In particular, those of a Marxist bent chided the liberals for ignoring class and class conflict and the dynamics of the modes of production in the South African past. While these radicals appreciated the advances which had been made by the **Oxford History**, they pointed to the limitations of the bourgeois idealist methodology which characterized this liberal history.

2.4   **The Radical Africanists**

The radical Africanist challenge represented the response of the subordinate African groups to the oppressive circumstances they found themselves in South Africa. Most of this challenge rejected the basic assumptions of liberal historiography and was nationalist. According to Ken Smith this tradition lay in the growing black resistance to the South African government[168]. A number of these writers in this tradition were black, but by no means all of them were black.

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165. Ibid.

166. Ibid.

167. Ibid.

168. K. Smith, **The Changing Past** ... p.156.

An important work in this tradition was published by E. Roux in 1948, the year the National Party came to power. It was written from "the standpoint of humane indignation". Its title was: *Time Longer than rope: The Blackman's struggle for freedom in South Africa*[169]. It gives a chilling account of the brutal manner in which the Africans lost their political freedom and land. Various forms of passive and active resistance were undertaken to regain this lost freedom and land. It contains a lot of data about the formation of the African National Congress, the communist Party of South Africa and Clement Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Workers Union.

In the 1950s there was a significant change in the attitude of black writers towards missionaries and whites in general. Whites and missionaries were no longer seen as heroes and saviours who brought christianity and civilization as was the case with liberal Africanists discussed earlier on but, "as outsiders, interlopers and exploiters who dispossessed the original owners"[170]. Most black writers no longer made any distinction between the Afrikaner and English liberal. All whites without exception were viewed as outsiders involved in the plunder and exploitation of the country. Missionaries were regarded not as saviours but agents of imperialism. This is very evident in *Three Hundred Years: A history of South Africa* which appeared under the pseudonym "Mnguni"[171].

The history of South Africa is viewed as the history of the "struggle between oppressors

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169.   E. Roux, **Time Longer Than People: The Blackman's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa**. (Madison, 1964)

170.   Ibid.

171.   "Mnguni", **Three Hundred Years; A history of South Africa**" (Jaca Books, 1980).

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and the oppressed". Another work supposedly published by Nosipho Majeke, entitled **The Role of Missionaries in Conquest**, implicated missionaries in the plunder and conquest of African land.[172] Missionaries, it is argued, were supportive of the activities of imperialists and those who alienated African land. Churches were seen as part of the oppressive machinery of colonialism. This work completely rejected the basic assumptions of liberal history which tended to view missionaries as friends of the oppressed blacks. The work anticipated most of the radical Marxist argument of the late 1970s.

In 1980 a book published in Sri Lanka was openly political and propagandist in its approach[173]. Its message is that blacks must struggle for their independence in order to get back their land. Other writers such as David Dube and Nimrod Mkele wrote in similar vein[174]. This work was radical Africanist but was written by people who were not professional historians. This work is highly committed and the writers are emotionally involved in that which they were investigating. The work reflects the racial polarization which emerged with the implementation of the Apartheid system. This work however, had tremendous influence on professional Africanist history which is discussed in the following chapter.

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172. N. Majeke, **The Role of Missionaries in Conquest** (Cape Town, 1952) pp.16-17.

173. K. Smith, **The Changing Past** ... p.157.

174. Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE AFRICAN FACTOR IN THE PRE-CONQUEST PERIOD: SELECTED THEMES

3.1 Introduction

Most Africanist historians regard the pre-conquest period crucial in attempts to show that Africa had an independent history and that Africans made history.[175] European colonial historians hardly bothered to investigate pre-conquest Africa. When they did it was mainly to demonstrate that African society was backward and primitive. The period was left as the stamping ground of anthropologists and other antiquarians. To colonial historians pre-conquest African could not be expected to have had a history since no system of writing was invented, an invention which was regarded as a mark of civilization. Africa was uncivilized and therefore did not have a history.[176] This is the myth which Africanist historians wanted to destroy and explode. Specifically, they set out to demonstrate that there was change and transformation in Africa before the whites conquered the continent. Centralised, well-administered kingdoms and empires were established. Some of these were even bigger and more efficiently administered than contemporaneous European polities. State creation and civilization were not therefore a monopoly of European history.[177]

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[175]. J. Ki-Zerbo, "**General Introduction**" p.21.

[176]. On a critique of the major thrust and main themes of colonial historiography, see J.A. Fage, "**The Development of African historiography**" in **General History of Africa. Volume I** ...

[177]. C. Neale, **Writing "Independent" History. African Historiography, 1960-1980**. (Greenwood Press, 1985), p.185.

The pre-conquest period, it is asserted, was an ideal period for the Africanist to demonstrate African activity, initiative and genius in its purity. This is so because whatever was created was not in anyway influenced by outside forces and developments.[178] Initiative was African demonstrating a peculiarly and specifically African genius. It is this genius which made a distinctive contribution to the current global civilization. Some Africanists, it may be noted, believe that the current malaise in which Africa finds herself can actually be eradicated if the current leadership adopts pre-conquest models of political and social development.[179]

This chapter aims at investigating how Africanist historians have reconstructed the African factor in pre-conquest South Africa. The main focus are the basic assumptions, concepts and frameworks which structure and foreground their work. No attempt is made to give a detailed exposition of these historical works.[180] Three themes have been selected because of their popularity and also because they clearly demonstrate the major thrust and orientation of African history. The themes are Zulu, Basotho and Pedi processes of state-nation building.[181]

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178. Ibid.

179. B. Davidson, **The Blackman's Burden. Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State** (London, 1992) p.13.

180. For detailed analysis of historiography in South Africa, see K. Smith, **The Changing Past** ...: C. Saunders, **The Making of the South African Past** ...

181. These are not the only states created in the pre-colonial period. The Ndebele, Tlhaping and the Venda, to mention only three, also formed states.

3.2 The Zulu Kingdom

The rise and fall of the Zulu Kingdom is one of the most popular themes on pre-conquest South Africa. Much has been written on this theme that it would not be possible to do justice to all the literature. Only the work of a few who exemplify Africanist history as defined earlier on will be examined.[182]

The work of Omer-Cooper exemplifies Africanist history in a fundamental way.[183] In fact this work is seminal. It breaks in a fundamental way from the picture of African society portrayed by contemporary colleagues. While most of his contemporaries drew pictures and images of an Africa which was static and barbaric, and Africans who lived in unstructured bush communities wallowing in ignorance and living in a Hobbesian state of nature and therefore not deserving any seriously and scholarly attention, Omer-Cooper portrays an African society that was dynamic, changing and transforming.[184] He referred to the rise of the Zulu nation as a revolution whose impact was felt beyond the confines of that nation. His work was deeply influenced by what has come to be known as the Africanist historiographical revolution which unfolded north of the Limpopo with the rise of African nationalism. In particular, he was influenced by the Ibadan school of history centred at the Department of History in the University of Ibadan in Nigeria[185].

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[182]. On the debates on the Mfecane, see, C. Hamilton, **The Mfecane aftermath: reconstructive debates in Southern Africa** (1985).

[183]. J.D. Omer-Cooper, **The Zulu aftermath: a nineteenth century revolution in Bantu Africa** (Ibadan, 1960).

[184]. Ibid.

[185]. **The Zulu aftermath**... was published as part of the Ibadan (Nigeria) History series.

According to historians working at Ibadan, African history was history of Africans and not of Europeans per se in Africa.[186] The focus was on African initiative, activity, adaption and genius in the making of the past. Specific themes include trade and politics, African missionary work and revolutions by Africans.[187] The common orientation of all this work was the glory of the Nigerian past, especially in the context of European expansion. Omer-Cooper wanted to do for South Africa what the Ibadan school was doing for Nigeria. Most Africanists have not deviated from this framework.

In his seminal work entitled *The Zulu Aftermath (1966)* and other works, he isolates three distinct stages in the rise of the Zulu Kingdom.[188] He, however, fore-grounds this three-stage development by looking at the basic principles which structured Nguni society before the rise of the Zulu nation. This fore-grounding was necessary in order to show that the Zulu kingdom was built out of principles which were purely African, which were fundamentally different from those principles which structured white polities - Cape Colony etc. which existed in South Africa at that time. It is important to describe these principles first.[189] According to Omer-Cooper the pre-Mfecane Nguni speaking people lived in relatively small-scale tribes between the Drakensberg range and the sea.[190] In these tribes the chief held a pre-eminent position as the political, judicial, military and spiritual head of his people. He was responsible for taking all major decisions affecting

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186. J.D. Omer-Cooper, **The Zulu aftermath** ... pv.

187. Ibid.

188. Ibid.

189. These principles were internal to Nguni society and were not influenced in any way by external forces or culture.

190. Ibid. p.5.

his people. His court was the court of final appeal. He was the link between the living and the dead. His influence extended to the fertility of the soil and the reproduction of his people.[191]

For effective governance, the tribal territory was divided into segments under the authority of relatives (brothers and sons). The segment chiefs were relatively independent and could pose a threat to chiefly-power.[192] This government was conducted by consultation. A small group of intimate councillors (amapagati) advised the king on day-to-day issues. A wider council existed to deal with the issues affecting the whole tribe.[193] This structure of governance could lead to tribal division if some segment head decided to break away and form an independent tribe. This was a common occurrence in Nguni society. Another cause for division was the system of succession to tribal headship.[194] The chief was, according to custom, succeeded by the eldest son of the 'great wife' who was married after the chief ascended the throne. The chief would almost certainly have had sons out of marriages contracted before succession. Such sons often contested the right to succession of the son of the great wife. This would normally lead to tribal division. Pre-Mfecane tribes were thus brittle and prone to division.[195]

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[191].   Ibid. p. 7.

[192].   Ibid.

[193].   Ibid.

[194].   Ibid.

[195].   Ibid. p.10.

There were however other features and principles which tended towards the opposite direction; towards integration and centralization.[196] These were the pre-eminent position of the chief in the community mentioned above and the age-grade system. The age-grades were a product of a system whereby youngmen of a similar age were initiated into adulthood together and would subsequently remain as a unit carrying out such duties as defending the tribe, building and repairing the chiefs homestead and also agricultural work. The age-grade system tended to unify the tribe, giving it a corporate identity.[197] There was also the system of appointing trusted commoners as deputies of the chief (Indunas). This was a nascent appointive bureaucracy which was loyal to the chief. Since they were commoners they could not form their own independent entities.[198] They did not have the royal charisma to do this and generate the necessary legitimacy.

It must be pointed out that the principles and features just described were adapted to the requirements of building relatively centralised kingdoms by Shaka and his predecessors. The first stage in the building of the Zulu kingdom, according to Omer-Cooper, was characterised by the emergence of three large tribal groupings: the Ngwane of Sobhuza, the Ndwandwe of Zwide and the Mthethwa of Dingiswayo. This stage saw the assimilation of smaller and weaker tribes by stronger ones and the transformation of the age-grades into age-regiments for military purposes.[199] This was necessitated by the competitive expansion of the groupings leading to war. These groupings had a sense of

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[196]. Ibid. p.11.

[197]. Ibid.

[198]. Ibid.

[199]. Ibid. p.25.

common identity but they were weakened by the fact that the age-regiments were disbanded after war and the soldiers went to live with their peoples as civilians.[200]

The next stage was initiated by Shaka when he took over the chiefship of the Mthethwa grouping. He wanted to create a bigger and stronger kingdom. He also did not feel safe with the Zwide grouping expanding.[201] Shaka made a few changes and innovations. First, he replaced the long throwing spear by the short stabbing spear for close combat. This was combined with prolonged drilling. He also created a standing army resident in military towns at the centre of the kingdom.[202] He also initiated the concept of total war in which the enemy had to be completely eliminated. These innovations enabled him to defeat Zwide easily.

Shaka's kingdom was more centralized than those he defeated. Youngmen from different tribes were gathered together and were permanently barracked in military towns.[203] They were commanded by Indunas appointed by him. Each military town was a royal household presided over by a senior women and a senior induna. A special head of cattle chosen for their colour was attached to each military town. There were also female regiments at each town. They were regarded as the wards of the king. They were normally disbanded simultaneously as male regiments and given as wives to the former by the king.

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[200]. Ibid.

[201]. Ibid. p.40.

[202]. Ibid. p.45.

[203]. Ibid.

It must be pointed out that this system tended to shift power from the territorial chiefs to the centre. This tended to prevent the disintegrative tendencies of the previous groupings.

Omer-Cooper pointed out that even-though the Zulu kingdom under Shaka was more centralized than previous kingdoms this centralization was not complete. At the periphery of the kingdom territorial chiefs continued to have their courts.[204] Some could even command some of the regiments. The members of the regiments returned to their tribes after military service. Some Indunas could actually transfer allegiance to one of the royal claimants to power. This is why it was easy to kill Shaka. An induna he trusted supported Shaka's brother's claim to the throne. What can be said in conclusion is that Shaka's kingdom was composed of a highly centralized new core and a traditional periphery.

Most Africanists have generally accepted this framework. The main additions and contestations were mainly empirical and the assigning of causes to those developments. It is not necessary to deal with the factual contestations because these have been dealt with ably in several works. As for causes Africanists have cited population pressure, the need to control or monopolize trade with Delgoa Bay and the role of dynamic personalities. These explanations remain hypotheses. Sources for the period-oral and written do not appear in a form which is conducive to definitive conclusions or explanations.[205]

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[204]. Ibid.

[205]. L.D. Ngcongco, "The Mfecane and the rise of the new African states" in **General History of Africa. Volume, VI**, p.92.

There is however a historian, Cobbing, who challenges the Omer-Cooper thesis as mythology.[206] He actually points out that Mfecane did not exist in the manner in which Omer-Cooper would like people to believe. He rejects Omer-Cooper's conception of the Mfecane as a product in Nguni society. He suggests that the violence which characterized this period did not originate from developments in Nguni society but were a product of labour raiding and slaving expeditiions steming from the Cape Colony and the Portuguese based at Delagoa Bay.[207] He actually suggests that the concept, Mfecane, in Omer-Cooper sense, must be jettisoned completely. He concludes his study by saying that the notion of the Mfecane was initiated by writers whose main purpose was to justify the dismemberment of the Zulu nation. In other words writings on the Mfecane justified the colonial subjugation of the region by demonizing the Zulu.[208]

Cobbing's thesis sparked a tremendous interest and controversy in the history of the Zulu. A lot of research was carried out to test the validity of Cobing's hypothesis. The results of this reconsideration of the Mfecane problem have now been published.[209] Cobbing has been supported by scholars such as Wright.[210] Others such as, Saunders,

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206. J. Cobbing, "Political Mythology and the making of Natal's Mfecane" in **Canadian Journal of African Studies, 2, 1989**. See also, J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo" Journal of African History, 29 (1988), pp 487 and 519.

207. J, Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo". **Journal of African History**, 29 (1988) p. 487.

208. Ibid.

209. See, C. Hamilton (ed.) **The Mfecane Aftermath. Reconstructive Debates in Southern Africa**, (Witwatersrand, 1995).

210. J, Wright, "Beyond the concept of the 'Zulu Explotion'. Comments on the Current Debate" in C. Hamilton, p.109.

prefer to be cautious.[211]   Saunders argues that there seems to be no evidnce to completely corroborate Cobbings radical hypothesis. He observes that at the moment it is difficult to say what really happened.[212]

In concluding our discussion on the rise of the Zulu kingdom it is necessary to isolate the basic assumptions and concepts which underpin the work of the historians we have mentioned above. In the first place, theirs is the conception of history as primarily past politics. Most Africanist historians of the Mfecane do not deal with the economic dimensions of this process. Those who mention trade, for instance, trade with Delgoa Bay, view it simply as an aid to politics and nothing else. The nature of the economy in the area and changes in its structure are not discussed. History is also viewed as a linear process of movement or progress from simple structures to more complex structures. There is also a tendency to see it as a movement from stateless societies to state directed society. The state plays a pivotal role in the process of change and transformation. Associated with this is methodological individualism which sees the individual as the motive force in history. Innovations and changes are viewed as the product of the agency of gifted individuals. These individuals are glorified as heroes who should be emulated by current leaders. Finally there is a tendency to view events in a positive light as leading to development. The role of violence is underplayed by viewing such violence as constructive. In the case of the violence of Mfecane, the idea is that this led to the creation of durable entities and polities which resisted racist colonialism and also formed the foundations of modern nations   who are members of the United Nations

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[211].   C, Saunders, "Pre-Cobbing Mfecane Historiography" in C. Hamilton. op.cit. p.33.

[212].   Ibid.

Organisations. It is clear that the reconstruction of the history of the rise of the Zulu nation is done through the framework of nationalist ideology which regards the national idea or spirit as the key or primary force in human development. It is necessary to turn to a discussion of the manner in which the history of the rise of the Basotho nation was represented in order to find out what other assumptions guided Africanist history apart from those mentioned above.

3.3   The Basotho Kingdom

The same pattern of change from small scale tribal units to large scale, fairly centralized units seems to appear in most of the work of Africanist historians on the Basotho.[213] Also evident is the role of individual genius in adapting to changing circumstances leading to the survival and consolidation of the kingdom. The idea of history as politics is also prominent in most of the analysis. This is the case with the work of Peter Saunders who is seminal in the Africanist reconstruction of the history of the Basotho nation. Other historians like Maylam do not significantly deviate from Saunder's work.

The Basotho kingdom developed among the Sotho to the east of the Caledon River.[214] It used to be argued that the kingdom developed during the Mfecane as a response to the Mfecane. However, recent research increasingly point to its formation subsequent to the Difaqane. This comes out clearly in the work of William Lye for instance.

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[213].   P. Saunders, **Moshoeshoe, Chief of the Sotho**. (Cape Town, 1975).

[214].   Ibid. p.10.

Prior to this the Sotho like the Zulu lived in small-scale chiefdoms. The little centralization which had occurred affected only a few of these tribes. A good example are the Kwena of Mohlomi.[215] Moshoeshoe, who is regarded as the founder of this kingdom, was born in one of the small tribal groupings, the Bamokoteli, a junior branch of the Bakwena. His group actually paid tribute to a stronger tribe, the Sekake. Moshoeshoe gained experience of leadership at an early age from Mohlomi and his life long-time friend and adviser Makoanyane.[216] He owned his rapid rise to power, it is argued, to a threefold strategy and some factors: his material base and wealth which came from frequent cattle raids; a reputation of justice and generosity and the food and protection he gave to refugees who were assimilated into his entity.

Born in 1786, he grew up under the shadow of his father until he broke away to form an independent tribe in 1820.[217] His capital was Buthabuthe. At this stage he was so weak that he had to pay tribute to stronger groups such as the Hlubi and the Ngwane. The Tlokwa also harassed him in 1823 and 1824.[218] He thus had to move to a more secure position, the mountain stronghold of Thaba Bosiu. It is at this stage that his followers came to be known as Basotho. Settled in Thaba Bosiu, the key issue for Moshoeshoe and his Basotho was survival. The migrations and the disruptions of the Difaqane were bound to affect him. There was also the threat of the Boers, missionaries and the British who were to move into his area in the 1840's and 1850s. The biggest initial problems involved the threats of conquest by the Ndebele, the Griqua-Kora and the White settlers

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215.   Ibid. p.12.

216.   Ibid. p.40.

217.   Ibid.

218.   Ibid. p.43.

in the Transgariep. The way he handled relations with these groups, it is argued, contributed to the consolidation of the Basotho kingdom.[219]

He survived Ndebele attacks by giving them food so that he could be left alone. His policy of providing food to his attackers led to some of them joining the kingdom. According to Maylam between 1833 and 1834, 12 000 people joined him during this period.[220]

The threat of white settlers was neutralized by the absorption of weaker groups who were then settled at the borders of his kingdom in order to repulse white settlers who were demanding cattle, land and slaves. Groups such as the Tlokwa, Taung, the Seleka-Rolong and the Tlhaping were absorbed and given the task of protecting the borders. This process was completed by 1853. Apart from absorbing these groups and treating them well he also acquired horses and rifles.[221] He created a small but efficient army which protected the territorial integrity of the nation.[222] He also brought in missionaries such as the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, the Roman, Anglican and the Wesleyan missionaries. These acted as go-betweens in relations with aggressive enemies. Because of his well-coming policy the missionaries were eager that his kingdom should expand so they could rescue more souls from the clutches of the devil.[223]

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[219]. Ibid. p.53.

[220]. P. Maylan, **A History of The African People of South Africa from The Early Iron Age to the 1970s**, p.26.

[221]. Ibid.

[222]. P. Saunders, **Moshoeshoe**..., p.39.

[223]. Ibid.

Africanists believe that missionaries played an important role in this material consolidation. They provided the Basotho with new skills of reading and writing, carpentry and new methods of agriculture etc. Some radical Africanists believe that the missionaries were agents of foreign rule who came as spies and who also, through conversions, led to division which weakened the nation.[224]

The biggest challenge however were the Boers who wanted grazing land and labour. In order to contain this threat he expanded his area of rule and incorporated more people who owed allegiance to him. These would then act as his defenders. He gave a few Boers right to use land on a temporary basis and employed missionaries as diplomats in relations with the Boers. He also tried to play Boer against Briton in order to buy time and to neutralize these threats. By the time he died in 1870 the Basotho kingdom had become a reality.[225]

The Basotho kingdom was not as centralised as that of Shaka.[226] He gave segment chiefs as much autonomy as possible. This was a weakness, but through his tact, justice and diplomacy he was able to hold the kingdom together in the face of enormous pressures. The **pitso** or national assembly was the main organ through which national identity was built.[227] Some have argued that the discussions and debates which characterized the

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[224]. On the impact of missionaries on African society, see, N. Majeke, **The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest** (Cape Town, 1952). Also, K. Smith, **The Changing Past**, p.158.

[225]. P. Saunders, **Moshoeshoe** ... p. 120.

[226]. Ibid.

[227]. Ibid.

deliberations of the **pitso** was an embodiment of democracy which assured the survival of the kingdom.

It is clear here that the basic assumptions which, we saw, underpinned the reconstruction of Zulu history also structure thinking in the Basotho case.[228] As pointed out above, the glorification of the nation and the individual leader of genius continue to be predominant. History is viewed as past politics. Also important is the idea of the enlargement of scale which underpinned social change.[229] The national principle or idea pervades the discussion. Africanism is evident in the portrayal of the African as the active participation in the remarking of his/her environment. The role of the white men is acknowledged; it is a role which is played in accordance with the needs of the African for survival.

3.4   The Pedi Kingdom

This was established in the region between the Leolu Mountains and Steelpoort and the Olifants river in the east of the Leolu Mountains. Centralization in this area was completed by the end of the 18th century.[230]

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228. Ibid.

229. On the idea of enlargement of scale, see, A. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History** p.22.

230. P. Delius, **The land belong to us: The Pedi polity, the Boers and the British in the 19th century Transvaal** (Johannesburg, 1983).

This kingdom was a product of the coming together of the Maroteng and the Tau. The Maroteng were initially subject to the Kwena but they eventually worked together to form the nucleus of a kingdom which came to be known as Bopedi. It was essentially a loose confederation. This structure was a source of both weakness and strength as will be observed below.[231]

The most seminal work on this kingdom was that of Peter Delius.[232] He identifies several factors leading to centralization.[233] The Tau and the Maroteng complemented each other well. The Tau were greater in number and had many cattle. They used this to establish marriages with other groups thus extending their influence. The Maroteng were brilliant metal workers and produced such products as spears and hoes which were in demand in these agricultural communities. They could also use their knowledge and wealth to assimilate other groups.[234]

It was the Maroteng under Mampuru who subjugated and assimilated other groups including the Tau. This process started in the second half of the 18th century. The Maroteng confederation reached its peak under Thulare who ruled between 1790 and 1820.[235] Thulare sent expeditions as far north as Phalaborwa and as far South as Vaal river. Thulare died in 1820 and a succession dispute left the Maroteng weak in the face

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231. Ibid. p.7.

232. P. Delius, **The land belongs to us**.

233. Ibid. p.4.

234. Ibid. p.5.

235. Ibid. p.8.

of pressures from the Ndwandwe, Ndebele and Swazi. Omer-Cooper and Rasmussen observed that the Maroteng were, because of this, defeated by their enemies. Sekwati who succeeded Thulare had to move as far north as Pietersburg for safety.[236]

Sekwati later came back to reclaim his throne. To expand his influence over other groups diplomatic marriages were contracted. Subordinate groups were also provided with cattle for use which however remained under the ownership of the giver; the **mafisa** system. Like Moshoeshoe, Sekwati used tact and diplomacy to keep his enemies at bay. He established cordial relations with the Boers in order to use them for defence against the Swazi and the Zulu. In 1845 an agreement was reached with the Boers on land in which the Boers were given usufrunct.[237] Sekwati understood by this agreement that the land grants were temporary. The Boers, however, had no intention of surrending the land given to them. This agreement however, cemented a temporary friendship which allowed the Pedi time to deal with other enemies. To avoid war with the Zulu he temporarily agreed to become tributary to the reigning Zulu monarch Mpande. Sekwati was not willing to make this a permanent relationship.

He was also able to create a powerful and loyal army. Migrant labourers who went to Kimberly were supposed to buy guns which would then be surrendered to Sekwati for use by his army. Horses were also acquired in this way. Indeed by the 1860s the Pedi confederacy was strong and a viable entity which entered agreement with other like entities.[238]

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[236]. Ibid. p.9.

[237]. Ibid. p.12.

[238]. Ibid.

What is clear in these analyses are the common assumptions of the national spirit, the role of the individual and enlargement of scale.

3.5   Conclusion

The themes which were selected exemplify the main thrust in the analysis of the African factor in the pre-colonial past. The picture which is now available is that of a dynamic pre-conquest African past. The picture of the immobility and backwardness of the colonial historian is completely gone. The "forgotten" factor in South African history has now become a significant factor. History did not begin with the Whites. Africans also made history. In the next chapter the African factor in the period from conquest to the present will be examined. Selected themes will be used to exemplify this factor.

CHAPTER IV

THE AFRICAN FACTOR IN THE POST-CONQUEST PERIOD: SELECTED THEMES

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the nature of Africanist history, with its emphasis on African initiative and achievement, was exemplified by an analysis of the processes of the state creation. In that chapter the central issue was to demonstrate that Africans, unaided by outside forces, were able to produce leaders of genius who responded to opportunities available to them to produce relatively advanced governmental structures and coherent and stable polities. The purpose of this was to counter the colonialist claim that Africans were incapable of initiative and never produced any structures of note in human civilization.

In this chapter, the African factor is demonstrated by analysing the African reaction and response to conquest and colonial subjugation. The main focus of the chapter is the Africanist analysis of what has been termed primary and secondary resistance to colonial penetration and subjugation. As in the previous chapter the idea was to demonstrate that Africans and their leaders did not just surrender the sovereignty of their communities and polities passively but that they defended their independence, through diplomacy and by taking up arms where necessary.

Furthermore, Africanists wanted to demonstrate that the outcome of this struggle, particularly the political content of the structures created after primary resistance, was not solely influenced by European requirements but also by African resistance itself.[239]   In other words the resistance put up by the Africans helped to shape the character of the political structures which emerged when the wars of conquest came to an end. However, of all themes in the Africanist attempt to demonstrate African initiative and achievement, it is the rise of African nationalism and nationalist struggles, which best exemplify the nature of Africanist history.   African nationalism and the struggle for political independence serve to demonstrate the continent's unique contribution to current global civilization.   African nationalism is viewed as African ideology which has catapulted Africa into the twentieth century.[240]

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the manner in which Africanists have approached these themes. No detailed exposition of the actual events is attempted since this has been ably done by the Africanist historians themselves.   The focus is on developments in the second half of the 19th century. For continuity, the responses of the Zulu Nation and the Pedi nation have been selected.[241]

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239.   P. Maylam, **A History of the African People of South Africa, from the Early Iron Age to the 1970's** (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1986).

240.   L.D. Ngcongco, **The Mfecane** ... p.211.

241.   On the Reaction of the Zulu and the Pedi see, P. Maylam, **A History of the African people** ...

4.2   Primary Resistance

The second half of the nineteenth century was very important in South African history. In particular, the discovery of gold and diamonds in the interior led to fundamental political and economic transformation of South Africa.[242] A new imperialism powered by the requirements of industrial capital for vital raw materials and markets for investment emerged.[243]   The British who had hitherto been content to leave the interior under various forms of indirect political and economic control changed their policy.[244] The huge capital investments poured into the mining industry had to be made profitable and secure.   A proper infrastructure of ports and railways had to be provided. Cheap labour had to be provided. It is in this context that the British embarked on destroying the sovereignty of polities in the interior, whether Boer or African.[245] Colonialist historians have viewed this as a process of white civilized expansion and Africans seen as obstacles to that expansion.[246]   It is this negative view of the African role which prompted Africanist historians to paint a positive picture of the African contribution to the rise of modern South Africa.

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242.   On the impact of diamond and gold mining and African societies, see, C. Bundy. **The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry (Cape Town, 1988):** P. Maylam, **A History of   the African people** ...

243.   P. Maylam, **A History of the African people** ... p.20.

244.   Ibid.

245.   Ibid. p.10.

246.   Ibid. p.12.

The response of the Zulu Nation to the processes mentioned above have been analysed by many historians from an Africanist position.[247] What emerges from these accounts is that the Zulu, far from being bloody scoundrels of colonial history, responded positively to the opportunities created by the presence of White traders and missionaries as long as these groups did not interfere with their political sovereignty and their land.[248] Indeed, since the establishment of Port Natal in the 1840s the Zulu became very active participants in trade, exchanging their indigenous wares - skins, ivory, honey etc. for important goods such as hardware, textiles and fire arms.[249] Zulu rulers, particularly Mpande and Cetshwayo in the 1860s and 1870s, willingly welcomed traders who were prepared to provide them with arms which would be used to strengthen Zulu sovereignty. Missionaries were also welcomed for some of the skills which they provided, such as woodwork, metalwork, farming, medicine etc.[250] It was only when they interfered with vital customs and religious activities that the Zulu ruling class became uncooperative[251] Even then, missionaries were able to gain a few converts who were subsequently to play a crucial role in the rise of African nationalism.[252]

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[247]. J. Guy, **The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom**. (Longman, London, 1979).

[248]. P. Maylam, **A History of the African People** ... p.30.

[249]. Ibid.

[250]. Ibid. p.32.

[251]. Ibid.

[252]. Ibid.

More threatening to Zulu independence than missionaries and traders were those Europeans who wanted land for settlement; the Boers and White settlers.[253]   The initial form of response to these threats was diplomacy, not war. Representations were made to the British administration in Natal to stop the encroachment of the Transvaal Boers on the Zulu Kingdom, by Mpande and Cetshwayo in the 1820s and 1860s.[254]   These representations were initially successful because the British administration under Shepstone was particularly hostile to the encroachments of the Boers in Natal. This hostility must, however, be seen within the context of Anglo-Boer rivalry for dominance within South Africa as a whole.[255]   The Zulu leadership was able to exploit this rivalry for their own benefit; that is, to protect their independence.

The situation changed completely with the arrival of Sir Bartle Frere in South Africa in 1877 as High Commissioner[256] Frere, an arch-imperialist, believed that the Zulu Nation had to be destroyed in order to establish British supremacy in the area. Since the Zulu ruling class wanted a peaceful solution to the various problems which existed including the crucial one of land, Frere had to manufacture reasons for the destruction of the Zulu Nation.[257]   Against evidence to the contrary, the Zulu state was portrayed as highly militarized and Cetshwayo as a barbaric despot who was not only planning war against the Whites settlements but also at the centre of a conspiracy to overthrow White rule

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253.   Ibid. p.33.

254.   Ibid.

255.   Ibid. p.40.

256.   J. Guy, **The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom** ... p.15.

257.   P. Maylam, **A History of the African People** ... p.132.

throughout South Africa.[258]   It is in this context that all attempts by the Zulu king to search for a diplomatic and peaceful solution to problems were rejected.[259]   It was Frere who prepared the road to Isandhlwana and Ulundi in 1879.[260]   Though the Zulu decimated British forces at Isandhlwana they were defeated at Ulundi.[261]   The outcome is well known; the Zulu nation, one of the most powerful states in Southern Africa, was dismembered. But resistance did not completely die out. The Bambatha uprising of 1906 was a manifestation of this. This uprising was directed towards the recreation of the Zulu Nation and the regaining of independence from foreign rule.[262]

An important aspect of the Africanist reconstruction of Zulu primary resistance as portrayed above has been an attempt to portray the Zulu as innocent victims of oppressive external forces, particularly those represented by the Boers and the British Colonial government. The Zulu ruling class leading the primary resistance movement emerge as heroes protecting the legitimate interests of the Zulu Nation. They were able to utilize indigenous structures such as the military machine to protect their territorial sovereignty. The British and the Boers are portrayed as invaders and enemies of peace and stability in Southern Africa during the nineteenth century. It is clear here that Africanist history is essentially nationalist.

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[258].   Ibid.

[259].   Ibid.

[260].   Ibid.

[261].   Ibid.

[262].   Ibid. p.36.

This approach is also evident in the analysis of the manner in which the Pedi polity was brought under colonial rule and the nature of resistance to that process.[263] The creation of a relatively united Pedi state was discussed in the previous chapter. This state was confronted by forces similar to those confronted by the Zulu Nation.[264]

Serious problems started during the leadership of Sekwati since the 1820s. Diplomacy was the tool chosen by Sekwati and the Pedi leadership to protect national sovereignty.[265] The two major problems this state confronted were the trekker communities of Eastern Transvaal and the Swazi State.[266] The Swazis were, however, not a very formidable force. Their attacks in the 1830s and 1869 were repulsed.[267] It was the Boer trekker communities and the Christian missionaries who posed the most serious threat to the integrity of the Pedi polity.[268]

In the mid 1840s a white boer trekker community settled in the east of the Steelpoort River.[269] The reaction of Sekwati was peaceful. Sekwati, to be specific, negotiated an arrangement with the Boer leader, Potgieter, whereby the Boers would have only the right to use, but not own, certain portions of the land in the western part of the

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[263]. Ibid. p.100

[264]. Ibid.

[265]. Ibid.

[266]. Ibid.

[267]. P. Delius, **The Land belongs to us** ... p.40.

[268]. Ibid.

[269]. Ibid. p.43.

Kingdom.[270] Relations later deteriorated when the Boers interpreted the agreement to mean outright ownership.[271] The Boers started demanding labour and tribute from the Pedi. The Pedis were blamed for cattle thefts.[272] A Boer commando attacked them in 1852 and Pedi cattle and goats were stolen.[273]

The Pedi reacted by moving to the mountain stronghold of Thaba Bosego.[274] When Sekhukhuni succeeded to the headship of the paramountcy he continued with his predecessor's policy of peaceful diplomacy, avoiding open confrontation with the trekkers.[275] However, the aggressive demand for land and labour by the Boers led to open war in 1876.[276] In the 1880s the Pedi polity had been dismembered and the Pedi were incorporated into the Transvaal by the combined forces of the British and the Boers.

Resistance was not restricted to the political and economic levels of the polity only. There was also cultural resistance. Missionary activity generally had the effect of creating divisions among the people; between the converts and those who stuck to their culture.[277]

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[270]. Ibid. p.45.

[271]. Ibid.

[272]. Ibid. p.50.

[273]. Ibid. p.51.

[274]. Ibid.

[275]. Ibid.

[276]. Ibid. p.60

[277]. Ibid.

This was the case with the activities of Berlin Missionary society in the 1860s and 1870s.[278] Though Sekhukhuni tolerated the activities of the missionaries, his tolerance disappeared when missionaries converted some members of his own family.[279] He put pressure on them to recant.[280] Hostility towards missionaries led to Merensky, one of the militant missionaries, to quit the Pedi heartland for Botshabelo in the south-west.[281] Converts followed and Botshabelo became the centre of christian refugees who continued to spread values hostile to the stability of traditional culture.[282]

As in the case of the Zulu Nation, traditional leaders emerged as guardians of indigenous African culture and protectors of territorial sovereignty and integrity. The Boers, missionaries and the British colonialists are viewed as outsiders coming to oppress a peaceful people. Of particular importance is the way missionaries are portrayed. They collaborated with invaders and oppressors.[283] Missionaries caused divisions and disunity instead of civilized stability. In short, missionaries emerged as enemies of African independence and unity. As agents of foreign rule, missionaries are viewed as a crucial cog in the exploitation and oppression of the African people.

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278.   Ibid.

279.   P. Delius, **The Land Belongs to us** ... p.60.

280.   Ibid. p.63.

281.   Ibid.

282.   Ibid. p.64.

283.   Ibid.

4.3 The Rise of African Nationalism and the Beginning of the Nationalist struggle

The rise of African nationalism and the beginnings of the nationalist struggle is regarded as the crowning achievement of African resistance in Africanist historiography.[284] It must be observed that Africanist history, as opposed to other historiographies, is at pains to demonstrate the continuity of resistance to what is regarded as foreign rule (European rule) since the nineteenth century.[285] The rise of modern nationalism tends to be linked directly with primary resistance and the rebellions of the colonial period.[286] It is argued that while primary resistance, the colonial rebellions and modern nationalism may have taken different forms, their substance was the same: the recovery of independence and freedom.[287] It is therefore not surprising that a discussion of the rise of African nationalism in fact, becomes a discussion of African activity since the imposition of colonial rule in the nineteenth century.[288] It is thus argued that it is not possible to understand modern nationalism without an understanding of primary resistance and the colonial rebellions.[289] The central feature in the Africanist approach is to demonstrate

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[284]. Ibid. p.67

[285]. A.B. Davidson, "African Resistance and Rebellion Against the Imposition of Colonial Rule" in T.O. Ranger (ed), **Emerging Themes of African History** ... p.181.

[286]. Ibid.

[287]. Ibid.

[288]. Ibid., p.182.

[289]. Ibid.

continuity and linkages between the past and the present.[290] This will come out in our discussion of the Africanist discussion of African nationalism in South Africa.

In discussing the background to African nationalism it is claimed that the tradition of resistance to the establishment of colonial rule was important. [291] Thus Ngcongco could argue in his discussion of the significance of the Mfecane that the foundations of the modern nations of Swaziland and Lesotho were laid down during this period and that the processes of state creation have provided inspiration to the educated elite of today.[292] Indeed, according to Ngcongco, the kingdoms of Swaziland and Lesotho have survived from the pre-colonial creations of Sobhuza and Moshoeshoe, respectively, as islands of sanity in a sea of racialism.[293] Thus the pre-colonial nationalism of Shaka, Sobhuza and Moshoeshoe never really died out in the consciousness of the respective people of Zululand, Swaziland and Lesotho.

Similar linkages are established between the colonial rebellions such as the Bambatha uprising of 1906 and modern nationalism.[294] This uprising which occurred as a response to the extortionate taxes imposed by the colonial regime is said to have provided inspiration to future nationalist leaders.[295] It is said to have provided lessons to the emerging educated elite to the effect that the tactics of the traditional leadership were not

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[290]   Ibid.

[291]   D. Chanaiwa, "African initiatives and Resistance in Southern Africa" in A. Adu Boahen (ed), **General History of Africa, Volume 7**; p.198.

[292]   L.D. Ngcongco "The Mfecane and the rise of new African States" p.91.

[293]   Ibid, pp120-121.

[294]   Ibid.

[295]   P. Maylam, **A History of the African People** ..., p.120.

very useful in the African struggle for independence.[296]   In other words primary resistance as well as the colonial rebellions, apart from establishing a valuable tradition of the memories of African people, were cast in the form of a learning curve.[297]   The educated elite of the modern nationalist movements are said to have modified their approach to the freedom struggle in the light of the failures of the past.[298]

Modern African nationalism in South Africa, according to Africanist historians, is said to have emerged in the first two decades of the twentieth century and was a child of the western educated elite.[299]   The largest concentration of this group was to be found mainly in the Cape Colony and Natal.[300]   At least three factors are said to have interacted with each other leading to the emergence of this leadership.   These factors were, the influence of christian missions, the non-racial political system of the Cape and African integration into the settler colonial economy.[301]   Of these factors, the impact of the missionaries seems to have been the most important.[302]   Most early leaders of the nationalist movement were graduates of mission schools in the Eastern Cape.[303]   The same can be said about the **Kholwa** of Natal who were prominent in the nationalist

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[296]   Ibid, p.124

[297]   Ibid.

[298]   L.D. Ngcongco, "**The Mfecane and the Rise of New African States.**" p.121.

[299]   Ibid

[300]   P. Maylam, **A History of the African people** ... p.130.

[301]   Ibid, p.131.

[302]   Ibid.

[303]   Ibid.

movement of that area.[304] Prominent names in the modern nationalist movement such as John Knox Bokwe, Tiyo Soga, John Tengo Jabavu and John Dube, Martin Luthuli and Pixley Seme were mission educated.[305] Mission education provided them with the skills and knowledge to mobilize support among the oppressed to struggle for their rights in the context of the twentieth century.[306] They were able to form proto-nationalist organisations such as the South African Native Congress.[307] The early proto-nationalist organisations were essentially moderate in their approach since they accepted the basic structures of European rule.[308] What they struggled for were improvements within the White dominated system.[309]

The same elite emerging within the context of christian churches later abandoned the white dominated churches to form their own independent christian churches.[310] The movement to independent churches has come to be known as Ethiopianism.[311] The root problem was the failure of the white colonial missionaries to find space within the European churches for emerging educated elite.[312] These elite felt that their education, knowledge and skills entitled them to hold positions of influence and power within the

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[304]. Ibid, p.132.

[305]. Ibid., p.133

[306]. Ibid.

[307]. Ibid.

[308]. Ibid. p.134.

[309]. Ibid.

[310]. Ibid.

[311]. Ibid, p.136.

[312]. Ibid.

church; a position which was rejected by the White missionaries.[313] Ethiopianism was thus an important factor in the rise of African national awareness.[314]

Before 1912 most organisations were regional and ethnic and were restricted mainly to towns in the Cape Colony, Natal, the Orange Free State and Transvaal.[315] Modern Nationalism in South Africa may be said to have emerged with the formation of the South African Native National Congress in Bloemfontein in 1912.[316] In 1923 this organisation was renamed the African National Congress.[317] John Dube, who received his education both in South Africa and the United States of America was elected the first president.[318]

Most Africanist historians observed that the African National Congress was mild and moderate in its approach to the African problem.[319] Most of its initial concerns were those which affected the educated elite: exclusion from the franchise, inequality in the distribution of land and discrimination on the job-market.[320] The party did not demand

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313.   Ibid, p.137

314.   Ibid.

315.   Ibid.

316.   Ibid.

317.   Ibid, p.137.

318.   Ibid.

319.   Ibid.

320.   Ibid.

African rule at this time. They were opposed to violent confrontation and strikes.[321] Thus in the first twenty years of its existence the African National Congress adopted a peaceful approach to African problems.[322] However certain developments in the wider society such as the increasing segregation legislation from 1923 onwards, the formation of the Communist Party in 1921 and the increasing radical activities of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union which had been formed by Clement Kadalie in 1919 tended to push the African National Congress in the direction of miliant radicalism.[323] This was however resisted by most in the period before 1948.[324]

4.4   Conclusion

The Africanist reconstruction of South African history tended to focus mainly on the African struggle against racist European rule since the nineteenth century. This is why themes such as primary resistance, colonial rebellions and African nationalism were selected. Africanist historians have largely ignored European activity. The reason for this is simple. They wanted to show that Africans played an active role in shaping their own destiny. The destiny of the Africans was not shaped for them by European missionaries. This history was also essentially nationalist in its attempt to link the present with the past. This is why Africanist history is a celebration of African activity, achievement, initiative and genius.

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[321]. Ibid, p.138.

[322]. Ibid, p.139.

[323]. Ibid.

[324]. Ibid.

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CHAPTER V

AFRICANIST HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CRITIQUE

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter a critique of Africanist history in South Africa is attempted. The critique focuses on three aspects namely fundamental assumptions, methodology and theory. However, before this is done it is important to revisit the definition of Africanist history in order to be absolutely clear about what is being critiqued. First, it is important to remember that not every historian who mentions Africans in his/her work is an Africanist.[325]

In South African historiography, for instance, the Imperial, Settler, Liberal, Afrikaner and Marxist schools tackle events which involve Africans.[326] The Imperial, Settler and Afrikaner schools however, tend to view Africans negatively: as obstacles to the spread of White Christian civilization. African culture and institutions were backward and primitive and had to be either destroyed or preserved separately. Though liberals were sympathetic to the interests of Africans, they wanted Africans to be assimilated into European culture since Africans were educable. Their approach was paternalistic. These schools were therefore not Africanist, for to be Africanist meant to view Africans as distinctive agents of their own change and transformation. It is to treat African culture

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[325]. For a clear definition of an Africanist historian, see, Chapter One.

[326]. For adetailed critique of the various schols of South African History, see Ken Smith, **The changing Past** ...

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as a civilization which is different but of equal value to others. Africanist historians pushed European activity into the background and African activity into the foreground. Marxists were not Africanist in the sense that their preoccupation with the mode of production, classes and class struggles tended to blur what was distinctively African. In the context of South African historiography; the dominant Althusserian Marxism tended to ignore agency in four of structural relations and yet at the heart of Africanism is African agency. What is being said here is that Africanist history is that which focussed on African agency, initiative, adaptation and achievement.

5.2 Fundamental Assumptions and Methodology

An important assumption which has structured Africanist historical practice in general and is implicit in the definition above is the desirability and possibility of writing an "autonomous African history".[327] The question of autonomy is "posited in three forms: first as against the preceding colonialist historiography in Africa, secondly as based upon indigenous documentation, and finally as pointing towards appropriation and adaptation of Western culture in the building of modern African nations".[328] It is hardly necessary to go into detail about the anti-colonial dimension of this issue. What must be emphasized however is that Africanists criticized colonial historians for presenting Europeans as the main actors in any significant transformation of the continent. This is the criticism which has been levelled against the dominant schools in South Africa.[329]

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[327]. C. Neale, **Writing "Independent" History**, p.30.

[328]. Ibid. p.36.

[329]. Ken Smith, **The Changing Past** ..., p.155.

It must be remembered that Africanists in South Africa were heavily influenced by the anti-colonial schools such as Ibadan and Dar-es-Salaam.[330] The doyen of mature Africanist history in South Africa, Omer-Cooper, worked at Ibadan and wanted to do for South Africa what was being done in West Africa. In fact the seminal **The Zulu Aftermath** was first published in 1966 as part of the Ibadan History series.[331] The battle against colonial history was fought on empirical and rhetorical grounds rather than on theoretical grounds. The main thrust of Omer-Cooper, Denoon and Delius, to mention only three, was the production of empirical evidence to prove the colonial school wrong. This approach continues today as is evident in the work of Maphalala working at the University of Zululand.[332] To be specific, Omer-Cooper rejects colonialist claims of the barbarity and backwardness of the Zulu. On the significance of the Mfecane, he observed:

> "Its interest and significance lie not only in its colossal scale, in the fearful destruction and loss of life which it produced ... but even more, in the fact that, far from being a mere matter of whirling bands of barbarians wandering and clashing orgy of destructive fury, it was essentially a process of positive political change".[333]

In a recent unpublished paper, Maphalala portrayed a picture of Zulu people who were essentially peaceful and against destructive wars. Though some of the views expressed

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[330]. For a thorough critique of these schools, see, A. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History**, Chapter Two.

[331]. J.D. Omer Cooper, **The Zulu Aftermath**.

[332]. J. M. Maphalala "The Zulu people and the Anglo-Boer War" (A peper read at the UNISA Library Conference on "Rethinking the S.A. War, August 1988).

[333]. Ibid. p.20.

by Africanists may be exaggerated, there is no doubt that a more balanced picture of African social and political structures now exists than that which existed before the 1960s. In South Africa however the Africanist school has not gained the dominance it has had north of the Limpopo for political reasons.[334]

What is important to mention, with Temu and Swai, is that "Africanist historiography was constituted as an ideological response to colonial historiography".[335] In this encounter, Africanist history, remained trapped, thereby making it "a negative mirror image of liberal historiography".[336] The consequences of this will be discussed below.

The second form the issue of autonomy took was reliance on indigenous documentation, particularly oral tradition. Africanists have catapulted oral tradition to centre stage in their historical practice. Oral tradition is regarded as "by far the most intimate historical sources, the most rich, the one which is fullest of the sap of authenticity".[337] African proverbs have been deployed to support the feasibility of these traditions in the reconstruction of the past. For instance, it is said, the mouth of an old man smells bad, but it says good and salutary things.[338] Africanists have supported the use of oral traditions by arguing that the inability and failure of previous history (colonial history) to mention African achievements were a product of their failure to tap oral tradition.

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334. Ken Smith, The Changing Past, p.159.

335. A. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History** p.21.

336. Ibid.

337. J.K. Zerbo, "General Introduction" in **General History of Africa Volume One**, p.30.

338. Ibid.

Oral tradition was thus viewed as the only source which could vindicate the African voice.[339] In other parts of Africa doctoral theses based mainly on oral traditions have been produced. This has yet to happen in South Africa. However, all Africanists use oral traditions, particularly in those cases where written documents are not available. The study of pre-colonial states in South Africa has taped oral tradition extensively[340]. What must be pointed out is that users of oral tradition have always been aware of their limitations. For instance, the fact that these traditions could have acted as justificatory charters for the powerful and ruling groups. Many scholars have, however, produced techniques which can be used to limit the effects of this problem.[341]

The third form, the issue of autonomy has assumed, adaptation of Western culture in the building of modern nations, has paradoxically negated the very notion of autonomy. Western nationalist history since the 19th century appropriated the notion of progressive change. Progress was viewed by nationalist historians to be a product of the increasing ability of mankind to control nature and society through the application of science and reason. Progress was linked to emancipation since the ability to control nature and society would enable man to establish material and social structures in which the natural desire for freedom would blossom.[342] Since the nation state had become a powerful entity in nineteenth century Europe, most European historians tended to take its existence

339.   Ibid.

340.   See S. Marks and Atmore, **Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa**. (Longman, 1980).

341.   See G. Prins "Oral History" in P. Burke (eds), **New Perspectives on Historical Writing** (Policy Press, 1991) pp.114-139.

342.   P. Burke, "Overture : "The New History, its past and its future" in P. Burke. **New Perspectives**, p.7.

for granted and tended to link progress with its development. Africanists have appropriated these ideas in their reconstruction of the past. The nation - state idea has influenced Africanists in their choice of themes. This is evident in the Africanist concentration on processes of state creation and political history in general. Austen has observed that the "terms in which past political events were presented tended to be those which most closely resembled the political systems of the present".[343] Austen elaborates:

> The past of each African region came to resemble, at least rhetorically, a miniature organisation of African unity, defined by its various states, each of which was fully equipped with ministers, generals, and ambassadors. Rulers prominent in oral traditions became "X the Great", those whose names were associated with possible political changes were labelled "reformers", succession struggles inevitably involved "coups" and enlightened leaders joined in the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. In short, an indigenous past, with its own social forms and mythologised values very different from those of Europe was now being demythologized to fit an alien model and one which was not even working very well in contemporary Africa.[344]

This has been the paradox of Africanist history where the attempt to write an autonomous African history is aborted through the use of a Western model and concepts. Africanist historians have failed to develop their own models and concepts to deal with indigenous material.[345] An autonomous African history still has to be written. It is in this light that

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[343]. R. Austen op.cit. p.37.

[344]. Ibid.

[345]. Wyatt Mac Gaffey, "Epistemological ethnocentrism in African Studies" in B. Jewsiewicki and D. Newbury (eds). **African Historiographies. What History for which Africa** (Sage, 1986) p.42.

the claim made by one of the characters in Conor Cruise O'Briens play to the effect that "an Africanist is a specialist whom we employ in order to get the better of Africans" should be taken seriously.[346] It would seem that Africanist history is a dependent form of history characterized by its failure to extricate itself from Eurocentrism. If this is true, then Africanist history is a weapon for perpetuating and consolidating the intellectual slavery of Africa. It is also in this light that the claim by Temu and Swai that Africanist history is a branch of metropolitan bourgeois history begins to make sense.[347] This position has to be fleshed out further in a discussion of the methodology of Africanist history.

5.3 Methodology

It has been observed in Chapter I that most Africanists regard themselves as scientists producing an authentic history of Africa. Science, it is argued, would lead to genuine cultural awareness and the healing of wounds inflicted by colonial imperialist rule.

The first point to note is that Africanist history in South Africa shares with Africanist history north of the Limpopo, similar methodological assumptions and concerns. Although, Africanists in South Africa have not engaged in a rigorous debate on the nature and substance of their methods, a close reading of their approaches seems to point to the conclusion that their method is basically empiricist. To elaborate, they view their practice as concerned with the remains of past from which they can collect the facts to

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[346].   Quoted in B. Freund, op.cit. p.40.

[347].   A. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History**. p.17.

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be ascertained in the process of reconstructing history, in order to show, like Ranke, as it really was. Facts are seen as past events as made by man in the form of such things as social, political and economic institutions.[348] The duty of an African historian is to identify facts and present them with strict and clinical objectivity.[349] This method, it must be noted, is objective empiricism. The weaknesses and limitations of this method were exposed in Chapter I. However, crucial aspects of this method which require further exploration relate, first, the orientation to facts, and second, its being a negative mirror image of liberal historiography.[350]

Facts (events made by man in the form of things such as social, political and economic institutions) are regarded as the indestructible atoms of history. They are considered natural and are given an ontological status.[351] That events arise and develop as part of a social whole is disregarded. The fact that no reading is neutral and that every interpretation involves its own theoretical and political presupposition is forgotten.

Facts, it must be pointed out, are "themselves theoretical constructs".[352] They neither constitute the beginning nor the end of historical investigation. In historical research or historical reconstruction, one, as it were, goes to meet the facts. This involves the projection of theoretical schemata or a theoretical framework with which to perceive and

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[348]. Ibid. p.112.

[349]. Ibid.

[350]. Ibid, p.113-115.

[351]. Ibid.

[352]. Ibid, p.114.

interpret the facts.[353]   In Africanist history, both in the north and south of the Limpopo (South Africa) the question of the theoretical framework (or history theory) has been neglected.[354]   This neglect is a product of the empiricist attitude which is anti-theory and which insists that the collection and presentation of facts constitute the most important practice of historical reconstruction. In other words, empiricism accounts for a-theoretical approaches in Africanist history.

Empiricism, by refusing to go beyond the facts, is similar to the process in which a part of the whole is described, and is confused with totality.[355]   The empirical method is thus partial and one-dimensional.

Facts, it must be observed, constitute part of an articulated social whole, so that to properly understand them (facts), it is necessary to go beyond them.[356]   Facts cannot be understood outside the social totality within which they emerge and develop.   Put differently, the empiricist method leads to a superficial and distorted understanding of the historical process.

A method which overcomes the weaknesses of empiricism is the critical, materialist method which analyses and locates events (facts) in the social whole in which they

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353. Ibid.

354. The only exception is the introductory chapter of P. Maylam, **A History of the African People** ...

355. A. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History** ... p.113.

356. Ibid.

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exist.[357]   Though there are different versions of critical martialist theory, its irreducible core regards the basis of society as that which is constituted by the link between productive forces and the relations of production. In most readings it is the relations of production and productive forces that constitute the mode of production.

It is argued that on the basis of this mode of production there emerges a superstructure of ideas, ideologies, political, economic and social institutions. Thus analyses of events have to explore their links and relations with the mode of production. This provides a more profound understanding of the historical process than the empiricist method which regards the identification, collection and presentation of facts as the sole or most important practice of historical reconstruction.[358]

The second aspect of Africanist history, that aspect which makes it a negative mirror image of liberal historiography is also significant and reveals the weaknesses of Africanist history.[359] Liberal historiography, in general, has as its basic assumptions the freedom and potency of the individual in the making of history. It is individual agency and initiative which were responsible for progressive change in society. It is the free play of individual genius which makes for change and transformation in society. If individual initiative or entrepreneurship is stifled, society becomes stagnant and dead. This usually happens when individuality is stiffed by authoritarian institutions as was the

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[357].   Ibid.

[358].   Ibid, p.115.

[359].   Ibid.

case, it is claimed, in most pre-capitalist societies.[360] Such assumptions tended to influence their perception of African society. Thus African society, because of the authoritarian nature of its institutions which stiffed individual freedom and initiative, tended to be changeless and stagnant. Western society, which offered room for individual initiative tended to change rapidly. Africanist history, as demonstrated in previous chapters negated this liberal reading of African society. Africanists came up with counter-propositions pointing to the existence of individual initiative and entrepreneurs in African society; whether precolonial, colonial or post colonial.[361] Thus they demonstrated the existence of individual initiative in state formation, in trade, primary resistance, colonial rebellions, and African nationalism. In other words Africanists did not reject the liberal basic assumption on individual initiative and entrepreneurship as the motive force of history. They adopted, without question, the liberal assumption about change and its dynamic. What they rejected were propositions about lack of individualism and change in African society. They rejected them as either a product of ignorance or ideological blinkers.[362]

This is why Africanist history was a negative mirror image of liberal history. They rejected colonial history without realizing that colonial history was a branch of metropolitan empiricist history. Africanist history thus shares all the weaknesses of metropolitan empiricist history.

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[360]. Ibid.

[361]. Ibid. p.66.

[362]. Ibid.

5.4 Africanist Theory of History

A problem which is faced in discussing the Africanist theory of history is that Africanists, as noted above, rarely discuss the theory/theories which underpinned their reconstruction of the African past. Therefore, there are no clearly articulated theories which we can focus on.[363] To proceed, it is necessary to tease out these theories or reconstruct them. In this process misinterpretations and misrepresentation are likely. However, there are leads. In connection with these, it may be noted that in their quest for multi-disciplinary, Africanists have extensively borrowed notions and concepts from adjacent disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and political science.[364] Using these notions and concepts as points of departure, it is possible to reconstruct broadly, the theory/theories which have influenced Africanist history.

Discussion of the processes of state creation and the rise of African nationalism are very revealing. Discussion of the process of state-creation is based on the assumption that African society developed from simple to complex forms.[365] Thus, for instance, the Zulu and the Pedi kingdoms evolved from decentralized clan based systems via tribal conglorne actions to relatively centralized systems which were more complex. This type of social change has been regarded as the "enlargement of scale". This change is viewed as progress and Africanist history is in fact a celebration of this progress. Africanists, in discussing the African past, tended to use evolutionary theory. If the focus is turned

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[363]. A.V. Dhliwayo, Africanist History and the Crisis of Africa's Political Economy: A Critical Evaluation (unpublished).

[364]. Ibid.

[365]. See J.D. Omer-Cooper, **The Zulu Aftermath** pp40-50.

towards their discussion of the rise of African nationalism the same observations can be made.[366]   It has been observed above how African nationalism developed from less complex organisations such as friendly societies and clubs of the educated elite to mass based organisations like the African National Congress whose main objective was the building of a free nation based on the freedom and equality of its people. This progress is also cast in the framework of progressive change and the enlargement of scale.[367] It may also be noted that African nationalism is regarded as modern since in terms of organisation, objectives and aims it was based on rationalist principles which underpinned contemporaneous organisation in the West. In this connection Africanist historical practice borrow from modernization theory which dominated the study of societal change in the Western world in the 1960s.[368] This date is significant because it marks the heyday of Africanist history.   It must be remembered that the initiators of Africanist history were Western-trained academics who had come under the influence of this powerful theory.[369]

Ideologically most Africanists were nationalists.[370] Nationalism is a system of ideas in which the central place is given to the nation. In most cases it is common culture and shared historical experiences which define the content of the nation.   There is also a tendency to view the discussion of humanity into nations as natural or even God-

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366. See D. Chanaiwa, "African Initiatives and Resistance in Southern Africa" pp197-216.

367. A. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History** ... p.22.

368. Ibid.

369. Ibid.

370. A.V. Dhliwayo, "Africanist History and The Crisis ...".

given.[371] Politically nationalism aspires to the creation of a nation-state. Nationalists argue that the only legitimate type of government is national self-determination. The domination of one nation by another is regarded as unnatural. The nation also constitutes, it is contended, the only framework within which social, cultural, political and economic development can take place. The supreme loyalty of the overwhelming majority of the people to the nation is thus demanded.[372]

The Africanist historians nationalists mind set is very evident at various levels. Prominent is the desire to create an autonomous and independent history as discussed earlier on. The very definition of the object of study is central to the realization of this aim. The focus is on the "African factor" in the development of human civilization and the insistence that contact with Europe should figure in it (African history) from the viewpoint of African experience and also the suggestion that African experience should not be measured by the yardstick of forcing values.[373]

It was mentioned earlier on that this desire for autonomy was aborted by the failure of the Africanist to extricate themselves from Western models. Modernization theory is Western theory constructed through the reading of Western historical experience. Africanist historians thus traced the evolution of modern nations from the precolonial past. The present thus became the criterion of significance in reconstructing the past. Ki-Zerbo was expressing the conception of most Africanist historians when he contended that "somewhere beneath the ashes of the past there were embers instinct with the light

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[371]. Ibid.

[372]. Ibid.

[373]. J. Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction" pxiv.

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of the present.[374] Africanist nationalist history distorts the African past. In the case of South African historiography the celebration of kingdoms tends to give us an impression of a glorious past.[375] The embarrassing realities of violence which normally characterise historical processes such as state creation are underplayed and only positive aspects are given prominence. Those societies which developed centralized structures are given prominence while those which did not are not being viewed as less developed or showing little progress.[376]

The notion of the desirability and the progressive nature of the enlargement of scale has recently come under suspicion among some critics. Neale questions the juxtaposition of the enlargement of scale, freedom and emancipation, noting that large scale structures many have led to rise oppression and the exploitation of the common people.[377] Indeed nationalist history is now in crisis. This crisis is rooted in the failure of the modern African nation-states to provide development to the majority of the African people. Celebratory Africanist history does not seem to be warranted in current deplorable conditions.[378]

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[374]. Ibid.

[375]. C. Neale **Writing "Independent" History** p.185.

[376]. Ibid.

[377]. Ibid. p.180.

[378]. A.V. Dhliwayo, "Africanist History and Crisis of Africa's Political Economy: A Critical Evaluation, A Paper presented at a History Conference, Cape Town, October 1988 (unpublished).

5.5 Conclusion

It would appear that Africanist history was the child of its period. Africanist historians responded to the requirements of their time. The nationalist leaders demanded a relevant history which would contribute to nation building. But this history has been found to be impoverished because of its empiricism, positivism and nationalist ideology. **Africanist history never became dominant in South Africa for political reasons**. Whether Africanist history will attain the dominance it did North of the Limpopo is yet to be seen.

CHAPTER VI

AFRICANIST HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA : GENERAL CONCLUSION

6.1   The Nature of Africanist history in South Africa

In West Africa and East Africa Africanist history came of age in the 1960s and 1970s and then descended into crisis. That crisis, as has been pointed out in this study, was related to the crisis of Africa's political economy. The failure of the nation-building project manifested in tragic civil wars, coups, inter-Africa wars and deepening poverty among the majority has led to the serious questioning of the fundamental features of the Africanist historical practice by Africanists themselves. Africanist history emerged as a celebration of African activity. This history was closely tied to the nation-building project. The failure of this project was bound to lead to serious doubts concerning the scientific credentials and value of this history among practitioners. A good example of this soul searching is exemplified in the work of Temu and Swai who started as Africanist but ended as hostile critics of Africanist history.[379]   They have identified the problems of the empiricist methodology which underpins Africanist history as the main problem. They have indicated that the only way out of the crisis is to adopt the materialist methodology. They have actually demonstrated the viability of this approach in their 1981 publication which is essentially, a critique of Africanist history.[380]   This approach tends to look at history from the perspective of exploited African workers and peasants rather than from the perspective of the petty-bourgeoisie as in Africanist history.

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[379].   See A. Temu and B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History**.

[380].   Ibid.

It must be pointed out, however, that Africanist history is not dead. The UNESCO General history of Africa is still popular in Africa.[381] The themes associated with primary resistance, state creation and nationalism are still popular. Empiricist methodology continues to be used, as is evident in the articles published in the Journal of African History. Thus the debate between empiricists and materialists continues in African history. This is likely to continue as long as the struggle between the African middle class on the one hand and the workers and peasant on the other rages on.

The situation in South Africa is slightly different. Actually, the collapse of the Apartheid system which had restricted the flowering of the Africanist school has created opportunities for this school to emerge as a powerful tendency. The main problem is that there are, at present, very few practising black professional historians in South Africa. Professional history is still dominated by the Afrikaner and Liberal Schools. Their journals and other publications still account for most of the history consumed in South Africa.

There has been, in some cases, an attempt to revise traditional accounts of key themes of South African historiography. One such problem is the Anglo-Boer War. In most of the traditional accounts of the Anglo-Boer War the role and participation of Africans hardly features.[382] The Anglo-Boer War, as the title seems to suggest was almost

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[381]. **General History of Africa 8 Volumes**.

[382]. B.E. Mongalo and K. Du Pisani "Victims of a White man's War: Blacks in concentration camps during the South African War (1899-1902)" in **Historia**, Volume 44 (1) May 1999, p.148.

exclusively a white man's war and blacks feature only as spectators.[383]   However, in the

past twenty years or so, our picture of this war has gradually changed.   It is now

recognised that blacks were active participants who played a significant role in the Anglo-

Boer War. A standard and major work in this area is Warwick's work suitably entitled,

Black people and the South African War 1899-1902.[384]   S.B. Spies and B. Nasson

have also added to our understanding of the role of blacks in the war.[385]   What is

emerging is that both sides in the war made use of Africans as carriers, spies and

labourers. Both sides discouraged the training of blacks in fire-arms. The circumstances

of war, however, made this impossible.

Some scholars have focused on Africans not as active participants but as victims of a

white man's war. Mongalo and du Pisani have focused on blacks in concentration camps

during the war.[386] They have discovered that by the end of the war there were "at least

70 concentration camps for blacks with a total population of 115, 700".[387] The conditions

in the camps were horrible. There were "more than 14,000 fatalities making the

concentration camps a tragic component of South African War".[388] The War

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[383].   Ibid.

[384].   P. Warwick, **Black people and the South African War 1899-1902**,
(Johannesburg, 1983).

[385].   S.B. Spies, **Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians
in the Boer Republics January 1900- May 1902**, Cape Town, 1977: B.
Nasson, **Abram Esav's War: A Black South African War in the Cape,
1899-1902**, Cambridge, 1991.

[386].   B.E. Mongalo and K. Du Pisani op.cit. pp, 148-182.

[387].   Ibid, p.149.

[388].   Ibid, p.181.

disrupted their lives. They concluded by pointing out that "their political and economic aspirations (were) unfulfilled". The blacks therefore paid a heavy price in a "white man's war".[389]

The attempt to write Africans back into the Anglo-Boer War has not gone down well with Afrocentric historians. Critics such as Maphalala have accused these historians for trying to push and place Africans at the centre of a war which was essentially European and imperialist.[390] Indeed it is Maphalala who is currently leading the call for the creation and development of an Afro-centric approach to the study of history in South Africa. His research and writings have focussed mainly on African themes, and Zulu history, in particular. His concern has been to correct the myths and distortions which currently dominate perceptions of the African past.[391] He has consciously avoided themes dominant in the Afrikaner and Liberal schools. A similar approach is evident in the few students who are still working on their masters and doctoral theses. Gasa, for instance, has produced a doctoral thesis on John Dube.[392] In this work John Dube is portrayed as a hero who was concerned to protect the interests of his people against the depredations of the Natal Colonial administration. Gasa's work continues that tradition of history which was pioneered by the Ibadan and Dar-es-Salaam schools. It may also be noted that the research and writing of this thesis were supervised by Maphalala.

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[389]. Ibid.

[390]. J.M. Maphalala, "The Zulu people and the Anglo-Boer War" (A paper read at the UNISA Library Conference on "Rethinking the S.A. War", August 1988) p.3.

[391]. Ibid. p.2.

[392]. E.D. Gasa, John Dube and His Ilanga Lase Natal, 1903-1910, (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1999).

It therefore appears, in South African, that there is no feeling of crisis in the writing of African history. With the coming to power of the ANC dominated government in 1994, South Africa has started the search for its African historians. The call by the President Thabo Mbeki for an African Renaissance seems to have emboldened the few black historians with a sense of their own importance.[393] However, while the call for an African Renaissance by the African leadership might encourage African historians to intensify research, in the African past, the unfortunate decline in the popularity of history in schools and universities seems to be a major problem. There are fears that history would vanish as a major subject in school curricula. This situation seems to act against the prospect for the emergence of an Africanist school of history.

6.2   Africanist history and political power

This study demonstrates that there seems to be a link between history writing and political power. The origin of Africanist history in South Africa and the rest of Africa is closely linked with the struggles of the African petty-bourgeoisie for power. It has been noted how some professional liberal historians in South Africa turned into what became known as Liberal Africanists in the 1970s. Apart from the obvious influence of developments in West and East Africa, this change in focus was in response to the deepening resistance of the Africans to the oppressive Apartheid system. African activity could not be ignored anymore. However, the liberal view and conception of African activity was limited by their Euro-centrism. African activity was judged worthy or progressive to the extent that it furthered the expansion of Western civilization. Any activity which tended to obstruct the progress of western civilization tended to receive negative valuation.

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[393]. E. Foner, "We Must Forget the past: History in the New South Africa" in **South African Historical Journal**, No. 32, May 1995. p.175.

African activity and society were not treated as having value in their own-right. The yardstick used to measure the worthiness of African history was western. The question of political interest is therefore clear in the liberal Africanist reconstruction of the South African past. It has also been noted how the Afrikaner school was closely associated with the rise and consolidation of Africaner political power and the Marxist school derived its development from the perceived interests of the working class.

The weakness of the Africanist school in South Africa was a product of the weakness of the African petty-bourgeoisie vis-a-vis the Apartheid system. The collapse of the Apartheid system has opened up opportunities, as mentioned above, for the consolidation of an Afro-centric or Africanist school. This is clear in the work of Maphalala and others.[394] It must however be noted that the collapse of the Apartheid system has not led to the decline of the Afrikaner and Liberal schools of history. They continue to live on.

The current situation in South African historiography is characterized by the competition of these schools and the emerging Africanist school. What J.H. Plumb said about historiography in general currently manifests itself in South Africa.

"Warring authorities mean warring pasts".[395]

The debate concerning the nature of South African history has thus been influenced by

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[394]. J. Maphalala "The Zulu People and Anglo-Boer War" and J.A. Du Pisani and B.E. Mongalo, "Victims of a White Man's War: Blacks in Concentration camps during the South African War (1899-1902) " in **Historia** 44(1).

[395]. Quoted in J. Barber, **Soviet Historians in Crisis**, 1928-1932 (MacMillan, 1981) pp.vii-viii.

the political battles which have characterized the South African social formation. The dictum that "History is the most political of all the sciences", a dictum which was an article of faith for Marxist historians in the Soviet Union in the decade and half following the revolution of 1917, seems to be applicable to South Africa since the 1970s.[396] The point which is being made here is that the emergence and future of Africanist history in South Africa cannot be understood without grasping the nature of the political battles which have characterized the South African social formation.

6.3   Weaknesses and strength of Africanist History in South Africa

The main weakness which comes out clearly in this study, is the fact that Africanist history has very few practitioners in South African Universities. There are very few professional Africanist historians in South Africa. Africanist historians have also not been able to establish a journal of their own. This is necessary if Africanist history has to contest for space in South African historiography.

The current decline in the number of students registered for history in secondary and tertiary institutions is bound to affect Africanist history more than the established schools. It is not possible to establish and strengthen a new school of history without a new crop of history students. If the future of history in the school system is shaky, then that of Africanist history is shakier.

The other weakness of Africanist history in South Africa is the weakness of the

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[396].   Ibid. p.vii.

Africanist school in general noted in Chapter I. This, as has been noted, is associated with the empirist method and the poverty of theory. The empiricist method is seen as unproblematic. Its weaknesses in terms of its basic assumptions and its treatment of facts have not been appreciated by South African Africanists. Indeed South African Africanists have not yet experienced a sense of crisis in their practice. In fact they still experience the euphoria which historians in West and East Africa in the 1960s felt. This euphoria tends to block any attempts at a thorough critique of method in Africanist history.

The main strength of Africanist history is that the "forgotten factor" is being provided with space in South African historiography. The knowledge of the nature of African communities - their structure and essence, their processes of change and transformation - is growing. This is contributing to a better understanding of South African history as a whole. Apart from the restoration of the pride of the African this Africanist reconstruction entails, the understanding of the South African past is forcing changes in the other schools. Thus, the calls by historians belonging to the Afrikaner and Liberal schools for a reassessment of the role of the African in Anglo-Boer War are likely to change the contours of South African history.

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