

THE VERNACULAR PRESS AND AFRICAN LITERATURE

by

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To consider the importance of the vernacular press in the making of African literature is simultaneously to encounter the paradoxical role of Christian missionaries in both enabling and equally disabling the emergence of modern African literary sensibilities. It is vitally important at this post-colonial moment to formulate a proper and correct reconstruction of the African intellectual and cultural history in the making of modern Africa. The importance of intellectual integrity in reconstructing African cultural history cannot be possibly be over-emphasized in the context of the present profound crisis of Africa in relation to modernity. The role of missionaries with the support of European imperialism and colonialism in initiating Africa (from Mozambique to Senegal) into modernity cannot be denied. In a recent remarkable book Toyin Falola has broached this issue with the required seriousness. It is too easy to criticize the imperial adventures and misadventures of missionaries in Africa than to specify their extraordinary contribution to the making of a 'New' Africa. The excellent recent critical study of the complex metamorphoses of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's writing consciousness across four decades by Simon Gikandi is very salutary in this instance. As Frantz Fanon has amply taught us, African cultural history is too complicated and too painful for quick and unreflective Manichean separations and judgements. For example the missionary turned academic Clement Martyn Doke (1893-1980) is arguably the foremost South African intellectual in the twentieth-century partly because of his active participation in the construction of New African modernity (Jordan Kush Ngubane characterises it as a 'New Africanism') through the New African Movement.

A recent vintage of books by Micheal Echeruo and Tiyo Falola and Philip S. Zachernuk on the intellectual history in the making of modern Nigeria (Nigerian modernity) gives prominence to the role of the vernacular press. Likewise too in South Africa in the late nineteenth-century and across the first half of the twentieth-century the press played a similarly critical role. There is no reason for doubting that this was not also true in many other colonial territories or African countries. The vernacular press was instrumental in facilitating the historical transition from tradition to modernity. Three fundamental themes were at the center of this progressive movement from the 'Old Africa' to the 'New Africa': acquisition of an education propagated by missionaries, conversion into Christianity, and negotiation of European civilization. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1959) is the first modern African literary masterpiece because of the way it interweaves these triadic patterns into its structure. The African vernacular

press was also instrumental in forging the new articulations of resistance to European imperialism and colonialism, the very historical forces making modernities possible in particular Africa national contexts.

It is because of the integrated nature of African experience at particular phases of the continent's history that the instance of South Africa concerning the relationship between the vernacular press and African literature will be made to stand as a symbolic representation of what happened in other parts of Africa. South Africa is not an exception to the historical patterns and dynamics of Africa however much pre 1994 the ruling European classes in my country desperately attempted to do otherwise. The complex interaction between tradition and modernity has anchored South Africa into Africa.

It was the missionaries of the Glasgow Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society who founded *Ikwezi* (Morning Star) newspaper in Chumi mission station near Lovedale in the Eastern Cape as an instrument for proselytizing the Xhosa nation into Christianity. Four issues appeared irregularly in English and Xhosa between August 1844 and December 1845. It was in this newspaper that the writings in Xhosa by the Xhosa themselves first appeared. These writings written by the children of the first Xhosa converts were unsurprisingly stories about their and their parents' conversion into Christianity. These authors were William Kobe Ntsikana (son of the prophet), Zaze Soga, and Makhaphela Noyi Balfour. It was the founding of the *Indaba* (The News) monthly by the Glasgow Missionary Society for African teachers and students that made a lasting impact on the evolution of Xhosa intellectual culture. It was through the monthly, published in Xhosa and English between August 1862 and February 1865, that the first incipient forms of Xhosa literary modernity emerged. Tiyo Soga (1829-1871), the first major modern Xhosa intellectual, published on its pages African fables, legends, proverbs, ancient habits and customs of the Xhosa people, as well as the genealogy of Xhosa chiefs. With these literary preoccupations, Tiyo Soga was forging an intellectual bridgehead from tradition to modernity for his students who were to become his intellectual descendants. Among these students were Elijah Makiwane (1850-1928), John Tengo Jabavu (1859-1921), John Knox Bokwe (1855-1922), William Wellington Gqoba (1840-1888), Gwayi Tyamzashe (1844- 1926), Pambani Jeremiah Mzimba (1850-1911), Isaac Wauchope (1852-1917) and Walter Rubusana (1858-1930), who two decades later were to make a cultural renaissance of some sort around the newspaper *Imvo Zabantsundu* (African Opinion, November 1884-). All of them were ordained African ministers of the church, just as Tiyo Soga had been himself. Tiyo Soga was not only anxious to impart to the students Xhosa customs and traditions, but also a sense of African history as a counter-narrative to the European history that they were receiving in the form of the history of the Christian Church. It should be recalled that these students were learning classics

(Greek and Latin literatures) from the Christian missionaries. Later on a remarkable debate occurred between the European missionary teachers and the African students as to the relevance of classics in the forging modern consciousness and modern sensibility among the emergent Xhosa intelligentsia. This is among the reasons that made Lovedale founded by the Glasgow Missionary Society such a brilliant learning institution and a center of high intellectual culture in the nineteenth-century.

The other importance of Tiyo Soga beyond his launching of historical narrations of representation, is that he appropriated the European essay form to interrogate the historical relationship between Christianity, racism, oppression, capitalism and modernity. He was deeply engaged with the question of whether Christianity, European civilization and modernity could have been imparted to the Xhosa people without the oppression and exploitation so endemic to capitalism. In these notations which took the form of essays but also the form of letters to various newspapers, Tiyo Soga was unrelenting in proselytizing that modernity was an unavoidable historical experience of the present. It was left to William Wellington Gqoba, Soga's intellectual descendant and the first modern Xhosa poet, later newspaper editor, to negotiate the cultural space between the European intellectual forms of representations and the African narrative forms of representation. In his writings, written in both Xhosa and English, Tiyo Soga left a rich cultural legacy to future generations of Xhosa intellectuals as to what their historical vision should be in their preoccupation with the making of African modernities. It needs to be emphasized that it was this extraordinary intellectual, the first one in South Africa perhaps in all of Africa, to postulate the historical idea that the making of African modernities must be linked to the making of black modernities in the African diaspora. It should also be remembered that this political position was formulated by Tiyo Soga at the very moment Edward Blyden and Alexander Crummell were arriving in Africa. Crummell was to have an astonishing influence on Tiyo Soga's intellectual descendants.

With the collapse of the aforementioned vernacular newspapers, the European missionaries founded yet another outlet, *Isigidimi Sama-Xosa* (The Xhosa Messenger), which appeared between October 1870 and December 1888. Initially editing it himself, James Stewart, the principal of Lovedale and publisher of Lovedale Mission Press, later had the foresight of giving the editorial responsibilities to the new African Christian intelligentsia. Many of Tiyo Soga's intellectual descendants, such as Makiwane, Bokwe, Jabavu and Gqoba, at one time or another edited the newspaper. With the assumption of the editorship by Africans, the newspaper acquired a critical voice on the matter of the violent entrance of European modernity into African history, as well it began a process what can be characterized as the secularization of the theologically shackled African imagination or imaginary. With his translation of Bunyan's

Pilgrims' Progress (1678) into Xhosa approximately two decades earlier, and its serialization in the previous missionary newspapers, Tiyo Soga had made the emergent modern Xhosa literary imagination largely preoccupy itself with theological matters, which was the fundamental and central aim of the missionaries. Within a decade of Tiyo Soga's death, the process of secularization of the modern Xhosa literary imagination produces great critical essays which are literary and philosophic, concerned with ontological matters rather purely with things theological. There also begins to appear extraordinary poetry about matters of existence as well as protest poetry. Concerning the essay form, Elijah Makiwane ("Livingstone's Last Journals" [June 1, 1875] and "Native Churches and Self Support" [August 1, 1881]) Gwayi Tyamzashe ("A Native Society at Kimberley" [April 1, 1884]) and William Wellington Gqoba ("Notes From the Transkei Upon Witchcraft" [January 6, February 7, March 7, 1874], "Notes of Cases, From Fingoland Dispensary" [April 1, 1880] and "The Native Tribes: Their Laws, Customs and Beliefs" [June 1, July 1, September 1, 1885]), are the major voices. Gqoba also begins to write serious major poetry ("A Winter Scene in Fingoland" [August 1, 1879]). Other intellectuals like Pambani Jeremiah Mzimba concern themselves with orthographic issues of the Xhosa language. With the death of William Wellington Gqoba in 1888, *Isigidimi Sama -Xosa* newspaper collapses. One of the reasons for the demise of the newspaper is that despite its achievements, the missionaries still sought to stifle its critical and secular literary voice, in order to return it to theological matters.

When A. C. Jordan, author of the great Xhosa novel *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya* (The Wrath of the Ancestors, 1940), in the 1950s wrote a series of essays on the history of Xhosa literature in the journal *Africa South*, that were two decades later assembled in a book form, he praised William Wellington Gqoba as the dominant literary figure of the late nineteenth-century. Discontent with the intervention of the missionaries concerning the content of *Isigidimi Sama-Xosa*, John Tengo Jabavu founded *Imvo Zabantsundu* newspaper. Although the newspaper focused on political matters, it could not avoid the literary legacy initiated by Tiyo Soga and expanded upon by William Wellington Gqoba. In order to consolidate their thinking on cultural and political issues, the intellectual descendants of Tiyo Soga founded the Lovedale Literary Society and in 1879 the Native Educational Association. Both organizations, respectively through literary representation and political activity, sought to facilitate the passageway of African people from tradition into modernity. As President of the Association, Elijah Makiwane made presentations some of which were published as essays in the *Imvo Zabantsundu*. One of the cultural issues Makiwane grappled with was to what extent would Africans retain their 'Africanness' when modernity demanded that they master English literary culture from William Shakespeare and Francis Bacon to John Keats and Alfred Tennyson. Would not this acquisition confirm the superiority of European cultures over African cultures, of which the

missionaries were certain as a self-evident fact? What should be the role of African languages and of traditional forms of literary representation in the context of emergent modernity? The consensus among these intellectuals of the Xhosa Cultural Renaissance was that the English language had to predominate in South Africa in order for the African people to make a transition from 'barbarism' and 'heathenism' to 'progress' and 'civilization'. In the process of grappling with these issues, Makiwane expanded the essay form beyond the attainments that Tiyo Soga and William Wellington Gqoba had achieved. These cultural and literary debates were spectacular in many ways. In the context of these debates, Isaac Wauchope on the pages of *Imvo Zabantsundu* published his biting protest poetry in Xhosa protesting the hegemony of European modernity in South Africa. The Xhosa intellectuals were caught in the maelstrom of paradoxes and ironies so singularly characteristic of modernity. One other achievement of Elijah Makiwane is that he was the first African intellectual to write essays on the role modern cities in making modernity possible.

It should be emphasized that despite these debates on the 'necessity' of the hegemony of English literary culture as a facilitator of modernity, the monthly continued to publish literary contributions in both English and Xhosa languages, as it had always done. While these debates were occurring in the English language, the actual poetry and prose published on its pages in the Xhosa language were far superior to those published in the English language. The person who made this dramatic shift in the late nineteenth-century possible, despite the debates of the 1880s, was S. E. K. Mqhayi (1875-1945). Another member of the third generation of Xhosa intellectuals since Tiyo Soga, Isaac Bud-M'Belle (1870-1947), observing these shifting literary practices and the debates on what were the best cultural facilitators of entrance into modernity, wrote the first book which recognized the importance of the role African newspapers in facilitating the literary culture of modernity. In *Kafir Scholar's Companion* (1903) Bud-M'Belle writes a short history of newspaper from the missionary newspaper such as *Indaba* in the middle of the nineteenth-century to those owned by New Africans in the late nineteenth-century, C. N. Umhalla and Allan Kirkland Soga's *Izwi Labantu* (The Voice of the People, November 1897-April 1909) and Solomon T. Plaatje's *Koranta ea Bechoana* (The Bechuana Gazette, April 1901-February 1908). Bud-M'Belle tabulates the contribution of these newspapers. Mqhayi's made two incomparable contributions on the pages of *Imvo Zabantsundu* : he wrote modern Xhosa poetry in the traditional form of Izibongo that had no precedence in South African culture; and he wrote prose works whose complexity had not been attained before (autobiographies, novellas, short stories, biographies, articles and essays). Mqhayi in effect completely transformed Xhosa literary culture. The serialization of his novella *Ityala lama Wele* (The Case of the Twins, 1914) marked a new beginning in Xhosa literature which was consolidated by the fourth generation of Xhosa intellectuals: Guybon

Bundlwana Sinxo (1902-1962), James J. R. Jolobe (1902-1976), and A. C. Jordan (1906-1968). With this novella and other prose writings Mqhayi was in effect the founding moment of literary modernity, if not modernism itself, within the context of New African modernity. It is because of this epoch making event that later intellectuals like H. I. E. Dhlomo (1903-1956) and Jordan K. Ngubane (1917-1985) were to celebrate his contribution to South African literary history as marking a fundamental break between tradition and modernity. That year of 1914 also saw the publication of John Knox Bokwe's *Ntsikana: The Story of an African Convert* (1914), which a few decades earlier portions of which had been published in Xhosa monthly publications. The book holds the median ground between the historical novel and the fictionalization of the past.

The very fact that S. E. K. Mqhayi stands as a major figure in the landmark anthology assembled by Walter Rubusana just within a few years of his literary debut was a premonition of the influence he effect on South African literature. Collated from various newspaper sources, the writings of Xhosa intellectuals and writers such as Bokwe, Ntsikana, Gqoba in *Zemk' iinkomo maGwalandini* (*The Cattle are Departing You Cowards*, 1906) were a testament of the role of the vernacular press had played in the emergence of a modern literary culture in South Africa. Although debuting in *Izwi Labantu*, it was during the subsequent long period of association with *Imvo Zabantsundu* that Mqhayi initiated a revolution in Xhosa literary culture. In another anthology, *ImiBengo* (1936), put together by W. G. Bennie from writings in Xhosa newspapers and journals, Mqhayi stands even in a more dominant position. Perhaps one of the reasons that vernacular press played such a critical role in facilitating the emergence of modern South African literature is that intellectuals from Tiyo Soga to S. E. K. Mqhayi were from time to time editors of newspapers and journals. During his tenure for approximately two years as editor of *Imvo Zabantsundu* in the 1920s Mqhayi launched on its pages the literary careers of Jolobe and Sinxo, two major figures who were to dominate Xhosa literature in the twentieth-century. Evaluating the contribution of Mqhayi to South African culture, particularly to Xhosa literature, on the occasion of his death in 1945, A. C. Jordan argued that his great contributions were in prose rather in poetry. Jordan concluded his evaluation by stating that although Mqhayi had brought South African literature into the modern period, he never in actual fact saw “the great New Age” of literary modernism.

At least two of the three novels by Thomas Mofolo (1876-1948) were partly serialized in the *Leselinyana* newspaper (November 1863-) owned by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society in Maseru before they were published in a book form. *Moeti oa Bochabella* (*Traveller to the East*, 1907) and *Pitseng* (n. d., but written in 1910) were read by well-educated Christian Africans as well as by those who were struggling with issues of illiteracy. There is no doubt that the

works of Mofolo had profound influence on the development of modern literary consciousness in the Sotho nation. Although a novel like *Moeti oa Bochabella* was an allegory closely based on John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the works of Thomas Mofolo attempted to open a secular cultural space for the nation relative to the religious space of the Sotho-translated Bible. This was one of the factors that caused the relations between Mofolo and the French missionaries who owned *Leselinyana* and the Morija Mission Press to be in a state of perpetual crisis. All the novels of Thomas Mofolo were vetted for their religious correctness before they were published by the Press. This is the reason that although his classic novel *Chaka* was already written by 1910, it was only published in 1926 after many delays. Thomas Mofolo's biographer Daniel P. Kunene mentions that this is the reason he never subsequently engaged himself with literary matters after this traumatizing experience. The French missionaries played both a negative and a positive role in the emergence of modern Sotho literature in the early part of the twentieth-century. However problematical the nature of its understanding of the historical relation between tradition and modernity, *Chaka*, as a literary practice, was at one time one of the foremost achievements of African literature. The ideological framework of Thomas Mofolo's fiction is constructed on Manichean terms as the unending struggle between African 'barbarism' and European 'civilization'. It postulates the absolute necessity of the triumph of 'enlightenment' over 'darkness'. In effect, Thomas Mofolo harnessed African literature to the civilizing mission of Christianity. It is not surprising that the next major Sotho writer who followed a few decades later, although much finding inspiration in Mofolo, projected African literature in the direction of the then emergent African nationalism. B. M. Khaketla (1913- ?), novelist, poet, and playwright founded his own monthly *Mohlabani* (*The Warrior*, September 1954-April 1968) on whose pages politics were not displaced by literature.

It was partly because of these entanglements with the forces of colonialism that Solomon T. Plaatje (1879-1932) founded his own newspaper *Koranta ea Becoana*, and likewise John Langalibalele Dube (1871-1946) launched his own newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal* (*Natal Sun*, April 1903-). Each in its own way contributed immensely to the construction of literary modernity in South Africa. From the moment of the obituary notice by H. I. E. Dhlomo in 1932 that declared that everything intellectual about Africans in modernity before culminates in Plaatje and everything thereafter about the historical choices to made begins from him, there has been a general consensus that Plaatje is the most important New African intellectual in the twentieth-century. Although previous to him intellectuals and writers such as Gwayi Tyamzashe and John Knox Bokwe were concerned about the orthography of African languages, Plaatje was the first one within the New African Movement to examine this issue from a perspective of linguistics. He was also consciously aware that without a correct resolution as to

the proper orthography for the African languages the makings of a great modern African literature he anticipated would be hindered. In *Koranta ea Becoana* he bitterly criticized the missionaries for proposing what he felt were incorrect orthography for the African languages. It is in the context of these interminable linguistic battles that he published two books: *A Sechuana Reader in International Phonetic Orthography* (written with Daniel Jones, 1916) and *Sechuana Proverbs with Literal Translations and their European Equivalents* (1916). It is also in relation to these matters that he translated four of Shakespeare's plays into Tswana, including *Comedy of Errors* (*Diphosho-Phosho*) and *Julius Caesar* (*Dintshontsho tsa bo Juliuse Kesara*). The last volume was published in *The Bantu Treasury* series edited by Clement Martyn Doke.

When Solomon T. Plaatje moved from Mafeking to Kimberley he founded a new newspaper *Tsala ea Batho* (The People's Friend, from June 1910 to July 1915, and from June 1910 to June 1912 it was known as *Tsala ea Bechuana* [The Friend of the Bechuana]). *Tsala ea Batho* would sometime appear in three or four African languages within a single issue of the newspaper. With many of his writings in the new newspaper there begins the prefigurations of the idea of a national literature. With Mhudi it is possible to argue that Plaatje sought to indicate how a 'national' novel ought to be like as opposed to a 'regional' novel. These three novels could be postulated as 'regional' novels, even though two of them engage the consequences of the violent entrance of European modernity into African history: Enoch S. Guma's *Nomalizo* (1918), R. R. R. Dhlomo's *An African Tragedy* (1928) and John Langalibalele Dube's *uJeqe insila kaShaka* (1933, *Jeqe the Bodyservant of King Tshaka* [1951]). In contrast to these writers, Plaatje attempted to infuse a national consciousness into South African literary imagination. One other innovative contribution of Plaatje is that in *Tsala ea Batho* politics and literary culture engaged each other as well as history across its pages.

Although Plaatje never actually edited the newspaper, in the first few months of its appearance his name and that of John Dube appeared on the masthead as co-joint editors on *Umteteli wa Bantu* (The Mouthpiece of the People, May 1920-). Although it did not concern itself with literary matters directly, since it was preoccupied with political, social and cultural issues, *Umteteli wa Bantu* had an inestimable impact on South African literary history. It was this newspaper that proclaimed in unambiguous terms that the fundamental national project that all African intellectuals had to confront was the construction of modernity. Previous to *Umteteli wa Bantu* modernity had been theorized as merely the product of history, but following its appearance, modernity was understood as the consciousness the African intelligentsia had of it as a historical process in which they could intervene. The newspaper grappled with the nature of modernity in the

1920s in ways that have never been surpassed: it analyzed the industrial transformation of the country; it traced the emergent historical consciousness that transformed the 'Old African' into the 'New African'; it traced the genealogy of the New African; it established the connection between New Negro modernity and New African modernity; it theorized the role of cities in enabling the New African to emerge; it articulated the politics of African Nationalism beyond tribal identifications; and it formulated the lines of intersection between politics and culture. The contingent of 'journalists' who worked for *Umteteli wa Bantu* was a formidable pleiad of writers and intellectuals ever to work together: R. V. Selope Thema (1886-1955), H. I. E. Dhlomo, Allan Kirkland Soga (1862-1938), Abner Mapanya (c.1880- ?), S. M. Bennett Ncwana (?- ?), H. Selby Msimang (1886-1982), Mark S. Radebe (?- ?), Richard Msimang (1884-1933), Marshall Maxeke (1874-1928). *Umteteli wa Bantu* was a demarcating line in South African cultural history by arguing that literary modernism should be as much about national consciousness as about the literary devices of representation. The central figures on the newspaper were R. V. Selope Thema and H. I. E. Dhlomo.

Founded seventeen years earlier, John Langalibalele Dube's *Ilanga lase Natal*, in contrast with *Umteteli wa Bantu*, in its early years sought to establish the lines of continuity between the past and the present which had been ruptured by the entrance of European modernity into South Africa history. Given that it saw itself as descending from the heroic deeds of Shaka, it is not surprising that in its early years the newspaper emphasized matters of historical recovery. It needs to be remarked immediately that *Ilanga lase Natal* made a lasting impact on literary culture because it gave a forum to young unknown Zulu novices who became major South African intellectuals in the twentieth-century: the essayist and cultural historian H. I. E. Dhlomo; the journalist and political maverick Jordan K. Ngubane; and the scholar and outstanding poet Benedict Wallet Vilakazi. The essays, prose-poems, satires, articles, poems they published in the newspaper in the 1930s and in the 1940s made the newspaper one of the outstanding enlighteners of modernity in the twentieth-century. Concerning literary matters, *Ilanga lase Natal* by far surpassed *Umteteli wa Bantu*. From its inception Dube's newspaper announced itself as a forum for literary matters. Within eighteen months of its appearance, *Ilanga lase Natal* published from October 14, 1904 to May 12, 1905 Robert Grendon's epic *Pro Aliis Damnati* (For Others Doomed) which consists of 4, 412 lines divided into twenty parts. It also published voluminously his other excellent poems. Generally, Grendon (?- ?) has unjustifiably disappeared from South African literary history. Another epoch making event in its early years was the publication of excerpts from the writings of Magema M. Fuze (1845-1922) which were to be assembled together in a book called *Abantu Abamnyama* (1922, *The Black People And Whence They Came*). A genealogy of the founding of the Zulu nation, though not wholly original, the book was the work of modern prose written in the Zulu language by a New

African intellectual. H. I. E. Dhlomo was to celebrate it in his cultural history of the making of modern South Africa. The third intellectual who featured prominently on the early pages of *Ilanga lase Natal* was Josiah Mapumulo. He has also unfortunately disappeared from our cultural history. Mapumulo wrote for approximately forty years columns in the form of short essays on the history of the Catholic Church and its philosophy, on the incomparable nature of Christian civilization, and on the importance of written culture. As though this embarrassment of riches were not enough, the newspaper published for decades the satires of R. R. R. Dhlomo. Though written in English, these satires were the training ground for the later Zulu historical later novels R. R. R. Dhlomo wrote in the 1930s. Lastly, the newspaper made available to the public over many years short pungent miniature essays of A. H. M. Ngidi (1869-1951).

It is no wonder that in later years *Ilanga lase Natal* gave rise to intellectuals of the caliber of Jordan Ngubane, Benedict Vilakazi, Emman H. A. Made (?- ?), and H. I. E. Dhlomo! There is a fascinating symmetry of mutual admiration between these four intellectuals in the newspaper stretching over a decade. Three of them stated that they had been immeasurably influenced by their predecessors. Among his earliest writings for the weekly in 1932, Benedict Wallet Vilakazi pointed out that the newspaper had been instrumental in his intellectual formation, especially the meditations of Josiah Mapumulo. H. I. E. Dhlomo himself selected A. H. M. Ngidi as having been instrumental in the formation of Vilakazi's literary imagination. In 1946 in *Inkundla ya Bantu* (Bantu Forum, April 1939-November 1951), which he was then editing, Jordan Ngubane marked for praise Ngazana Luthuli (1874- ?) who replaced John Dube as editor of *Ilanga lase Natal* from 1917 to 1943. Also in the same newspaper in the same year of 1946, H. I. E. Dhlomo singled out his brother R. R. R. Dhlomo, who from 1943 to 1962 was the editor of *Ilanga lase Natal*, for praise. Ngubane and Dhlomo were intent on continuing on the great caliber of *Ilanga lase Natal*. Ngubane wrote the first serious literary criticism to appear in a New African newspaper. In a 1941 critical appreciation of H. I. E. Dhlomo's *Valley of a Thousand Hills* (1941), Jordan Ngubane praises the poem as representing a new national spirit of modernity as well as giving expression to a New Africa. An appraisal of such serious intellectual content had not appeared on the pages of any New African newspaper before. Intellectual portraits of political and religious leaders had been appearing for decades, but not in a form of a penetrative literary appraisal of a brilliant literary work. As for H. I. E. Dhlomo's achievements on the pages of *Ilanga lase Natal*, of which then he was an assistant editor to his brother, they are amazing and astonishing: he writes a major theorization of literature, specifically the poetics of dramatic form; he contributes a cultural history of New African literature; he constructs an intellectual portrait of the most important New African intellectuals and political leaders; continuing on the direction Solomon T. Plaatje had taken, he appraises the possibilities of the Zulu language

in creating a new modern national literature; as though this were not enough, he formulates a cultural history of the New African writer and intellectual. Moving from theoretical preoccupations, in 1947 he writes a series of great prose-poems and then for over a decade before his death in 1956 he writes essays whose poetic power has been equaled by a few. In one of his last important essays written on the occasion of the golden anniversary of *Ilanga lase Natal* in 1953, H. I. E. Dhlomo makes a retrospective evaluation of the contribution of the New African newspaper to the literary imagination of South Africa. As for Benedict Vilakazi, the prose of Josiah Mapumulo and A. H. M. Ngidi, both of whom were very serious students of Roman literature and spoke Latin, was fundamental in influencing the poetics of his three Zulu novels: *Noma Nini* (1935), *U-Dingiswayo kaJobe* (1939) and *Nje Nempela* (1945).

The short story form was to find its ideal representation in the 1950s in *Drum* magazine (March 1951-April 1965 [original series]). The monthly held numerous short story writing competitions, some of which were adjudicated by prominent writers like Langston Hughes and H. I. E. Dhlomo. It is not far fetched to argue that Richard Rive was 'discovered' by Hughes through such a competition. In dedicating his book of short story collection, *African Songs* (1963), to the African American poet, Rive was taking cognizance of this fact. It was Langston Hughes who enabled Richard Rive and Ezekiel Mphahlele to be aware of each other. This is one of the concrete manifestations of the unity between New Negro modernity and New African modernity. The immediate effect of *Drum* magazine on South African literary history was in giving rise to a group of brilliant journalists and short story writers: Can Themba (1924-1967), Henry Nxumalo (1918-1957), Lewis Nkosi (1936-), Bloke Modisane (1924-1986), Ezekiel Mphahlele (1919-), Arthur Maimane (1932-). Some of these intellectuals attempted to write novels during their exile period, which were largely unsuccessful. The only member of the *Drum* writers who was successful at being both a novelist and a short story writer was Bessie Head (1937-1986), who strangely enough during this historical moment of the hegemony of the "Drum" writers was marginalized from this intellectual constellation. This constellation of writers, including the brilliant photographers and outstanding musicians of the decade have been retrospectively designated as the 'Sophiatown Renaissance'. Another important contribution of *Drum* magazine as far as literary matters is concerned were the brilliant intellectual portraits of New African intellectuals, writers, and leaders (religious and political) which graced its early years of publication. In this, it surpassed many of the previous New African publications. Both H. I. E. Dhlomo and Jordan K. Ngubane contributed portraits, respectively of Benedict Vilakazi and A. W. G. Champion (1893-1975).

Although *Drum* magazine commissioned first rate intellectual portraits, including those of African political leaders in other parts of Africa as well as those of

African American intellectuals, artists and artists, but as a forum of creative writing and intellectual thought, it never reached the productivity and cogency attained by previous New African publications whose genealogy has been traced here, yet today it occupies a legendary status in South African cultural history! It is the only publication which was monolingual while the others were trilingual. While the others were preoccupied with the concept of history, it never betrayed such an anxiety. Perhaps the preeminent position unjustifiably accorded to *Drum* magazine is because it was culminating point of the logic of modernity whose completion was unrealizable due to the politics of oppression. A new intellectual history needs to be written with the intent of repositioning the decade of the 1950s in its proper dimensions in relation to the intellectually and culturally stronger decades preceding it.

There is no reason to believe that this relationship between the vernacular press and African literature in South Africa was not paralleled in many other African countries in the first half of the twentieth-century.

Further Reading

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