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An African Newspaper in Central Johannesburg:

The Journalistic and Associational Context of *Abantu-Bantu*

Peter Limb
Michigan State University limb@msu.edu

Prologue

Many writers, from Eddie Roux to Tim Couzens to Les Switzer, have bewailed the absence of *Abantu-Bantu* from the shelves of libraries and from scholarship; this shocking neglect of black intellectual life has often been dismissed as a tragedy—few have bothered to do anything about it. The text below comprises chapter 11 of a book to be published by Wits University Press in September as *The People's Paper: A Centenary History & Anthology of Abantu-Batho*. Its complexity, evident in the multi-lingual nature of the paper and its long obscurity, is glimpsed in the titles of chapters from Part One:

“Only the Bolder Spirits”: Politics, Racism, Solidarity, and War in *Abantu-Batho*;
“They Must Go to the Bantu Batho”: Economics and Education, Religion and Gender, Love and Leisure in the People's Paper;
Pixley Seme and *Abantu-Batho*;
Queen Labotsibeni and *Abantu-Batho*;
“We of Abantu-Batho”: Robert Grendon's Brief and Controversial Editorship;
The Swazi Royalty and the Founding of *Abantu-Batho* in a Regional Context;
Abantu-Batho and the Xhosa Poets;
African Royalty, Popular History, and *Abantu-Batho*;
“Johannesburg in Flames”: The 1918 Shilling Campaign, *Abantu-Batho*, and Early African Nationalism in South Africa;
Garveyism, *Abantu Batho* & the Radicalisation of the ANC during the 1920s;
An African Newspaper in Central Johannesburg;
Assessing the Decline and Legacy of *Abantu-Bantu*.

Part Two consists of a 200-page anthology drawn from each year of the paper's life. The reason for bringing it back to life is the constant lament by scholars of its absence.

I present below only a cog in our still very incomplete understanding of the life and times of the newspaper and its world, focusing on a little-known club. The empirical

data on the life of this club is still very limited, which cramps our ability to draw firm theoretical conclusions, but it is a large advance on what we knew before.

Here I focus chiefly on the newspaper's associational context and its circle in the neglected decade of the 1910s, and on black politics and intellectual life in central Johannesburg. As a Preface and to provide context I include two sections from the book's Introduction that sketch *Abantu-Batho*'s history and raise theoretical issues to do with journalism, political engagement, translation and associational life that can frame our discussion. In the discussion I will also address related theoretical and methodological issues. Given the limited extract you have of a long book, I summarise these below.

1. Changing Historical Methods/Procedure?

A lot of sharing took place in this project, which was written at considerable speed to be available in the year of its centenary and that of the political movement closely associated with it, the ANC. That very pace leads to my first point, about apparent changes in historical methodology, or at least in process, that I address elsewhere.¹ That the book has appeared now is partly a function of procedural changes in the researching and writing of history stimulated by technological developments that allow much faster interaction and sharing between scholars and access to rich primary sources.

2. Disjunction between Theory and Practice.

The African Club was literally right under our noses and most of us missed it—though Phil Bonner and Paul La Hausse footnoted its existence. Elaborating this shrouded history required trips to archives, translation, and collaboration. But the general absence of the Club, and *Abantu-Batho*, from the history books and literary essays reflects abysmal gaps in the *empirical* work on this period that implies a disjunction between theory and practice. We have conferences on 'lost' decades. And indeed they were lost; some still are. Why does this happen? When advances in theory are not matched by empirical work on the ground something is wrong. Narrative can easily fall into traps of generalisation not based on evidence. This neglect is nothing new with regard to black writing, but it raises issues of translation, of canon or oeuvre, of publishing and historiographical trends, of 'dangerous' but necessary work that I should say something about for reasons of context before turning to *Abantu-Batho*.

3. Canon & Oeuvre.

Both in another recent book (*Autobiography and Selected Works of Dr Alfred Bitini Xuma*) and this, I must deal with the canon around ANC history. Any Selected Works invariably raises problems of canon but encouragement of research by publication of lost works should need no justification. The intellectual output around *Abantu-Batho* deserves a more accessible repository. There can be no effective criticism without consideration of a fuller text. The *Abantu-Batho* 'Library' is remarkable for how it has continued to be

¹ C. Saunders and P. Limb, 'Southern African history in the digital era' and Limb, 'Dis/connects: Building and maintaining digital libraries on Africa', SCOLMA Anniversary conference, Oxford, 25-26 June 2012.

neglected and how this has limited our understanding of the history and culture of the 1910s and 1920s. The anthology addresses this lacuna.

4. Associational Life

Today we tend to take voluntary associations for granted, but how much do we know of their history, of their nature and operation in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries? We don't have a history of black associational life in South Africa. Neither has the broader field of African urban studies dealt with them.² The history of African clubs is neglected due to paucity of sources such as *Abantu-Batho*. Some accounts mention associations in Kimberly, but then completely elide Johannesburg and the African Club to pass on to the white-controlled clubs at the very end of the decade and start of the next; the Bantu Men's Social Centre whose sudden history has been so seductive in its appeal to scholars failing to see the connection with the more radical African Club.

Associations have been important in many spheres, as for example in the French Revolution and English radicalism, as shown by E. P. Thompson. Peter Clark shows the importance of such clubs in Britain, and even mentions elite clubs exported to the Cape. He demonstrates how early clubs helped stimulate new ideas of 'progress' whilst maintaining 'pre-modern' sociability. He also engages with work on voluntary associations and civil society and consideration of the impact of the rise and fall of independent African associational life on the ANC would make for interesting observations. From a different angle, Amy Milne-Smith analyses the spatial class segregationism and masculinities of elite clubs in Victorian Britain, deploying Bourdieu's take on lifestyle and distinction to show how people used clubs to denote a status-based community. This might be another line for further research in South Africa, though the class, gender and social composition of the African Club—from what limited sources we have—seems to have been much wider, and more united by race, whilst I am less interested in imaginary conversations than in recovering neglected voices.³

Some Qualifications

Writing history from an amputated archive is risky. My big qualification here is that whilst my chapter on the African Club fills an important gap empirically, we need more evidence on this and other clubs, perhaps from other issues of *Abantu-Batho* that will come to hand, and more work on associations across time, to assess their significance. I imagine that such a broader tableau would confirm how black clubs were linked closely with socio-economic trends, urbanisation, the rise of mobility and education, the black press, national black politics, and leisure. And I expect I would not become too starry-eyed about their achievements. I would however, emphasise the importance in the life of the African Club of the local sphere, and the national sphere writ local. I do think the

² For example, in Arne Tostensen, Inge Tvedten, Mariken Vaa eds. *Associational life in African cities: popular responses to the urban crisis* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2001) or Steven Salm and Toyin Falola eds. *African urban spaces in historical perspective* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005).

³ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin, 1968); Clark, *British Clubs & Societies, 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Clarendon, 2000); Milne-Smith, *London Clubland: A Cultural History of Gender & Class in late Victorian Britain* (Palgrave, 2011); Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (Harvard University Press, 1984), and Michael Burawoy and Karl Von Holdt, *Conversations with Bourdieu : the Johannesburg moment* (Wits University Press, 2012) .

Club moved into a vacuum, and its brief flourishing was a fortuitous coming together of Seme's initiative and emergent intellectual and political forces.

One could make other qualifications about our book: in talking of *the* 'People's Paper', we are well aware of *many* peoples. And, mindful of the intolerance of some columnists, we include some translations kindly made by Peter Lekgoathi to demonstrate this. Yet there was also an interesting pluralism of politics, religion, and poetry as demonstrated in other chapters, for which you will have to wait until September.

[From the Introduction] Abantu-Batho, a Very Short Introduction

The 2012 centenary of the African National Congress (ANC) is also that of the closely allied newspaper, *Abantu-Batho* (The People). This little-studied weekly was established in October 1912 by the convener of the ANC, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, with financial assistance of the Queen Regent of Swaziland, Labotsibeni. It attracted as editors and journalists some of the best of a rising company of African intellectuals, political figures and literati such as Cleopas Kunene, Saul Msane, Richard Victor Selope Thema, T. D. Mweli Skota, Robert Grendon, S. E. K. Mqhayi and Nontsizi Mgqwetho. In its pages important themes of the day, from the pass laws, Land Act and the world war to strikes and socialism, the founding of Fort Hare, the rights of black women and Garveyism were articulated, just as mundane events such as football matches, marriages and church gatherings were reported. It also was a forum for letters and literary contributions, some of the highest calibre, others of a plebeian bluntness.

There was already an established, dynamic black press in some cities and towns by 1912. The ability to spread news in a printed format had once been a virtual monopoly of the colonial state, or missions, but the rise of a black-owned and edited press challenged this just as the spread of new communications and news agencies opened up space to share ideas more freely. In the latter-half of the nineteenth century, a nascent

African intelligentsia developed letter-writing networks⁴ and then, having few publication outlets, created their own regional newspapers such as *Imvo Zabantsundu* (Native Opinion, 1884-) of J. T. Jabavu, *Izwi Labantu* (Voice of the People 1897-1909) of A. K. Soga, *Koranta ea Becoana* (Bechuana Gazette 1901-8) and *Tsala ea Batho* (1910-15) of Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje, and *Ilanga lase Natal* (Natal Sun, 1903-) of John Langalibalele Dube, plus several weeklies printed across the border in Basutoland.⁵ The editorial politics of these weeklies was always strictly within constitutional limits but in favour of extending black rights. Like *Abantu-Batho*, their circulation and readership (see below) was modest but their impact large on emergent political bodies. Their relationship to *Abantu-Batho* was sometimes stiff—after all, they were commercial (and often political) rivals, sometimes more intimate, but often they swapped or reproduced each other's stories, a practice which has greatly assisted the realisation of this book.

In the Transvaal, this press was slower to emerge in the face of harsh anti-black laws, but in the first decade after the South African War, pioneer black newspapers helped inculcate reading habits and impart journalist skills, starting to create an audience and forge a foundation on which *Abantu-Batho* could soon build. In Pietersburg (Polokwane), the short-lived *Leihlo la Babathso* (Native Eye, 1903-8) of Simon Phamotse and Levi Khomo gave voice to the Transvaal Native Vigilance Association.⁶ Then from Johannesburg in 1910 came the weeklies *Motsoalle* (Friend, later *Moromioa* (Messenger)) of Daniel Simon Letanka in Setswana/Sipedi, and *Umlomo wa Bantu-*

⁴ See V. Khumalo, 'Ekukhanyeni Letter Writers: A Historical Enquiry into Epistolary Network(s) and Political Imagination in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa', in K. Barber (ed.) *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 113-142.

⁵ The Basutoland papers *Leselinyana la Lesotho*, *Mochochonono* ('The Comet', Maseru, founded 1910) of Abimael Tlale and M. N. Monyakoane, and *Naledi ea Lesotho* ('Star of Basutoland', Mafeteng, 1904) would feed into *Abantu-Batho* and their columns provide important insights into its history.

⁶ T. Couzens, 'The Struggle to be Independent: A History of the Black Press in South Africa 1836-1960', History Workshop paper, Johannesburg, 6-10 February 1990, 16.

Molomo oa Batho (People's Mouthpiece) of Levi Thomas Mvabaza with Saul Msane in English/isiXhosa/Sesotho. Both broadsheets would merge (in 1912 and 1916 respectively) in a new paper tied to the Transvaal Native Congress (TNC) and South African Native National Congress (SANNC, ANC from 1923), whose founding, and that of their public voice, *Abantu-Batho*, trumpeted a rival legitimacy.

Africans soon made good use of these papers to communicate, and to organise politically for whilst commercial ventures and moderate in tone, they had to operate in a society discriminating harshly against black people.⁷ A new political culture primarily articulated via the black press and public meetings was emerging.⁸

All these members of the Black Fourth Estate remained under close neo-colonial scrutiny. As with the subaltern press in other colonial situations, state censors would closely monitor *Abantu-Batho*⁹ and government officials hauled managing editor Seme before them to explain stridently anti-Imperial wartime editorials.¹⁰ Still, as long as it did not become too radical, the state could use the black press for conveying official notices and maintaining a 'pressure-cooker' on unrest. In 1905 the South African Native Affairs Commission saw them as 'an infant press' yet 'fairly accurate in tracing the course of passing events and useful in extending the range of Native information'.¹¹ Yet given its

⁷ R.H.W. Shepherd, *Literature for the South African Bantu* (Pretoria: Carnegie Corporation, 1936), 6; Morris, 'The Early Black South African Newspaper and the Development of the Novel,' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* v. 15 no. 1 1980, 15-29, 16; P. Limb, *The ANC's Early Years: Nation, Class and Place in South Africa before 1940* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010), 19-20, 87.

⁸ Limb, *The ANC's Early Years*, 94, 104

⁹ Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA) to Director of Native Labour (DNL) 19 February 1918, in State Archives, Pretoria, DNL, Government Native Labour Bureau (GNLB) v. 90 144/13 D205, asking clerks in his office to read *Abantu-Batho* regularly for the benefit of the Chief Censor.

¹⁰ Banning was more pronounced in India: Lord Curzon stated the Indian press had shown 'a most exemplary and gratifying loyalty' in the South African War but 'now and then one detects a note of veiled irony' (letter 28 December 1902, in Private Correspondence India, Curzon to Hamilton, Vol. X, D510/3 India Office, British Library; M. Israel, *Communications and Power: Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1920-47* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); C. Paul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press and India, c. 1880-1922* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 23.

¹¹ *Report of the South African Native Affairs Commission 1903-1905* (London: HMSO, 1905), 65.

physical existence on the Rand, in the centre of the country's political storms, and its centrality to Congress and vernacular discourses—at the very 'point of intersection between political intelligence and indigenous knowledge [where] colonial rule was at its most vulnerable'¹²—there was every chance it would become more radical; and it did.

The idea of a new, multi-lingual newspaper with a truly national focus was raised, probably by Seme, at a meeting in Johannesburg in 1911 connected with the South African Native Convention, which led to the January 1912 launch of the SANNK.¹³ That *Abantu-Batho* from its launch later that year to its end in 1931 would be adopted at various times as an organ of Congress and articulate its policies and promoted its campaigns flowed from the fact that the movement's founder, Seme, had also founded the paper. The 1919 constitution of the TNC registers *Abantu-Batho* as its organ and in the late 1920s it became the national ANC mouthpiece.

Yet it was much more than a mere party 'organ'. The very title *Abantu-Batho* ('The People', from 'ntu' (Nguni) and 'batho' (Sesotho-Setswana)) spoke meaningfully to readers in a wide range of African languages¹⁴—it published simultaneously and in some depth in Sesotho, isiXhosa, and isiZulu, with some Setswana, as well as in English—and clearly to the vision of ANC founders for unity and nation-building.¹⁵ The term 'people' (like 'nation'), invokes fraught and contested concepts used and abused by populists of many persuasions. There were, of course, many 'peoples', just as one can also characterise other weeklies, such as *Imvo* and *Ilanga*, as 'people's papers'. Neither

¹² Again the Indian comparison is apposite: C. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

¹³ A. Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu! The Beginnings of Black Protest Politics in South Africa* (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1984), 260.

¹⁴ J. Starfield, 'Dr S. Modiri Molema (1891-1965): The Making of an Historian', Ph.D. thesis University of the Witwatersrand, 2007, 240, (footnote (fn.) 69).

¹⁵ A point made by A. Davidson, I. Filatova, V. Gorodnov, and S. Johns (eds.) *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History* vol. 2 (London: Cass, 2003), 4, fn. 3.

do we suggest that if some other newspapers were not official organs of Congress then they could not represent certain peoples or indeed the collective ‘people’. However, *Abantu-Batho* claimed a wider mantle, a national focus (even if it sometimes fell short of this aim), and the term had a ‘naming, identifying’¹⁶ role that sought to recapture African dignity lost under colonialism. It was a call to arms for editors to vigorously defend the causes espoused by ‘the people’, a mission executed in editorials (and associated campaigns) on land, civic, and human rights. Looked at retrospectively, it was this sort of vigorous, popular approach epitomised by *Abantu-Batho* that would eventually mobilise wide sections of ‘the people’ to overcome colonialism and apartheid.

Over the nineteen years of its existence this paper played an important role in influencing and reflecting African political thought and intellectual life in South Africa and beyond. Its history is a fascinating and complex story, a remarkable window into social and intellectual life and political culture in the early twentieth century. Here too we see the triumphs and failures of its own editors together with political leaders as African nationalist networks were forged and tempered, as moderates and radicals alike absorbed, adapted and re-cast new ideas and forms of discourse, grappled with issues of tolerance and democracy, and networked across different social classes and peoples to try to forge new social, ethnic, and political identities and viable social forces. If the relatively narrow social base (and material resources) of the paper, like that of the SANNC, meant that it never entirely or consistently lived up to its populist ambitions in the period,¹⁷ then it accomplished a great deal in setting the pace and broadening the focus of the black press.

¹⁶ R. Whitaker, ‘History, Myth and Social Function in Southern African Nguni Praise Poetry’ in D. Konstan and K. Raaflaub (eds.) *Epic and History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 381-91, 381.

¹⁷ I owe the latter comment to Chris Lowe’s ever-sharp insight.

The weekly went through various phases some more radical and others more moderate, and had a wide range of editors before it ceased in July 1931. This Introduction and the first pair of chapters outline the broad contours and contexts of *Abantu-Batho's* hitherto hidden rich history, historiography, structure and thematic content. These themes are then taken up in detail by our contributors. The concluding chapter assesses the legacy of the 'people's paper'. ...

[also from The Introduction]

Translation and Engagement: Journalistic and Nationalistic Contexts

In times of change, as Benedict Anderson and others have shown, newspapers could influence or connect to the public sphere, politicise people and interpret new ideas; in this way they could be 'distinctly subversive'. They could also show the way to alternatives to the status quo.¹⁸ *Abantu-Batho* would do just this, posing alternatives to white rule in liberalism, African nationalism, socialism and Garveyism, and so helping ignite new African identities and dreams for the future. Like journalists the world over and despite their lack of training, its editorial staff were skilled 'word weavers' somewhat akin to literary writers and carriers of an oral tradition that had been gradually incorporated into a press format.¹⁹ Indeed, one editor, Grendon, was an accomplished poet and, as the cover of this book (and Jeff Opland's chapter) intimate, another poet, Nontsizi, may well have been a fleeting staff member. In this section, I focus on translation, engagement and nationalism; in chapter 11, I elaborate the journalistic aspects of the 'people's paper'.

Editors, lacking access to expensive, white commercial news agencies, developed their own processes of gathering news, locating and maintaining sources, selection and

¹⁸ B. Anderson, H. Barker, and S. Burrows, 'Introduction', in H. Barker and S. Burrows (eds.) *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-22, 1, 17.

¹⁹ J. Aitchison, *The Word Weavers: Newshounds & Wordsmiths* (Cambridge: University Press, 2007) xi.

layout of stories, and writing for a wide audience. In doing so, they forged distinct relationships to politics and to modern cultures, and played a major role in building a new national identity. Simultaneously they maintained old identities and link to indigenous cultures, for implicit in a multi-lingual structure was the dilemma of how to communicate in the vernacular and retain solidarities forged on regional or ethnic bases while at the same time constructing African nationalism.

Translation played an important part in these processes. With four or five languages there may at any one time have been the same number of independent editors. Some articles appeared in different versions that offer variant interpretations of the same event (see Paul Landau's chapter) but what exactly was going on is only partly known. One process in play was cultural resistance. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that close examination of colonialist pressure on African cultures can reveal pride in African language; Lorna Hardwick shows that developments in translation allowed classics to be appropriated by imperial subjects to help challenge colonialism and represent histories of African resistance.²⁰ What might linguistic analysis of *Abantu-Batho* reveal?

Abantu-Batho was attempting a creative adaptation of language and culture aimed at socio-political transformation. In his chapter, Jeff Opland shows that poets used its pages to interpret and encourage such transformation, and we can see this engagement with regard to the vernacular and adaptation of English literatures such as Shakespeare.²¹

There was a sort of hierarchy of languages in *Abantu-Batho*. English tended to be

²⁰ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: J. Currey, 1986); L. Hardwick, 'Playing around Cultural Faultiness: The Impact of Modern Translations for the Stage on Perceptions of Ancient Greek Drama', in A. Chantler and C. Dente (eds.) *Translation Practices: Through Language to Culture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 167-84, 167, 183.

²¹ Brian Willan has pushed back the date of such engagements to the 1870s in 'Whose Shakespeare? Early African Engagement with Shakespeare in South Africa', paper to the Fourth European Conference of African Studies, Uppsala June 2011.

relegated to the middle pages as ‘The Empire Wrote Back’, though it may have served to bind some readers. A column count using random samples of complete issues from 1928 to 1931 suggests attempts to balance languages, but that Sesotho and isiZulu may have been dominant, at least in letters and advertisements, logical given the main audience on the Rand. The ‘languages question’ may not have been fully settled at the start. Kunene (backed by Plaatje) in 1912 had earlier proposed the new SANNC adopt an African language name, such as *Imbizo Yabantu* (Bantu Congress, or ‘Congress of the People’),²² and contemporary African newspapers bore vernacular names. In December 1912 the precise mix of languages was still ‘a matter for discussion’.²³

Publishing in so many languages aimed to reach wide audiences and part of this was undoubtedly conveying the political message(s) of Congress. Undoubtedly, the paper sought to mobilise politically both *kholwa* strata and chiefs, and at times it also published direct appeals to workers and women. However, these messages were by no means singular, as evident not only in the differences between provincial Congresses but also the rise and fall of political leaders over a short span of time. There was a marked difference in the politics of the moderate John Dube from the radical Josiah Gumede. The coming and going of individual editors, from the moderate Saul Msane to the more radical Daniel Letanka, also lent variety to political opinions expressed. As I explain in chapter 8, political pluralism even extended to accommodate views not in support of Congress. Questions arise here which we cannot yet answer. What did it mean to translate into a coloniser’s language, and if an educated black stratum was now reading in English, what does that say about the problems and confusion engendered in building a new

²² ‘S.A. Native Congress’, *Tsala ea Batho* 17 February 1912; Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu!*, 274.

²³ J.M.T., ‘Inxube Vange’, *Ilanga* 6 December 1912; C. Lowe email 19 May 2011 suggests English, isiZulu and Sesotho capacity was there with Letanka, Seme and Kunene, while Xhosa may have come in part via Seme’s isiXhosa-speaking first wife.

African nationalism?²⁴ There are also translational problems of archaic orthography of language, use of metaphors, wordiness and untranslatable terms.²⁵

Journalism history has drawn profitably on cultural and comparative studies of the media to highlight and weigh alternative readings of the press, whether as reflection of society or ‘constitutive medium’ of society.²⁶ Journalists everywhere produce ‘news’ and engage with society and ideologies.²⁷ In settler societies such as South Africa, print journalism played a crucial role in creating real or imagined communities of readers and connecting them with each other across town and country, into a nation and to rulers,²⁸ and more widely to engage Imperial and other international or diaspora networks. The medium of print in settler societies with a stunted indigenous bourgeoisie, as South Africa, played a pivotal role in developing nationalisms and engaging the state.²⁹

Abantu-Batho was a weapon that allowed engagement more on African terms and much more so than in deputations or the white press. A newspaper was impersonal, often anonymous via collective authorship,³⁰ varied in views and able to use ‘freedom of the press’ to push the envelope of criticism. *Abantu-Batho* used vernacular languages to change the linguistic terrain or discourse, though censors scrutinised their columns. If reaching a limited audience, it was important in instituting political engagements on

²⁴ P. St.-Pierre, ‘Translating (into) the Language of the Coloniser’ in S. Simon & St.-Pierre (eds) *Changing the Terms: Translating in the Postcolonial Era* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 2000), 261-88, 275.

²⁵ See, for example, N. Dhlomo, ‘The Theory, Value and Practice of Translation with Reference to John L. Dube’s Texts *Isita Somuntu nguye uqobo lwakhe* (1928) and *Ukuziphatha kahle* (1935)’, M.A. thesis, University of Durban-Westville, 1996, chapter 2.

²⁶ E. Morrison, ‘Reading Victoria’s Newspapers 1838-1901’ in D. Walker et al (eds.) *Books, Readers, Reading* (Geelong: Deakin University, 1992), 128-40, 129.

²⁷ K. and R. Tomaselli and J. Muller, ‘The Construction of News in the South African Media’ in K. Tomaselli and J. Muller (eds.), *The Press in South Africa* (Bellville: Anthropos, 1989), 22-38, 22-3.

²⁸ See A. Curthoys, ‘Histories of Journalism’ in A. Curthoys and J. Schultz (eds.) *Journalism: Print, Politics and Popular Culture* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999), 1-9.

²⁹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983, 1991), 13-15, 137.

³⁰ L. Sage, ‘Foreword’ to K. Campbell (ed.) *Journalism, Literature and Modernity: from Hazlitt to Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), ix-xi, x.

better terms for Africans and helping make these encounters more flexible and potent. It ‘crossed the line’ between polite deputation and political resistance, usually seen as starting only from the late 1940s, and in this sense helped prepare the ground for popular resistance. It did this by broadening the terms of engagement to include solidarity with different classes, women, and other African peoples, and by re-inserting into discourses African notions of politics (as around chiefs) and new hybrids of African and Western politics (such as Congress itself, a very *African* version of a parliament).

All this is not to say that other black newspapers did not also aim to speak on behalf of ‘the people’,³¹ or those parts of the population with whom they particularly identified. *Imvo*, *Ilanga* and *Umteteli* for example also sought such a mantle, and the latter two had close connections with some parts of the Congress movement. *Umteteli* (like its white mining backers and the white government) was strident in its rejection of *Abantu-Batho*’s claim to represent ‘the people’, as demonstrated in chapter 7. The frequent reprinting of each other’s articles in the first years of *Abantu-Batho* points to a certain camaraderie of the black press. Moreover, some Congress provincial branches developed their own organs and, as Chris Lowe observes in his chapter, in its very early days Congress officials envisaged or recognised multiple organs; though the term, I suggest, might refer to credentialed papers accorded access to meetings rather than organisational organs.³² Nevertheless, *Abantu-Batho* claimed and to some extent would succeed in building, a more intense national pitch. It cultivated a special, even intimate, relationship with Congress, from Seme’s initial dream of a united national voice to its

³¹ To give one example, the first two issues of *Ilanga* were replete with mentions of ‘the people’ and even ‘the masses’: W.C. Wilcox, ‘Correspondence to the editor’, *Ilanga* no.1 10 April 1903 and H.A., ‘Education of Body and Mind’ *Ilanga* no. 2 17 April 1903

³² ‘South African Native National Congress’, *Tsala ea Batho* 10 May 1913 lists *Naledi ea Batho*, *Molomo oa Batho*, *Abantu-Batho*, *Tsala ea Batho* and *A.P.O.* as ‘newspaper press organs’.

1919 confirmation of official organ status in the TNC constitution, to Gumede's 'nationalisation' of the paper in the late 1920s.

Similarly 'the nation' is also fraught with complexity and contestation, on which there is a vast literature that deconstructs the term and warns of the dangers of abuse of nationalism. Suffice it to say that in this period of rising African nationalism, *Abantu-Batho* played the central coordinating and consciousness-raising role as discussed above. When I speak of 'The People's Paper' then, I do so more to capture the meaning of 'Abantu' and 'Batho' ('people') to its editors, writers and audience, and not to suggest any kind of endorsement of nationalism as such. Even so, and as I and others argue elsewhere,³³ national liberation was and is a key concept in South African politics.

The national dimension is more significant here than may meet the eye. Historians of the 1970s-80s searched for social histories in newspaper columns, moving on to the cultural sphere. The onset of digital newspaper archives now presents the tool, as John Nerone says, to begin 'the reconstruction of the national conversation of previous ages', aided by the distributed nature of the press via recirculation of content through reprinting in other periodicals or by exchange, which may have been more useful in generating a national profile than subscribers.³⁴ This is one way *Abantu-Batho* is now emerging from archival obscurity. Just as close monitoring by opponents gave it some credibility, the reprinting of content and its exchange to editors in other places, and the ability to search some of this content online has helped us recover more of this hidden archive].

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³³ See Limb, *ANC's Early Years*, 9-15, and the authors discussed therein.

³⁴ J. Nerone, 'Genres of Journalism History', in C. Robertson (ed.), *Media History and the Archive* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 18-29, 26-27: in the U.S. early African American and radical papers for example, were able to draw attention to themselves by this recirculation. Here I pay tribute to the World Newspaper Archive of the Center for Research Libraries/Readex that has placed online many such papers.

Chapter 11. An African Newspaper in Central Johannesburg: The Journalistic and Associational Context of *Abantu-Bantu*.

In the chapters above, we examined the content of *Abantu-Batho*. This chapter situates the paper in its journalistic and associational context; what was it like to be an African newspaper literally on the sidewalks of central Johannesburg, how did it gather and interpret news, how did it survive, socially and financially, and what socio-intellectual matrix did it inhabit, or even help create?

The Making of a New Radical Journalism

The steady growth of the black-owned and edited press from the 1880s (see Introduction) laid an important foundation for *Abantu-Batho*, and supplied useful journalistic connections for advice or providing copy, even models of layout and design to emulate. But the new paper also found its own niche as both a national and Johannesburg forum. It challenged the hegemony of the Establishment press that controlled public knowledge. There had been earlier flashes of radicalism, as in *Izwi Labantu*,³⁵ but these faded as fast as the paper. *Abantu-Batho* sought to be a journal of national politics and quality as opposed to a tabloid, but with a hybrid character and inclusive of human-interest stories and advertisements (see below).³⁶ Above all, it was a political newspaper.

³⁵ P. Limb, “‘Representing the Labouring Classes’: African Workers in the African Nationalist Press, 1900-60” in L. Switzer and M. Adhikari (eds.) *South Africa’s Resistance Press* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000), 79-127, 85-88.

³⁶ This trend would continue after its demise; the 1930s saw a global shift to tabloids (H. Wasserman, *Tabloid Journalism in South Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 17-18) and the rise of *Bantu World* to claim *Abantu-Batho*’s mantle as ‘South Africa’s only national African newspaper’: I take this from the masthead of the issue of 16 April 1955.

In other chapters, we investigate themes of political campaigns and policies, resistance and construction of nationhood in its pages.³⁷ Here I suggest that *Abantu-Bantu* both reflected and helped create African politics. It was a new media for Africans with a wider national and linguistic reach than before and a strident new assertiveness—the Facebook of the 1910s. Over time, under fire from the Right and with declining resources and a worn-out press, it failed to keep up with technological change. Yet those writers who stayed with *Abantu-Batho* refused to kowtow to the white-sponsored ‘yellow’ press epitomised by *Umteteli wa Bantu*, and retained their assertiveness and autonomy—to the extent that a largely pro-Congress editorial team could ever be fully ‘independent’ of politics. In this regard, it was the start of a new radical journalism later consummated in *The Guardian* and *Inkundla ya Bantu*.

Today we can well see *Abantu-Batho* staff as investigative journalists.³⁸ In comparison with notable correspondents of their age (such as *The Manchester Guardian’s* Alexander Werth) or of our times (such as John Pilger), they stand up well. They were not beholden to corporate interests and were fiercely independent. Yet we should not imagine they all were cut from the same ideological cloth. Some had substantially different views (see chapters 1-2 on the variety of political and religious views articulated). If to a man they opposed white supremacy, there were differences between the studied moderation of Saul Msane, the shrill African nationalism of Selope Thema, the socialist leanings of Letanka or the committed poetic lyricism of Grendon. The more moderate Mweliso Skota co-existed with the radical Gumede and A.W.G. Champion (see chapter 8). Journalism in general has been characterised as ‘an

³⁷ On these themes see F. Banda, ‘African Political Thought as an Epistemic Framework for Understanding African Media’, *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 29, 1, 2008, 79-99, 79.

³⁸ Judged by recent trends, still much needed for an open society: see A. Harber and M. Renn (eds.) *Troublemakers: The Best of South Africa’s Investigative Journalism* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2010).

annoyance, a scurrilous activity, operating on the borders of society, in dark recesses where ordinary people fear to delve'.³⁹ *Abantu-Batho* journalists were no different, except all suffered acute national and racial oppression, and some lived very 'ordinary' lives indeed given their limited income and lodgings.

They were all very much 'political journalists' who, as Fred Inglis observes more generally, not only report but also interpret events and help shape public views, many with 'no very settled place in the social structure' (doubly resonant in South Africa of the day).⁴⁰ *Abantu-Batho* expressed its critical journalism with an unapologetic, even aggressive style. It articulated a sense of black exclusion from political representation. At various times, its philosophy mixed liberalism, Christianity, Garveyism, African nationalism, and socialism. Initially, the basis of editorialising was a radical liberalism epitomised by Cleopas Kunene and Saul Msane, giving way to the radical socialist and then Garveyist flirtations of Letanka and Josiah Gumede.

Towards the end of its life, *Abantu-Batho* editors claimed continuity in policies across its history. Indeed there was a remarkable constancy in its editorial line,⁴¹ although this was more the case with their African nationalism than their factional politics. We can ascertain disjunctures, changes, revisions, and both tension and intersection between the editorial search for truth (as seen in an unrelenting critique of racial domination) and meaning (in Grendon's poetry or in Thema's ruminations on race and politics).⁴²

How open then was *Abantu-Batho* to new ideas, to new writers? There was enough openness and flexibility to accommodate some major editorial changes—Grendon

³⁹ S. Niblock, *Journalism: A Beginners Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), 147.

⁴⁰ F. Inglis, *People's Witness: The Journalist in Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 23, 25, 49, 102.

⁴¹ 'Alive Again', *Abantu-Batho* 11 June 1931.

⁴² On tension, see G. Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie* (Dallas: Spring, 1987), xix.

and Msane came on board, only to almost as quickly have their services terminated, just as Letanka, and later Mvabaza, remained in their posts year after year. Yet adherence to broad Congress aims—natural enough in an official organ of sorts—predominated and tended to unite all editorial staff even if ANC rivals sometime received an airing. There were other dynamics at work. Editorial thought evolved, absorbing new influences such as Garveyism and socialism (see chapters 2, 9 and 10). However there is also evidence of a degree of stagnation of ideas that ran parallel with that of Congress in the 1920s-30s. The drying up of ANC ‘new blood’ limited new energy flowing into *Abantu-Batho*.

The contours of the new journalism were determined not just by the politics but also by the skills of its staff, as well as the structure and operations of the venture. Lacking professional training, most of its editors probably lacked the sort of detachment that comes with such training. Besides Thema, who undertook a short course in journalism in England in 1919, we can presume none of them formally studied the subject, not offered by Fort Hare College that only opened its doors in 1916. Nevertheless some staff had served time on other journals and may have undertaken self-study or swapped notes with journalists. It is likely they all learnt journalism by doing it, and drew inspiration and models from their peers. With the passage of time, some of them probably strove towards greater objectivity of reportage, if not necessarily of political stance; after all, objectivity is a very subjective category when applied to politics.

Intimacy with black political figures and first-experience of events also provided editors with keen insights into society. Staff witnessed or participated in some major news-making events on the Rand. Mabaso and Letanka were active in protests of 1918-20; others travelled to diamond mines and farms for stories. *Abantu-Batho* did provide

‘facts’ and, except for over-reliance on advertisements by quacks (typical of other papers of the day) rarely drifted into mystique. On the other hand, given *Abantu-Batho*’s limited finance and its militant stance, which worked against a large staff, there was not a great deal of actual reporting. Instead, editors often relied on accounts in other papers and published documents. Still, they communicated with makers of events at protests, public meetings, sports, concerts and conferences. One writer reported optimistically from a conference sponsored by the Dutch Reformed Church.⁴³

Trying to visualise *Abantu-Batho*’s weekly operations has not been easy in the past but, as noted in the Introduction, we have recently identified a photograph that is possibly either the paper’s print shop or editorial office, in perhaps either 1916 or 1920. Imagining the activities of this office, there would probably have been weekly editorial meetings, perhaps of all the language editors, or perhaps they worked alone. In the office would probably have been copies of newspapers and magazines received on exchange or subscription, a typewriter and filing cabinet, as well as the layout table that is visible. Staff may have visited the Johannesburg Public Library for national and international news. Copies certainly went overseas; we know it reached Britain, the United States, and Central and West Africa, as well as other Southern African countries. These exchanges were not matched by formation of a black journalists’ union, despite Sol Plaatje’s efforts in this regard, but in the frequent cross posting of each other’s stories and editorials,⁴⁴ we can glimpse an emergent informal black journalists’ network.

The failure to form a black press network made *Abantu-Batho*’s struggle for access to news sources that much harder. It was ‘running against the fast current’ of a

⁴³ ‘Briton, Boer and Bantu’, *Abantu-Batho* 11 October 1923, clipping in Rhodes House Library, Oxford University, Aborigines Protection Society Papers, Ms. Afr. S.24 J15.

⁴⁴ For example, ‘A Change of System’, *Abantu-Batho* 11 June 1931 came from *Natal Advertiser*, and *Abantu-Batho* 29 April 1920 cites *East London Dispatch* on sharp rises in the cost of living for Africans.

vast ‘river of news’ from the Establishment press.⁴⁵ Communication patterns were largely set by the time *Abantu-Batho* appeared in October 1912. The press had developed in the nineteenth century and telegraphy plugged South Africa into global news agencies such as Reuters that dominated international news feeds.⁴⁶ Declining prices of telegraphy and paper (except during wars) and mechanisation encouraged more papers.⁴⁷ The press remained a central forum of debate, with radio yet to develop—films, soon to penetrate the country, would later be deployed against the radicalism championed by *Abantu-Batho*. The land was ringed by a grid of Establishment papers like the *Cape Times*, *Star* and *Rand Daily Mail* but these aimed at white readers. The black press, excluded from the corridors of power, were raising dissenting voices and constituting themselves as an alternative to white hegemony.

However, *Abantu-Batho* staff lacked the cash, connections or skin colour to access commercial news agencies. So, as a modestly-funded alternative paper, it took up the challenge to source its own news. Limited evidence of internal operations makes it difficult to estimate, beyond sourced articles, where all stories came from, but reading between the lines it is clear that editors and correspondents spoke to participants in events, began to develop their own networks, and monitored the mainstream press.⁴⁸

From time to time they reprinted articles of interest to readers from the pages of *The Star*

⁴⁵ Paraphrasing Zimbabwean journalist Dinga Mpondah writing on the gross imbalance between news from the West and the Third World, and showing that in some ways today little has changed, for by 1990, 90 per cent of world press stories came from only four major agencies: cited by J. Pilger, ‘Information is Power’ in Pilger, *Distant Voices* (London: Vintage, 1994), 63-69.

⁴⁶ See D. Read, *The Power of News: The History of Reuters* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 125; A. Nalbach, “‘The Software of Empire’: Telegraphic News Agencies and Imperial Publicity, 1865-1914’, in J. Codell (ed.) *Imperial Co-Histories: National Identities and the British and Colonial Press* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 68-94.

⁴⁷ B. Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 39.

⁴⁸ Like seventeenth century editors of newsbooks and newspapers who turned to gossip and rumour, or commissioned their own correspondents, they ‘reported, evaluated, interpreted, critiqued and questioned information’: N. Greenspan, ‘News and Politics of Information in the Mid Seventeenth Century: The Western Design and the Conquest of Jamaica’, *History Workshop Journal* 69 2010, 1-26, 20.

and *Rand Daily Mail*; in 1930 they carried articles from the critical journal *Sjambok*.⁴⁹ There was a chronic lack of black periodicals to draw upon for copy or images, and a general lack of black people owning telephones to call up to interview. But staff did draw on their fellow African newspapers, which in turn generously reprinted stories from *Abantu-Batho*, widening its reach.

Just how radical was this new journalism is evident in the response of Left and Right. The overall situation was not kind to the black press. Discrimination swirled in the rhetoric of ‘semantic strategies’ of racism publicly reproduced in the white press.⁵⁰ And the status quo was plainly hostile to a radical black paper. The antagonism of government and big business and its press mouthpieces (discussed in the Conclusion) intensified in direct proportion to *Abantu-Batho*’s radicalism.

In this milieu, *Abantu-Batho* was an alternative to both the white mainstream and black status quo press, and we can even see it as a ‘resistance newspaper’ of the earlier period of African political struggle to white rule. Whilst *Imvo* and *Ilanga* developed a readership that extended somewhat beyond its home province and ethnic base, *Abantu-Batho* sought to become a truly national and rigorous opposition voice. In this regard, it was an alternative or ‘new type’ black newspaper.

How alternative this modest weekly newspaper was can be seen in the fact that from 1916 until 1923 it was cited often in its heyday by the communist *International*, if criticised in a comradely, paternalistic way.⁵¹ Longevity and audacity brought grudging recognition. In 1923, the week after the SANNC changed its name to the ANC and for

⁴⁹ See ‘[A]merican Negro Mission to South Africa’ and ‘Training Native Labour Leaders’ (*Star*) and ‘The Ricsha Ramp’ [*Sjambok*] *Abantu-Batho* 15 May 1930. *Sjambok* also was cited in a report on pass laws of 14 August 1930 (‘Drastic Urban Areas New Legislation’).

⁵⁰ See T. van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁵¹ R.K. Cope, *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews* (Cape Town, 1943) notes that ‘the Native Congress and its paper, *Abantu Batho*, were indulging in unrivalled slanders against the ISL’ 212.

the first time called for South Africa to become a republic,⁵² *The International*, in discussing elitist versus worldly education, remarked that ‘Even *Abantu-Batho* can give the Minister of Native Affairs points about native affairs’.⁵³ A fortnight later the exchange continued, with *The International* paraphrasing an article in *Abantu-Batho* that criticised the bourgeois press for attacking an article by David Ivon Jones on a Comintern-supported Negro conference.

What has Russia done, asks our contemporary, that the whites of South Africa should be so scared of her ... Do they really think people from Russia will come to South Africa to emancipate the natives from slavery? Or that ‘Russian influence’ can have that effect? Their fears are groundless, says ‘Abantu’, for no good can come out of Nazareth; no whites will ever save blacks.⁵⁴

The International strongly supported a proposal from *Abantu-Batho* for a conference of African journalists ‘to present a united front’ on black issues ‘instead of the present lack of general policy of African newspapers’ that saw ‘vulgar wrangling to the benefit of the enemy’. It reported *Abantu-Batho* (‘the official organ of the Transvaal Native Congress’) had reprinted an article from *Young Worker* of the Young Communist League.⁵⁵

The International's successor, *South African Worker*, cited *Abantu-Batho* much less, perhaps due to development of the Party’s own correspondents and black membership, but also due to growing sectarianism.⁵⁶ However the fraternal exchanges continued. In 1930, *Abantu-Batho*, under the radical management of Gumede but also the

⁵² This ‘republican turn’ may explain publication in *Abantu-Batho* of a quote from Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini: ‘We have men to-day, [republican] writers of merit, who maintain that there is no light to guide the people to a better land except it come from the hands of those who hold watch ... others who protest against every bold movement of the people as inopportune and ineffectual, against every really creative belief displayed by the defenders of the people’s rights’; reprint in *International* 24 August 1923.

⁵³ ‘Education’ and Education’, *International* 13 July 1923.

⁵⁴ ‘Can Any Good Come Out of White Men?’ *International* 27 July 1923. This reflected a growing interest in ANC politics: the daily press’ failure to report resolutions of the recent ANC conference reflected its ‘great lack of independent thinking’: ‘More Will-o-the-Wisps’, *International* 27 July 1923.

⁵⁵ ‘African Journalist Conference’, ‘Free Primary Education’, *International* 4 January, 29 February 1924.

⁵⁶ *Umsebenzi* 18 April 1930 notes how *Abantu-Batho* had been ‘unsatisfactory’ in printing many letters recommending different candidates, but not Gumede, for ANC president.

more moderate editorship of Skota, carried frequent articles from communists such as Albert Nzula and Charles Baker.⁵⁷ For the communist press to cite and critically encourage *Abantu-Batho*, its radical pedigree was clear.

To capture the thinking behind the paper, to glimpse *Abantu-Batho*'s 'journalistic imagination', we can examine its style, layout, and rhetorical flourishes, or its graphic symbol (a circle enclosing a shield backed by spears and knobkerries with two hands shaking in the centre: see Figure ...) and this is briefly discussed in The Introduction. Here we can just add that this was not a time of great press experimentation. Like the *Sunday Times* and *Cape Times*, *Abantu-Batho* retained the stolid emphasis on dreary text presented in uniformly laid out columns, with few illustrations or comic images save an occasional portrait, more often than not in advertisements. And it was in advertising and financial matters that we see a quite different side to *Abantu-Batho*.

Beds, Bicycles & 'The Bank of the Congress': Advertising & Finance

Growth of the African population in the city of Johannesburg increased potential readership, though advertising revenue continued to come from a handful of white companies; after all, running a newspaper was expensive. Allocation of space for commercial advertising was generous and undoubtedly helped keep the paper alive.

Abantu-Batho gave voice to diverse black social strata on the Rand and those catering to them. A 1929 issue advertised not only the services of American astrologers but also 'Brasso' and hair-straighteners. The ubiquitous Dr. Williams Pink Pills and Parton's Purifying Pills literally chased one's devils away. Reliance on patent medicine

⁵⁷ It also published a curiously apolitical report on a Christian conference by anti-communist socialist William Ballinger: 'Impressions of the Bantu European Conference', *Abantu-Batho* 7 August 1930.

vendors would increase, and commentators have chosen to focus on this as an indicator of *Abantu-Batho*'s decay, yet such medicines also filled the pages of other contemporary papers.⁵⁸ The phenomenon may relate to connections between African and Indian herbalists and their suppliers, as well as growing popularity for indigenous medicine and commercial rivalry with white pharmaceutical companies.⁵⁹ W.R. Pimm & Co. took out regular large advertisements in *Abantu-Batho*.⁶⁰ American Vaseline, the Marvel Pharmacy in Johannesburg, and the tonic 'Virata' were prominent; '77 Mixture' and Freed's ointments and female tonics often filled the cover page. Louis Freed, pharmacist, was a not-so-distant neighbour, on the corner of Marshall and Von Wielligh.⁶¹ Another regular advertiser, for over a decade, was A.H. Todd of Red Hill with his 'UmKemisi' medicines.⁶² Todd was hungry for herbs, asking S.M. Molema's 'brother' Sebopiwa Joshua to write on company stationery to his father for *mogau* roots.⁶³

Fashion, transport and entertainment are perennial needs of urban folk. In a 1916 issue we see images of men in suits (John Dube and Alfred Mangena endorsed Premier Tailors of Johannesburg) and bicycles for sale. Reuben Davis' African Music Studio in Anderson Street was one business that sought African customers. L. Jaffe's Grand Native Hotel on the corner of Main and Delters Streets was another. Among advertisements for beds, harmonicas, and gramophone records, a 1930 issue boasts a large notice for Jolly

⁵⁸ Roux, *Time Longer than Rope*, 358 claims it fell into the hands of patent medicine vendors 'who used it mainly for advertising ... and it finally died an ignominious death'. Patent medicines had, however, been there a long time. It also carried cures of alcoholism, influenced by the temperance-minded Skota.

⁵⁹ As suggested in a different context by K. Flint, *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820-1948* (Scottsville: UKZN Press, 2008), 172-3, 151, 148-9: African healers and *muthi* merchants had developed loose ties with the Natal Congress by the 1920s.

⁶⁰ C. Burns, 'The Letters of Louisa Mvemve', in K. Barber (ed.) *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 78-112, 94.

⁶¹ See *Abantu-Batho* 23 July 1931.

⁶² B. Willan (email 4 August 2011) notes Plaatje's son F.Y. St. Leger Plaatje worked for Todd (who also advertised in *Ilanga*) in the mid-1920s and may have liaised with *Abantu-Batho* on advertising.

⁶³ S.J. Molema to Chief Silas Molema 25 September 1922 in Molema-Plaatje Papers Wits: my thanks to Sekepe Matjila for translating this in person at short notice, and Jane Starfield for clarification.

Jack Barnard's Bookshop that hawked not just 'School Books' and titles on the 'American Negro World' but also 'Fortune Telling Books'.⁶⁴ Revenue also would have accrued from such sources as the Polela Institute for boys and girls in Bulwer, and pharmaceutical remedies from Orlando.⁶⁵ All was not crass commerce. A more serious appeal to readers in 1931 was to join the African Prohibition Umbrella, possibly an initiative of Skota, long involved in temperance; the address was none other than that of *Abantu-Batho*: 75a Auret Street, Jeppe. And Plaatje's *Diphosho Posho: Comedy of Errors* was advertised for 2/6 from the author.⁶⁶

Behind advertisers were financiers. The African Trading Company Ltd. in 1917 had nominal capital of £5,000 and may have had ties with the paper; perhaps the same firm that in 1922 advertised in *Umteteli* as (Inkatha) African Trading Company Ltd, involving J.T. Gumede and S.S. Dambuza, Natal, and Boyce and 'T.D.M. Skota Esq.,' Kimberley. In September 1914, the 'Swazi' Hotel, Ermelo Location, and the 'Mtunywa' Company, floated by prominent Eastern Cape Africans based in Butterworth and Idutywa, such as Samuel Ntisama and Enoch Mamba, shared the front page with central Johannesburg commercial denizens such as The Colonial Banking and Trust Company of Africa Ltd.⁶⁷ Adverts of the latter bank featured an image of its corner building and a list of shareholders or investors: Elka Cele, Revs. J.M.P. Lebala, and M.M. Mokone, and G.B. Mvenyana. The English linguist, Alice Werner, in touch with Dube and Plaatje, wrote to Harriette Colenso that Plaatje had told her that Dube had

⁶⁴ Advertisements in *Abantu-Batho* 20 January 1916, 20 November 1930.

⁶⁵ *Abantu-Batho* 20 January 1916, copy in Rhodes House Library, Oxford University, Ms. Afr. S.633; *Abantu-Batho* 14 August 1930, 9 July 1931.

⁶⁶ 'Liquor is Peril', *Abantu-Batho* 5 March, 2 April 1931; *Abantu-Batho* 14 August 1930, 9 July 1931.

⁶⁷ 'Masizake! Lituba! Eli! African Trading Coy. Ltd.' Supplement, *Abantu-Batho* 20 December 1917, in National Archives of South Africa, Pretoria (NASA), Dept. of Justice files (JUS) 3/527/17; *Umteteli* February 1922; T.D.M.S. [Skota] 'Umhlangano we Nkata', *Umteteli* 15 April 1922; *Abantu-Batho* 18 September 1914, Swaziland National Archives (SwNA), Resident Commissioner series (RCS), 754/1914.

gone into business with a Mr Schlesinger (I think) at Jo'burg. Now I see in 'Abantu-Batho' (June 7) the advertisement of a 'Colonial Banking and Trust Co. of Africa Ltd' to which are attached the names of Seme, Mangena, 4 other natives ... W. Otis Bullock and I. W. Schlesinger. I should like to know if you think this is an honest concern ... or who ... the two abelungu are. The 4 natives were Elka Cele, ... Rev J.M.P Lebala, G.B. Mvenyana and Rev. M.M. Mokone.⁶⁸ Mangena and Seme, by themselves, I fear, would not inspire me with any great confidence – but it all depends on who the rest are'.⁶⁹

Insurance (and later film and radio) financier, the American-born Isidore William Schlesinger had in 1910 established the company on the ruins of the Robinson South African Bank, providing loans to small business, including Africans, which explains the Seme/Dube connection. Centrally located on the corner of Market and Simmonds Streets, it seems likely this major Jewish company would not have incorporated Abantu-Batho Ltd. but may have joined a joint-stock company and certainly them given small loans.⁷⁰

The Company was in fact 'the Bank of the Congress' by the TNC Constitution.⁷¹ In a 1916 concert advertisement, the Company is given as Abantu-Batho Ltd's banker, and yet the list of people listed there as investors or shareholders is quite different from the above-mentioned *Abantu-Batho* shareholders list. The last known reference to the company in *Abantu-Batho* is in 1923. Here one change from 1920 is the disappearance of Seme, Dube, and Mangena from the list and the addition of the Rev. Nojekwa to join Rev. Lebala. By then, *Umteteli* had denounced *Abantu-Batho* as radicals, so Dube and Seme may have insisted on removal of their names. The text details monies, perhaps indicating an account within the Bank involving *Abantu-Batho*.⁷² The Company also

⁶⁸ Cele was a SANNC Executive member, assistant compound manager at Robinson Deep Mine, and related to John Dube by marriage: H. Hughes, *First President* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2011), 183, Limb, *ANC's Early Years*, 134 and obituary, *Ilanga lase Natal* 17 August 1923. Mangena Mokone (d. 1936) was active in the AME Church after earlier founding the Ethiopian Church. I have not traced the others.

⁶⁹ A. Werner to H. Colenso 24 August 1917, Colenso Papers, National Archives Pietermaritzburg, Box 63. My thanks to Brian Willan for this reference and pointing me to Schlesinger.

⁷⁰ W.J. de Kock and D.W. Kruger (eds.) *Dictionary of South African Biography* v. 2 (Cape Town: HSRC, 1972), 631-2. Schlesinger's holdings included papers, the Zebediela citrus estate, *African Mirror* newsreels, African Theatres, and African Film Productions. There are many such advertisements from 1914 to 1923.

⁷¹ Transvaal Native Congress. Constitution (1919), §.17, 8, State Archives, Pretoria, NTS 7204 17/326.

⁷² 'Yilona kupela labantu Abansundu', *Abantu-Batho* 14 June 1923.

advertised in *Imvo* and *Ilanga*, and specialised in small loans to Africans so too much should not be made of any relationship, but the fact remains it is named as ‘the Bank of the Congress’ and, interestingly, an *Abantu-Batho* editor, Champion, later accepted a job from Schlesinger as cashier of the Bank’s Native Department.⁷³

All these political, social and economic aspects of black life come together in our final, but important theme, the matrix of African clubs and *Abantu-Batho*.

African Associational Life in Central Jo’burg: The African Club & Abantu-Batho

Johannesburg, centre of South African urbanisation, provided a ready and growing audience for *Abantu-Batho*, one less wedded to local issues. By 1912, the population was 129,601 whites and 104,974 Africans.⁷⁴ Most writers view Africans in the context of central Johannesburg at this time as either labourers or dispersing out to the locations. Yet as Bonner and La Hausse show, something was stirring. Radical politics was being born amid a Rand ‘cosmopolitanism life’ (that included a Zulu Institute, formed in 1917) which helped Zulu intellectuals combine ethnic patriotism with racial nationalism into a flexible ideological weapon in this radicalism.⁷⁵ Much more was at work, however, for many different peoples, all carting their own identities and each wanting their say, were arriving on the Rand and forging a vortex of hybridity. To pull these all peoples and cultures together under one African banner would be no mean feat. But on the edges of

⁷³ Advert, *Ilanga* 7 July 1922; A.W.G. Champion, *The Views of Mahlathi: Writings of A.W.G. Champion, a Black South African*. M.W. Swanson ed. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1982), 83.

⁷⁴ *Official South African Municipal Year Book* (Cape Town: Juta, 1913), 213.

⁷⁵ P. Bonner, ‘The Transvaal Native Congress 1917-20: The Radicalization of the Black Petty Bourgeoisie on the Rand’, in S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds.) *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (London: Longman, 1982), 270-313; P. La Hausse, ‘“Death is Not the End”: Zulu Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Zulu Cultural Revival’ in B. Carton, J. Laband and J. Sithole (eds.) *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 256-72.

the Central Business District there is evidence that Africans worked and partied, formed clubs and produced an influential newspaper. Into the cloistered world of the white press, of *The Star* (founded 1887) and *The Rand Daily Mail* (1902), dominated by mining houses⁷⁶ with its corresponding Rand Club, came a new multi-lingual African newspaper with ‘multiple imagined identities’,⁷⁷ nationalisms and cultures—and its particular Club.

Another base of *Abantu-Batho* was a voluntary association, The African Club,⁷⁸ founded in Johannesburg in 1915 as a ‘lively centre for political and social meetings’. It was apparently under the aegis of Congress and the inspiration was probably Seme, who had enjoyed club life in Oxford.⁷⁹ In Oxford, he and his friend Alain Locke had formed the African Union Society and joined the Cosmopolitan Club. The Society was open to ‘all men of Africa or Negro extraction ... interested in the general welfare of the Race both in Africa or other parts of the worlds’. The Cosmopolitan Club and its journal, *The Oxford Cosmopolitan*, aimed to foster understanding between nationalities at Oxford and remove racial prejudice, and articulated a degree of ‘anti-imperialist cultural criticism’.⁸⁰ Homegrown influences also may have influenced Seme. I have not been able to establish any firm connection, but in 1912 there was a Swaziland Native Club in Bremersdorp (Manzini) which may have paralleled or inspired the African Club.⁸¹ Similarly, as La

⁷⁶ B. Kennedy, *A Tale of Two Mining Cities: Johannesburg and Broken Hill, 1885-1925* (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1984), 99-100.

⁷⁷ Paraphrasing Su Lewis, ‘Echoes of Cosmopolitanism: Colonial Penang’s “Indigenous” English Press’ in C. Kaul (ed.) *Media and the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 233-49, 234.

⁷⁸ Not be confused with two clubs of the same name founded in 1913, a luncheon club in Pietermaritzburg, which hosted Rider Haggard (‘The African Club’, *Rhodesia Herald* 9 October 1913), the other in Cape Town, instigated by the Aborigines Protection Society and composed largely of white liberals (‘Natives and the Land’, *Bulawayo Chronicle* 25 December 1913).

⁷⁹ Benson, *African Patriots*, 58. From the late 1910s, sometimes known as The Bantu Club. See Saunders, ‘Seme’, 203 on his proclivity for clubs at Oxford. Ethelreda Lewis mentions a Native Club in her historical fiction *Wild Deer* (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1984), 161, 190, 210, but this could refer just as much to the Workers’ Club of the ICU (with which she had ties) or the Bantu Men’s Social Club.

⁸⁰ Harris and Molesworth, *Alain Locke*, 71-72, 79, 110.

⁸¹ ‘Iso lase Swazini’, *Ilanga* 15 March, 26 April, 8 November 1912: I thank Grant Christison for sharing a translation; but these reports are very brief and connections between paragraphs unclear.

Hausse shows, Zulu associations such as the Zulu Institute (founded 1917) and later the Zulu National Association (1919) soon after appeared on the Rand.⁸² African associational life⁸³ had organic ties with the press at this time and this little-studied⁸⁴ club may serve as one source for *Abantu-Batho* staff and news, and organising events.⁸⁵

By 1912 there were many white associations in South African cities: from business to sporting to ‘gentlemen’s’ clubs. Early clubs included Cape Town’s Concordia Club, Africa Clubhouse⁸⁶ (or Society House in the Heerengraacht), City Club and Owl Club, and in the north the Union Club, Pretoria Club, Rand Club, New Club, Irish Club, the Women’s Reform Club, and the Native Affairs Society of the Transvaal, as well as the South African Club.⁸⁷ By the time *Abantu-Batho* folded, there was even a Bantu Studies Club,⁸⁸ associated with the essentially white journal *Bantu Studies* established in 1921 in the rush for white-led moderate liberal institutions that also saw the establishment of *Umteteli wa Bantu*, the Joint Councils, and Johannesburg Rotary Club.⁸⁹ But, we might ask, what of ‘Bantu Studies’ by Bantu before *Bantu Studies*? There was, broadly speaking, such a thing, and it was based on the Rand in the African Club.

It is unclear if at first different social classes mixed there or whether it was simply an attempt, possibly by Seme, to recreate Oxonian gentlemanly niceties or ‘consolidate

⁸² La Hausse, “‘Death is Not the End’”, 264, 266.

⁸³ See Clark, *British Clubs* on the importance of such clubs in general and in Britain in particular.

⁸⁴ Scholars have neglected the history of African clubs in part due to paucity of sources such as *Abantu-Batho*. David Coplan discusses clubs in Kimberly but misses the African Club and passes on to white-controlled clubs at the end of the decade: *In Township Tonight! South Africa’s Black City Music & Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 138.

⁸⁵ A distant echo was formation in May 2006 of the Native Club under the intellectual patronage of Thabo Mbeki (see S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Tracking the Historical Roots of Post-Apartheid Citizenship Problems: The Native Club, Restless Natives, Panicking Settlers and the Politics of Nativism in South Africa* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2007) but historians have not hitherto noticed the connection.

⁸⁶ See *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 15 November 1800 (front page notice on horses).

⁸⁷ See for example A.I. Little, *History of the City Club, Cape Town, 1878-1938* (Cape Town: Cape Times, 1938), L. Delatolla, *The Pretoria Club, 1885-1985* (Pretoria: Pretoria Club, 1985); F. Bell, *The South African Native Problem* (Johannesburg: CNA, 1910).

⁸⁸ A.B. Xuma, *Reconstituting the Union of South Africa* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1933)

⁸⁹ J. Gray, *The History of the Johannesburg Rotary Club, 1921-42* (Johannesburg: The Club, 1942).

the intelligentsia' and work as a 'breeding ground' for cultural authority and identity, as in more literary clubs elsewhere.⁹⁰ Unlike the above-mentioned white clubs, the African Club does not seem to have functioned purely as a 'gentleman's club'. Possibly, the imposing presence of the Rand Club in Loveday Street only two blocks away from the African Club offered salutary lessons. The generally conservative, all-white members included Colonel Stallard who defended the elite premises rifle in hand during the 1913 general strike when security forces massacred civilians in guise of protecting the Club.⁹¹ Such newsworthiness may have made an impression on Seme who in 1911 had opened an office on the corner of Anderson and Joubert Streets.⁹²

The African Club was located first at 57 Albert St. Johannesburg,⁹³ and also held social functions at 134 Anderson Street,⁹⁴ where it was later based. In 1914 *Abantu-Batho* offices were on the corner of Anderson and Russik. Brief reports in *Ilanga* in 1916 show Letanka and J. T. Gumede prominent in the Club; one alerts readers to a forthcoming event at the Club in Albert Street, near the Wesley Church; a fairly nice location where young men reside, eat nice meals, cook, enjoy games/sports.⁹⁵ A few months later, *Ilanga* noted that the African Club was 'very commendable indeed' and noted the role in the club of Letanka.⁹⁶ The Club became wider known. In 1917, H. M. Mnyandu wrote to *Ilanga*

⁹⁰ K. Wolff, *Culture Club: The Curious History of the Boston Athenaeum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 150-1.

⁹¹ R. de Villiers and S. Brooke-Norris, *The Story of the Rand Club* (Johannesburg: The Club, 1976), 32, 85-93. But not entirely conservative: S.P. Bunting, later a communist, joined in 1902 but resigned after the 1913 massacre: *The Rand Club 1887-1957* (The Club, 1957), 87, 98 and A. Drew, *Between Empire and Revolution: A Life of Sidney Bunting, 1873-1936* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2007), 60, 83-4.

⁹² 'Izindatshana ngezinto naBantu', *Ilanga* 13 January 1911. See also Seme's letterhead, in his letter to Alaine Locke 24 January 1921, in Locke Papers, Howard University Library, 164-84/36.

⁹³ A photograph of the Club appeared in the *Abantu-Batho Almanac* (see 'Ialmanaka ka Bantu Batho', *Ilanga lase Natal* 1 February 1918) but this book has totally disappeared.

⁹⁴ Residential houses were still found here at the time: see G.A. Leyds, *A History of Johannesburg: The Early Years* (Cape Town: Nasionale Bokehandel Beperk, 1964), 174

⁹⁵ 'Ezase Jozi', *Ilanga* 1 September 1916, 1 December 1916. My thanks to Sifiso Ndlovu for translation.

⁹⁶ 'African Club', *Ilanga* 1 December 1916.

from Johannesburg calling for unity instead of bickering between sects. ‘Is it not inspiring if we see that Ohlange College exists because of commendable efforts by black people? Is it not inspiring if we are conscious of the existence of the ‘African Club?’ Does not this prove a point to those nations/racial groups which we do not get along with?’⁹⁷

Clubs tended to affiliate with like-minded bodies.⁹⁸ Perhaps the Swaziland Native Club was affiliated to the African Club. There *was* a close association of the Debating Union and African Club. A June 1917 report on ‘The Bantu Social and Debating Union, African Club’ at 57 Albert Street, resolved that ‘We Should Have an Universal League’. S.R. Mgale read the motion: ‘Mr Chairman and Gentlemen, on the universe, God etc.; no two things alike in the universe. Different peoples, nations, languages; wrong to have a universal language such as Esperanto but a universal language is impossible, therefore we need to strive to understand all peoples and tongues’.⁹⁹

In these dusty streets Africans produced the newspaper and held political, intellectual and social gatherings. In 1917, police spies recorded the addresses of members of the Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA): Simon Motselanuka and J. Seko gave their address as the African Club; perhaps renting cheap rooms.¹⁰⁰ There is evidence of prominent guests, including ‘Mbelle, clerk to native solicitor Seme and the editor of *Abantu-Batho*’ and lawyer G. D. Montsioa, an ANC funder.¹⁰¹ Hospitality to both proletarian and professional suggests wide social interest in the Club and its facilities.

⁹⁷ ‘Iseluleko Sabantsundu’, [Advice for Africans] *Ilanga* 16 November 1917, translation by Sifiso Ndlovu.

⁹⁸ See for example W.E. Ranby, *The City Club, Cape Town* (Cape Town: The Club, 1955), 15 ff.

⁹⁹ ‘The Bantu Social and Debating Union, African Club ...’, *Ilanga* 15 June 1917.

¹⁰⁰ List of IWA members compiled by Detective King, 12 December 1917, JUS 3/527/17. Others resided not far away: in Loveday, Kruis, Marshall, Commissioner, Bree, Market and Sauer Streets; a few gave their addresses care of post office boxes or mine compounds.

¹⁰¹ Native Constable W. Jali, ‘Report of an International Socialistic Meeting in Johannesburg, JUS 3/527/17; *Abantu-Batho* 1 January 1920, in NASA, Government Native Labour Bureau (GNLB), 320/3011972.

Like *Abantu-Batho*, the Club seems to have increased in radicalism through the 1910s, though it is unclear who was influential within it. With roots in Congress, it probably reflected ANC trends, especially in the Transvaal, but not exclusively so as in 1916, Natal Congress leader J. T. Gumede, a future owner of *Abantu-Batho*, was prominent in the Club.¹⁰² In 1919, TNC leader Letanka was club chairman (see below).

In 1918, the Club was used for meetings in solidarity with the ‘bucket’ strikers. On 18 June, it hosted a gathering from 5 p.m. to 7.45 p.m. by Letanka, Mvabaza, Richard Msimang, Horatio Bud-Mbelle, Ferdinand Mautu and William Mhlong to discuss a pamphlet, the ostensible purpose of which, Mvabaza explained, was to mobilise for a meeting at Ebenezer Hall to call for release of the jailed workers, but ‘the real business though is to get the people together in order to arrange a general strike’. Msimang pointed out the difficulty of organising a general strike in a city where Africans were ‘employed in diverse capacities’, but they agreed to form a committee comprising Msimang, Tinker and Mangena, with Seme as legal adviser, though there is no evidence he colluded.¹⁰³ The Club was also the venue of a report on these events by Congress activists.¹⁰⁴ This hosting of radical events may explain why, when the bucket strikers and their *Abantu-Batho* supporters appeared in Court, an African who went state witness, then retracted his testimony, claimed ‘he was never kept out of the way of the police at the ‘Abantu Batho’ office’ and neither was he at the African Club.¹⁰⁵ Protest meetings also took place elsewhere: at the African Methodist Episcopal Church on the corner of Anderson and

¹⁰² ‘Isaziso’, carried in *Ilanga lase Natal* from 13 October to 3 November 1916; ‘Africans Club’ (in Sesotho), supplement to *Abantu-Batho* 20 December 1917, JUS 3/527/17, which relates the event to *Abantu-Batho*, and in the same issue, ‘A GRAND Social Club’, which refers to a Club group photograph.

¹⁰³ ‘Translation of Pamphlet’, JUS 3/527/17, p. 112 attached to Macfie, Johannesburg Magistrate to Secretary of Justice, 21 June 1918, which details discussions at the Club. Letanka’s only recorded comments were concern at paying for the leaflets; he suggested those attending contribute 2d. each.

¹⁰⁴ R.W. Msimang evidence to Moffat Commission in Bonner, ‘Transvaal Congress’, 259.

¹⁰⁵ ‘No Socialism for Natives: The Case of ‘Luke Massina His Mark’, *International* 26 July 1918.

Philip Streets, Jeppes, in Market Square, at St. Mary's Hall in Polly Street, the Rev. Mauvana's Church in Van Beek Street, Doornfontein, the American Mission in Church Street, the African Congregational Church, Lower Rose, Doornfontein, New Market, and Newtown Ebenezer Hall.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the African Club was at times at the hub of organising, and playing host to, key events of the 1918 protests.

After his refusal to support the strikes that had been supported by the TNC and *Abantu-Batho*, Saul Msane was obliged to resign from the African Club. By 1919, Letanka was manager of the Club,¹⁰⁷ suggesting close links to or ownership by the TNC or *Abantu-Batho*, or both. Such ties are suggested by a 1917 court case when the Club was plaintiff to an improperly served summons served on an employee who allegedly stole £37 10s. The summons was issued by Letanka as chairman of the Club and signed by a Mr. Phooko on behalf of C. S. Mabaso & Co. trading as the Native General Agency; Mabaso simultaneously was secretary of Abantu-Batho Ltd.¹⁰⁸

The anti-radical onslaught after the strikes saw formation by liberals and missionaries of the Gamma Sigma Club in 1919,¹⁰⁹ the Abantu Social Club in Durban¹¹⁰ and, most significantly, the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg in 1921,¹¹¹ which had a parallel effect on the African Club to that of *Umteteli* on *Abantu-Batho*. Ray Phillips in 1919 proposed establishing an 'Educated Boys Club' 'for the simple reason that of the educated boys here in Johannesburg are outside the church'. He would invite

¹⁰⁶ See for example 'The Workers' Indaba' translated from *Abantu-Batho*, n.d. [ca 1918] in *JUS* 3/527/17—some of these meetings were attended by white clergy such as Goodwin, Howard and Bridgman.

¹⁰⁷ *New Dictionary of South African Biography* v. 1 (Pretoria: HSRC, 1999), 138.

¹⁰⁸ 'Kopanye v. African Club' in *South African Law Reports. Supreme Court. Transvaal Provincial Division* 1917 (Cape Town: Juta, 1918) 417-9 (also in *South African Law Journal* 35 1918, 119).

¹⁰⁹ A.W.G. Champion, 'The Gamma Sigma Club', *Ilanga* 16 April 1920, stating it was nine months old, and that among its attendees were Phillips and (TNC radicals) Horatio Bud-Mbelle and B. G. Phooko; Ray E. Phillips, 'Introducing Abundant Life', *Missionary Herald* 117 1921, 341-4, 344

¹¹⁰ 'The Abantu Social Club Durban', *Ilanga* 28 January 1921, headed by William Bhulose and J. Macebo.

¹¹¹ See 'Native Club', *Umteteli wa Bantu* 5 March 1921, by which time £5,000 had been raised for a building, the Chamber of Mines donating £3,000, the American Board Mission £2,000.

‘prominent European officials’ to address them and thereby ‘do something to alleviate the spirit of distrust and unrest prevailing among the natives’. The year before, Bridgman had attended a mass meeting that called for a strike,¹¹² and heard attacks on whites. Growth of the IWA and ‘the tendency of many natives to scoff at the missionary, the church and even Christianity itself’ led him to seek reasons for the lack of involvement of mission-educated Rand Africans in churches. He thought immediately of the African Club associated with *Abantu-Batho*: ‘it makes one stop and think ... that our young radicals in Johannesburg have established the ‘African Club’ with its own club-house’.¹¹³ The solution he and Phillips quickly embarked on was white-owned and led welfare services and their own ‘safe’ club—these God-fearing Americans were well aware of the detrimental effect on African-owned establishments such as bioscopes, African Club and *Abantu-Batho*, but capitalism had to be saved; and Africans from themselves.

We gain a vivid glimpse of this early politico-social club and confirmation of its close Congress connections from Skota, who had no doubt the Bantu Men’s Social Centre (BMSC) was ‘established to destroy African Club where African people always met, Anderson and Delters Streets – one storey building with verandah – office, Dining Hall, committee meeting room. Congress met there daily and had paid secretary. Club started 1915 and ended around 1930 after BMSC established. Unfortunately never bought property. So also Abantu-Batho destroyed by Ch. of Mines people’.¹¹⁴

At first, the Club continued to operate. In 1920, there was a call for ladies and gentlemen to attend a function for Congress on Saturday 4 December at the Club.¹¹⁵ By

¹¹² *Abantu-Batho* 27 June 1918 reported him as an ‘interested listener’.

¹¹³ R. Phillips to American Board Mission (ABM) 11 May 1919, in Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Harvard University, reel 203, 3; F. Bridgman, Annual Report, Transvaal, June 1918, 11, ABM reel 203, 11-12.

¹¹⁴ Skota to Mary Benson, interview ca. 1962, in Benson Papers, SOAS, Ms. 348942/1.

¹¹⁵ ‘Imihla Nezolo’, *Abantu-Batho* 2 December 1920.

1923, it had relocated to 134 Anderson Street (which Skota would have recalled, as he was away in Kimberley in its early years). The Rev. Abraham Zephania Twala, visiting Johannesburg from Rhodesia to raise funds for his Waterfall Farm Native Manual and Industrial School stayed in its rooms; most interestingly, by then it was *Umteteli wa Bantu*, not *Abantu-Batho*, coordinating matters, suggesting new management.¹¹⁶

It is possible the Club's earlier radical politics disappeared for a time or went behind closed doors, but management later seems to have returned to radical hands. Eddie Roux notes that alleged attendance at an African club in 1928 was one cause for S. P. Bunting's 1931 expulsion from the Communist Party. It survived for a few more years, at times still at the centre of radical politics. When Gumede returned from the Soviet Union, his arrival in Johannesburg on 25 February 1928 was greeted by a large procession of African communists and ANC activists who, with a brass band 'led Gumede in a taxi from the Union grounds en route to the African Club, where Gumede addressed the gathering 'from a window on the first floor'.¹¹⁷ In late 1928 it served as lodgings for both Gumede and moderate Zulu writer Petros Lamula; in the same year Letanka, Secretary for the ANC Council of Chiefs, gave the Club's location as his address.¹¹⁸ The following year David Hlakudi of the African Club, Johannesburg wrote a

¹¹⁶ 'Manual and Industrial Training' and Abraham Z. Twala, 'Ngesi Kolo sase Waterfall-Farm' *Umteteli wa Bantu* 24 March 1923. Twala, a South African, was a moderate, closer to J. T. Jabavu than Congress and accepting partial segregation. He was prominent in the Rhodesian Bantu Voters' Union, as was Martha Ngano and Ernest Dube, who reported the Union's formation in *Abantu-Batho*: see Part II, and T. Ranger, *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia* (London: Heinemann, 1970), 59, 90-118.

¹¹⁷ E. Roux, *S.P. Bunting, a Political Biography* (Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1993), 133. In a 1928 letter Bunting claims the charge was false: A. Drew (ed), *South Africa's Radical Tradition: 1907-50* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1996), 119: perhaps conflating the Bantu Men's Social Centre though in sectarian times, attendance at either spelt trouble; R. van Diemel, *In search of 'Freedom, Fair Play and Justice': Josiah Tshangana Gumede, 1867-1947: A Biography* (Belhar: The author, 2001), 123.

¹¹⁸ La Hausse, *Restless Identities*, 137; Letanka, Secretary for ANC Council of Chiefs to Secretary Governor General: 4 October 1928, NASA, Governor General (GG) 1184 50/1313).

stinging article in *Abantu-Batho* on Kadalie and his ‘Good Boys’,¹¹⁹ whilst in 1930 the paper mentioned the African Club’s J. Mareme Modiselle as one of its correspondents.¹²⁰

By 1929-30, the two remaining legal African clubs in Johannesburg, one moderate, the other radical, were on their last gasp. Yet the need for such clubs was clear from 1929 evidence before a Parliamentary committee. City Council officials Graham Ballenden and E. O. Leake noted lack of ‘premises for use or occupation as a club, dance hall or other place of entertainment or meeting for Natives’. Ballenden stated ‘We have two native clubs. One—the African Club—is almost defunct, and the other is run by missionaries and other people interested in native welfare, and is under very strict control. We have no purely native clubs because the native never has the means. He may start a club to-day but in twelve months time it is defunct’.¹²¹ Soon after, it appears the African Club—like its newspaper ally—lapsed into obscurity.

Questions remain about the Club. To what extent social activities and interaction between men and women took place is unclear, and we know little of membership size or formality. But there was music and performance; perhaps the great poetess Nontsizi performed. A March 1920 event protested the shooting of innocent victims by police in Johannesburg and a funeral procession was attended by her; a gathering at the African Club concluded with ‘God Bless iCongress!’¹²²

¹¹⁹ D.R. Hlakudi, ‘Bo Good Boys le di Socialists’, *Abantu-Batho* 26 January 1929.

¹²⁰ *Abantu-Batho* 4 September 1930.

¹²¹ *First Report of the Select Committee on Native Affairs* (SC-31), 8-10, evidence of G. Ballenden, 4 March, 1929. Benson, *African Patriots*, 58 also notes its decline by then. Graham Ballenden was Manager, Johannesburg City Council Municipal Native Affairs Department from 1927 to 1944.

¹²² I take Jeff Opland’s point (email 7 June 2011) it is unlikely they performed in urban places, as *izibongo* is not recital but ritual celebration. Yet Nontsizi performed at concerts at City Deep Hall and with a brass band at the African Club, with Mabaso in charge (‘Ezase Goli’ *Ilanga* 2 April 1920, ‘Umngewabo omkula eGoli’ *Ilanga* 12 March 1920) and in 1922 (*Imvo* 20 May 1922, *Umteteli* 3, 24 June, 12 August 1922). A gathering in July with Jabavu, Letanka, and Mabaso present heard a choir sing *Nkozi Sikelel’ iAfrika* and Nontsizi may have performed: ‘Amazwi amahle’, *Imvo* 1 August 1922 (taken from *Abantu-Batho*).

Around this time various African debating unions were forming on the Rand, in which the editors took an interest.¹²³ There were already such societies at Lovedale and Healdtown with circumscribed but socially relevant debates that some *Abantu-Batho* staff (Thema, Bud-M'belle, Herbert Msane and Mabaso) probably imbibed.¹²⁴ The Bantu Debating Union appeared in 1913 or 1914.¹²⁵ In 1913, a Debating Society (probably the same body) met with Mabaso and Mangena and was tasked with raising money to assist Plaatje, stranded in England. 'The Society will begin raising the money during Easter Holidays. They will sing in Kroonstad, Bloemfontein, Kimberley, Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom. We hope that the concerts will be well attended'.¹²⁶ Young activists such as Benjamin Phooko, Horatio Bud-M'belle, Selby Msimang and Bennett Ncwana attended a Union meeting in Johannesburg in December 1914.¹²⁷

Thema came to the Rand around this time and became SANNC Acting Secretary General in 1915 and correspondent or sub-editor of *Abantu-Batho*. One way he connected with the paper was by attending the African Club or the Bantu Debating Union he joined. He addressed the Union and his close interest in history may in part have been a response to the call at the Lovedale Literary Society jubilee that 'South Africa is waiting for her

¹²³ *Ilanga lase Natal* 18 December 1914, reprinted from *Izwe le Kiti* no date (concerning the involvement among others of Selby Msimang, Bennett Ncwana, and H. B. Phooko; 'Isimemo se "Langa lase Natal"' *Tsala ea Batho* 20 March 1915, reprinted from *Abantu-Batho*, no date.

¹²⁴ S.M. Molema, *Healdtown 1855-1955: A Scrap of History* (Mafeking, 1955), 10; I. Hofmeyr, 'Reading Debating/Debating Reading: The Case of the Lovedale Literary Society, or Why Mandela Quotes Shakespeare'. In K. Barber (ed.) *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006: 258-77, 263, 271.

¹²⁵ Possibly the same as the Johannesburg African Debating Union, one founder of which was Congress activist Z.P. Ramailane, a clerk for R.W. Msimang: Skota, *African Who's Who*, 3rd ed., 26.

¹²⁶ 'Isimemo se Langa lase Natal', *Tsala* 20 March 1913 from *Abantu-Batho*, translated Sarah Mkhonza.

¹²⁷ 'Ezixoxa Ngabantu', *Ilanga* 18 December 1914, reprinted from *Izwe la Kiti*.

Bantu historian'.¹²⁸ The Union was an independent African initiative that 'escaped the tight missionary control' and by 1917 attracted most TNC leaders.¹²⁹

On 15 May 1918 *Abantu-Batho* reported a 'big debate' at the Union and insisted it had now made 'its existence felt' (see Part II). 'Members are young, energetic and enthusiastic, and there is no doubt that their determination is to make a great success of the Society'. Like the African Club, the Bantu Debating Union aspired to have a 'Library for the benefit of the public'. Probably closely linked to the Club and the paper, and foreshadowing the Bantu Men's Social Centre (or even the Congress Youth League of the 1940s), the youth of the Union were characterised by *Abantu-Batho* and others as the 'Young Unionists' who 'are optimistic and are looking forward to the day when the Bantu Nation shall boast of men of letters. Indeed the principle aim of their Society is to encourage the cultivation by its members of literary taste'.¹³⁰

Neither do we know much about how the African Club and Debating Union may have enhanced (male) friendship, though at other times and places the combination of nationalism (or socialism or feminism) and civic association often engendered camaraderie or rivalry.¹³¹ Whilst the Club may have had—echoing Seme's aim to transcend 'the daemon of tribalism'—more a political than cultural mission, working together on the paper and relaxing together in the Club may have intensified emotions such as friendship (as between the longest-serving staff, Letanka and Mabaso) or

¹²⁸ S. Ndlovu, "'He Did What Any Other Person in his Position Would Have Done to Fight the Forces of Invasion and Disruption": Africans, the Land and Contending Images of King Dingane ('The Patriot') in the 20th Century, 1916- 50s', *South African Historical Journal* 38 1998, 99-143, 121: 'Natives & the Literary Endeavour' *Ilanga* 26 October 1917, possibly by D. Jabavu: *Christian Express* 1 August 1917.

¹²⁹ P. Rich, *State Power and Black Politics in South Africa, 1912-1951* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 21; R. Thema, 'From Cattle-Herding to the Editor's Chair', unpublished ms. Ms. 320895. (1935-), SOAS, 88, 70.

¹³⁰ 'The Bantu Debating Union', *Abantu-Batho* 16 May 1918, in GNLB v. 90 144/13 D205.

¹³¹ M. Brodie and B. Caine, 'Class, Sex and Friendship: The Long Nineteenth Century', in B. Caine (ed.) *Friendship: A History* (London: Equinox, 2009), 223-78, 225.

irritation (in the cases of Saul Msane, Thema and Nontsizi, who seem to have been repelled by the politics or personality of what Rich calls the *Abantu-Batho* faction.¹³²

The Club also helped raise funds. *Abantu-Batho* hosted a major fund raising concert in 1915 with local musicians and performers at the Ebenezer Hall in Main Street, venue of many a Congress function.¹³³ The Abantu Debating Union was still going in 1922, when police reported it held a meeting to discuss the Urban Areas Bill and also ponder polygamy, evoking ‘considerable controversy’ and, before closing, to resolve to deliberate at their next sitting ‘whether the men on strike were justified or not’.¹³⁴

There were some other clubs, of which we know little. The Y. M. and Y. W. (Young Men and Young Women) Political Society was chaired by Silas Mokwena in Kareefontein in the Waterberg.¹³⁵ In Durban, the Native Affairs Reform Association, which hosted the Ghanaian-born African American moderate J. E. K. Aggrey on his great anti-radical tour of 1921, ‘subsidised the Abantu Social Club, an elitist institution ‘where country members visiting town can rest and obtain their meals and see the latest papers’.¹³⁶ Back on the Rand, Aggrey spoke at none other than the African Club, suggesting either it was used not only by radicals or that his visit coincided with what Thema characterises as a temporary sojourn of *Abantu-Batho* editors into the BMSC.¹³⁷

In the period 1914-19 it was the African Club, working hand-in-hand with *Abantu-Batho*, which seems to have had the greatest impact of these African-controlled

¹³² P. Rich, ‘The Origins of Apartheid Ideology: The Case of Ernest Stubbs and Transvaal Native Administration, c.1902-1932’, *African Affairs* 79, 315 1980, 171-194, 187.

¹³³ Police files report dozens such meetings. Prince Malunge attended the SANNC conference there when ‘the hall was packed to suffocation’: ‘South African Native Congress’, *Ilanga* 28 March 1913; see poster attached to Cleopas Kunene to Director of Native Labour (DNL) 4 June 1915, GNLB 90 144/13 D.205, revealing the *Abantu-Batho* office not only operated as a newsagent but also combined printing, publishing and bookselling. It published several pamphlets. See Chapter 9 for the musical side of the paper.

¹³⁴ Report of CID Inspector Transvaal 19 April 1922, in GNLB 101/677/13/160, file 1058/3742, C. 259/20.

¹³⁵ ‘The Y.M. and Y.W. Political Society’, *Abantu-Batho* 2 December 1920.

¹³⁶ Hughes, *First President*, 215.

¹³⁷ Thema, ‘From Cattle-Herding to the Editor’s Chair’, 60.

associations on the Rand, but by the early 1920s it was being displaced by the essentially white-sponsored Bantu Men's Social Club.

Synthesis

Little known in any detail today, *Abantu-Bantu* in its day was a vibrant centre of political and intellectual ferment, and an integral part of emergent black urban social life and culture on the Rand. Unlikely as it seems, it is now clear that this plucky, if at times intolerant, African newspaper helped stimulate a new African associational life based on the African Club in the inhospitable environment of central Johannesburg, one that would be short-lived in its radicalism and its central location.

At a time of gross stereotyping and marginalisation of black people by white society and its media, *Abantu-Batho* writers portrayed Africans positively and chronicled their struggles with sympathy, restoring human agency and individual names and ideas to an amorphous and alienated mass depicted in the white press. They made a major contribution to the making of a new radical journalism that would persist, even if *Abantu-Batho* did not, and which would help carry forward the ANC and Congress Alliance. Its journalistic style was audacious—right in the face of white supremacy. For this, it was unapologetic; but as we shall see in the Conclusion, this was to come with a great cost.