

THE POSTHUMOUS VINDICATION OF ZACHARIAH GQISHELA: SOME REFLECTIONS  
ON THE POLITICS OF DEPENDENCE AT THE CAPE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

by

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This paper is constructed around a story and a moral. The story tells of the death of Zachariah Gqishela and its sequel. The moral is implied in a Nietzschean rejection of an alien legitimacy of domination. In the paper as a whole I try to do three things: to say why I am interested in the politics of dependence; to reconstruct a tragedy of South African life; and to document an instance of the workings of Cape liberalism in its impact upon African political consciousness.

The historical importance of the groups around individuals like Tengo Jabavu and Walter Rubusana has been recognized in the general literature of South African political history, but almost solely from the point of view of their being proto-nationalists or the forerunners of the SANNC. (1) In the most comprehensive account of African politics in South Africa to date, Peter Walshe's The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa (1970), the 19th century origins of African political consciousness are summarily dealt with in the space of a single chapter; and the ideologies developed by the leading figures are most often referred to in the process of making a critique of their vitiating effect on post-SANNC political action. The explanation for this relative neglect of the 19th century lies in the belief that the study of African politics is properly and almost exclusively a study of nationalism. Because the ideology of 19th and early 20th century politicians like Tengo Jabavu "falls outside the context of African nationalism" (2), it is deserving only of "retrospective comment". (3) The historiography of nationalism has been subject to a widespread ex post facto prejudice against what it has labelled "collaboration", and if there is a commonly held view of the 19th century African elite at the Cape, it is that they were collaborators.

My own orientation to this group is informed by what has been called post-independence gloom. It was to be expected, at a time when African societies appeared to be throwing off the shackles of their colonial overlords and asserting their right to an independent national existence, that historians should have rediscovered the African past in terms of resistance and nascent nationalism. It became clear, contrary to the wisdom of conventional colonial historiography, that there was an African past, that it had been made by Africans, and that during the colonial episode Africans had remained the subjects of their own history. Now, however, contrary to the hopes engendered at independence, it has become clear that dependence is deeply embedded institutionally and intellectually in the most important areas of economic and social life; that colonization was not merely an interlude to the unfolding of African history, but introduced structural changes which altered its course in a profound way. What was thought to be development came to be seen as underdevelopment. So it is that, in my view, historians are having to reinvestigate the colonial period

in order to provide a more balanced interpretation of African history. More specifically, resistance/nationalism as a theme of study must give way to a deeper understanding of the importance of co-operation/assimilation. This is not to recommend a return to an historiography which assumes the absence of African initiative. What is required is an approach which sees that without collaboration there could not have been colonization, and also that collaboration is itself a matter of choice and initiative. Even the Cape schoolmen, who appear at times to take over in unquestioned form the ideology of their colonizers, undoubtedly regarded their success at becoming assimilated as instrumental to their own purposes; and they sometimes pursued those purposes to the point of open rebellion against their earnestly proclaimed allegiances. What is revealed on the part of the assimilated at the Cape in the 19th century is a complex interplay between the poles of total co-operation and total rejection. At times both are in play at the same moment. It is this complexity, called by Shula Marks the ambiguities of dependence, which a history of the spectacular fails to take into account. (4)

While the schoolmen at the Cape came to share the British assumption that "there were universal standards, that those standards resided in British culture, and that the merit of other cultures rested on their approximation to those standards" (5), and while their private and public attitudes were patterned within the overall style of behaviour appropriate to that stance, they were caught up in the contradictions which their identity as black Victorian gentlemen entailed in the colonial context. Thus the columns of Isigidimi SamaXhosa, under the editorship of Elijah Makiwane, could make the struggles of 1877-81 appear to the Xhosa reader as a clash between heathendom and Christendom, represented by "our troops, the troops of Victoria Child of the Beautiful", in which those Africans who were defending their lands against white invaders were cast as villains engaging in "hostility to the Word", and, at the same time, carry a poem by "Hadi" in which Victoria is made to undergo a radical metamorphosis:

Awake, rock rabbits of the Mountains of the Night  
She darts out her tongue to the very skies  
That rabbit-snake with female breasts  
Who suckled and fostered the trusty Fingoes  
Thereafter to eat them alive. (6)

There are many levels at which this ambiguity can, and should, be explained, because there are so many levels at which it operates. The question to be asked is why, in the face of dispossession and hostile government, did educated Africans continue to act for so long in a constitutionally loyal way. As every educated African was in some way a product of the mission school, the role of missions and of missionaries has been seen as the most important single influence on African attitudes. (7) While individual socialization through mission education is important for the formation of ideology amongst African intellectuals, it has been concentrated on to the neglect of a wider investigation which must be firmly rooted in the historical processes which shaped society in the Eastern Cape in the 19th century. Constitutional developments apart, this indicates a methodology which will attempt to explain the thinking and the political behaviour of the elite in terms of its structural situation within the colonial political economy - an approach used, so far, only by Colin Bundy. (8)

Within this broad prescription there are other fascinating areas which require exploration - such as the impact of the collective past, of ongoing events in social and political life, of the American negro influence, and of "Ethiopianism". In this paper I want to suggest some implications of the influence of white liberals in the so-called Cape tradition.

At a time when Africans, both as loyal British subjects and as "natives", perceived themselves as coming under increasing pressure from ministries dominated by the Afrikaner Bond in Cape Town, and when successive governments were proving themselves "a sort of political Baal to the entreaties of the natives" (9), African fears of betrayal, of the reality of the lie behind the non-racial constitutional myth, were from time to time allayed by public displays of good intentions on the part of individual liberals. This is well illustrated in a single humanitarian act undertaken

by the Presbyterian minister at King Williamstown, the Rev. John Davidson Don. (10)

On the morning of Friday, 16th January 1885, Zachariah Gqishela of Tambookie location was sent out by his master, a stonemason of Burghersdorp, to look for a horse which had gone astray. He followed the railway line out of Burghersdorp and approached the farm Rooidebergsvlei. On the way he met two workers on the telegraph construction between Queenstown and Aliwal North, James Fischer and Grahamstown. After exchanging greetings with them and having a smoke, he moved on to the farmhouse, where horses were tethered in an enclosure. (11) He inspected them and went on to the tramp floor nearby where the farmer, Willem Jacobus Pelser, his cousin and his brother-in-law, and several labourers, including Martinus David senior and Abo, were threshing corn. (12) Abo was the only fluent Xhosa speaker present, and Zachariah asked him if he had seen a black horse. Abo replied that he had not. Zachariah asked Martinus David, and he made the same reply. Pelser then asked Abo what it was Zachariah wanted. Zachariah asked Abo to tell Pelser that he was in search of a black horse. Pelser did not answer directly, but asked Zachariah through Abo whether he had a pass. Zachariah replied that he did not, and Pelser ordered him to go back and get one. Zachariah replied that he could not, as the horse was not his but his master's. Pelser did not reply. (13) Zachariah then left the tramp floor and passed out of sight over a ridge in the direction of the farmlands.

Pelser left the tramp floor and stood on the land wall to observe the direction Zachariah had taken. After a remark about fining Zachariah fifteen shillings, he jumped off the wall and went to the house. After a while he emerged with a telescope and mounted an eminence behind the house from where he watched Zachariah's progress through his lands. He then returned to the house, and, after strapping on his revolver and talking a while to his father, emerged once more, mounted a horse, and rode in the direction Zachariah had taken. (14) As he passed the tramp floor he called out to Martinus David, junior, to ride after two policemen who had passed in the direction of Burghersdorp earlier. (15) About an hour had passed since Zachariah first appeared at the tramp floor.

After Zachariah had left Pelser and the labourers, he walked back past the house towards a small dam some distance the other side of the railway, where there was a group of horses. On his way he met up with more workers on the telegraph construction. He first greeted Alfred Peters, who was digging a post-hole, and moved on to where Veldtschoen Gwacweka was similarly occupied. He sat down there for a while and was joined by Zwartboy Mdlunya, a friend of his. Ntolyiya left his hole and joined the others in conversation. After about half an hour, Zachariah left in the direction of the dam. Not long after he had left them, the telegraph workers saw Pelser gallop after him. Ntolyiya and Alfred Peters gathered at Veldtschoen Gwacweka's pole to watch what would follow. (16)

Alfred Peters:

There were some horses out beyond the dam, and in the direction in which Zacharias was going. I saw Mr Pelser, riding on a black horse go up to him, and then they both stood still for about five minutes, after which they turned and came in my direction, the native in front and Pelser behind. Suddenly, while watching them, I saw smoke hanging around them, and then I heard the report of a pistol, and saw the native fall down in front of the horse. The native shouted three times after he was shot. "Hey! hey! come this way!" ... I told my fellow workmen that if I had not been frightened also of being shot, I would have gone to examine the deceased. (17)

Ntolyiya:

... He went to turn the Kafir. I saw him turn him, then they stood a little while and then both came back; the white man behind the native. While I was looking I saw smoke. I was looking towards them. And then I heard the report. Then



the man dropped. The horse stook and the white man, after looking a little, galloped towards the house. (18)

Veldtschoen Gwacweka:

... After getting through the dam the white man overtook him. They spoke a little. I could not hear it. The white man had gone ahead of him, and they faced each other. Then the native turned and came towards us. Then they walked along, the white man behind mounted, and the native walking three yards in front of the horse. When they got near to the dam there was a gun's report. It came from the white man. After I heard the report the horse swerved with the white man on it. Then he turned and galloped home ... I was afraid ... (19)

Frederick David, who was taking sheep to midday water, saw Zachariah near the dam. He was lying with his legs crossed and was waving his hand. Frederick did not go to him because he was afraid. (20)

Pelser's bullet had entered above Zachariah's left shoulder blade about two inches from the spine. It had travelled obliquely without deflection and fractured the second vertebrae of the thorax, compressing the spinal marrow. (21) That afternoon the District Surgeon, accompanied by Pelser and the Chief Constable, Edward Williams, made a post-mortem examination. On Saturday morning police constable Jacob Sulemane, together with some prisoners, buried Zachariah at the spot where he had fallen. (22)

After the shooting Pelser rode back to the house and then into Burghersdorp, where he made statements to the Magistrate's Clerk, Alfred Harmsworth, and to the Chief Constable. The gist of his statements that afternoon was that he had been out riding, had come across Zachariah, had asked him to show a pass, and when he did not had tried to turn him off his land. Zachariah, he said, had then resisted and had struck out at him with an iron bar which he was carrying. Pelser then drew his revolver and shot him. (23) After taking all the evidence during hearings on 20th and 27th January, the magistrate was in two minds, whether to indict Pelser for murder or for culpable homicide. He sent the evidence to the Solicitor General, Maasdorp, in Grahamstown, and asked for instructions. On 31st January Maasdorp instructed the magistrate to indict for culpable homicide. On the 9th February, Prime Minister Upington, who was also Attorney-General, addressed a telegram to Maasdorp enquiring what stage the case had reached. (24) Maasdorp wired back that the magistrate had been told to indict for culpable homicide. On the 11th February Pelser made another statement saying that the pistol had fired accidentally as his horse shied away from Zachariah's blows. On the same day the magistrate at Burghersdorp wrote to Maasdorp that there was "very considerable excitement in the District" and that he anticipated "very serious excitement" if the trial of Pelser were not moved to another district. On the 16th February Maasdorp wired Upington: "On seeing the examination as completed, have declined to prosecute." (25)

There the matter rested, until, on the 24th March, George Hay, editor of the anti-ministry, anti-Bond Cape Mercury, published a leading article titled "Justice and Party Politics". In it he attacked Upington, suggesting that he had quashed the case against Pelser in order to retain the support of the Afrikaner Bond in parliament. The article denounced the government for introducing party politics into the administration of justice. Hay suggested that, if Pelser had been an English farmer, or had Zachariah been a white man, the case would not have been dropped. (26)

Hay's initiative was greeted with general public silence, until the 14th April, when the Mercury published what was afterwards to become a celebrated letter from the Rev. Don. In his letter, Don called Zachariah's death a foul crime for which Pelser should have been tried. As the government had not rebutted Hay's charges, Don was "reluctantly compelled to come to the conclusion that our rulers have been influenced by political instead of ... legal considerations ...". He demanded that

justice and decency be satisfied:

I belong to no party; I am not a politician; I never was in Burghersdorp; I know nothing of its people and never heard of Pelser before. But I am a member of the community which has to bear the responsibility in the last resort of its Government's unchallenged acts, and a minister of a religion which knows no distinction of race, caste, class, or colour; and my conscience refuses to put up silently with this offence.

This is the eloquent voice of compassionate liberalism. Unlike Hay, Don was not making political mileage out of Zachariah's death. He was genuinely outraged that Pelser should be allowed to get away with it:

That poor man's blood cries to heaven, not merely against the wretched murderer, but against the Government which refuses to prosecute, and the country which condones such conduct. (27)

By the end of April the affair had become a major political row, with the whole of the Cape press involved. Those papers, like the Kaffrarian Watchman, which supported the Ministry, took Pelser's side - or made out at least that the decision not to prosecute was the Solicitor General's, and not the government's. The opposition papers denounced the Upington ministry and stridently called for "justice and fair play" and an enquiry. The Burghersdorp Gazette published a letter by "Bondsman" which called the Cape Mercury "one of the greatest detestors of the Boers and a champion of the most rabid Jingoism". (28) Hay published letters from missionaries and opposition politicians supporting Don. (29) On the 2nd May Richard Rose-Innes had the whole of the evidence given at the preliminary hearings printed in the Cape Mercury. (30) A question on what had become known in the opposition press as the Pelser case was raised in parliament on the 19th May, and in the ensuing debate Upington was cleared of any interference with Maasdorp. Hay's comment was "so much the worse for Maasdorp". (31)

Public comment died away until early in July when, on the affidavit of Pelser, the Attorney-General started proceedings against Don and Hay for criminal libel. (32) The allegedly injurious part of Don's letter was the final paragraph quoted above. The case was set down for a hearing on the 23rd July, and it raised tremendous public interest. (33) The hearing was stopped on a technicality, and after further appearances on the 25th and 27th July Don was finally remanded until the 11th November. Six days before the commencement of the trial the case against Hay was dropped. Don now stood alone. (34)

When Don heard early in July that he was to be charged with criminal libel, he was outraged that he should be so traduced by Upington. Nevertheless, he saw the impending trial as an opportunity to uphold his principles. By August, when he had been committed for trial, he was no longer concerned with "that poor man's blood" but was trying hard to justify himself to the Foreign Missions Committee (FMC) of the Free Church of Scotland. (35) In a long letter home he set out the course of events and explained to his Scottish superiors why he had got into such a parlous position. According to Don, Pelser was not prosecuted

- a) because of racial discrimination
- b) because of "Dutch" power in government.

He is being prosecuted

- a) to appease the Dutch voters
- b) because Upington is an Irishman
- c) because the government is tyrannous
- d) for political reasons of state
- e) because he has become the plaything of powerful forces
- f) because he spoke the truth. (36)

Thus by now, Don, like Hay, saw the "Pelser case" as a government/Bond conspiracy, and his own trial as a political one. (37) Don's letters to the FMC became increasingly shrill before they became resigned. On the 19th August he implied that the African population was so disturbed over the Pelser affair that they were threatening the destruction of the colony, and reminded the FMC of his plight as a victim:

It is not Pelser, however, who is striking at me, but the head of our Government, a disreputable, false, disloyal man, who holds his place by pandering to Dutch prejudice, ignorance, and disloyalty. (38)

The whole liberal establishment in the Eastern Cape - or, rather, all those who thought of themselves as loyal British subjects - gathered around Don in support, interpreting his prosecution in much the same way that he did: as an attack on their position by the Bond. James Stewart, the powerful principal of Lovedale, wrote the FMC that:

There is nothing very surprising in this case, as a result of the dominance of Afrikanerdom ... (39)

The Presbytery of Kaffraria, representing all Scottish missionaries west of the Kei, sent a long minute to the FMC setting out their view of the case and endorsing the stand taken by Don as being "necessary in the interests of justice and right ...". (40) As the trial approached, Don took a more resigned tone and moved from political vituperation back to a consideration of his original impulse in writing to the Mercury. In mid-October he characterized the trial as the test of a "great question": "... for it is a great question involving the sacredness of life, the equality of men before the law, and the purity of Justice". (41) Because he is pleading "justification", a more dangerous course legally than the more usual "fair comment", in order "that the case could be more fully aired", he recognized that he might have to go to prison:

But should the result be a purifying of our atmosphere, and healthier views on the great questions involved, the price paid will not have been too great. (42)

The trial opened in Grahamstown on the 11th November. It was a disaster for the prosecution. The African witnesses stood firm, Pelser was made to contradict himself. (43) The medical evidence showed that Zachariah could not have been in the act of striking at Pelser when the shot was fired. (44) The jury returned a verdict of not guilty, and the Judge-President, Sir J. D. Barry, acquitted Don and congratulated him "on the position he had taken to uphold justice in this country". (45)

This was the signal for colony-wide rejoicing by all those who considered themselves "liege subjects of Her Majesty in South Africa". (46) As the verdict was announced,

Such a burst of applause breaks out through the Court house as had never been heard before. It is not suppressed. It is the universal assent of true-born Britons to the fact that one man had dared to stand forth and vindicate, at terrible cost, and at the peril of being cast into a felon's cell, the principles of truth and justice and the sacredness of the life of all who claim to be the subjects of our Gracious Sovereign Queen Victoria. (47)

King Williamstown had never been so excited. The townspeople decided to do honour to the "hero of the hour". Shortly after five o'clock on the afternoon of the 20th November, "a number of well-filled vehicles and many horsemen" went out to meet Don, arriving in the Royal Mail cart, at the borough boundary. They arrived to discover that they had been anticipated. Already with Don was a "troop of native horsemen, who had ridden out as far as Crowe's (sixteen miles) to greet one who, in this trial, had championed their race!" Don was transferred to a private coach and the cavalcade set off for a triumphal entry into the town. "Their approach was heralded by two native horsemen, one of whom carried his many-coloured handkerchief tied to a kerrie as a



flag. 'Remember! exclaimed George Hay at his purplest, 'this was their Runnymede!'"(48) The Mail appeared. The town pressed forward eagerly, then rushed back to the square when it was discovered that Don was not on it. Finally, he arrived, preceded by the Mayor's carriage, and was given three "lusty British cheers". When he could make himself heard the Mayor read an address in celebration of Don's "great victory". The address (expensively bound as showing what could be done by local printers), with 800 signatures attached, was presented to him with ceremony. Then, at the height of what a Bondsman might have been justified in calling a jingoistic orgy, Tengo Jabavu, supported "by several other influential native men", stepped forward and read "with a very clear enunciation" a tribute on behalf of "the natives of King William's Town".(49)

The tribute paid by Jabavu to Don on this occasion expresses very clearly the impact on his own consciousness of what he interpreted as Don's readiness to sacrifice himself to uphold the rights of Africans to equal government. This is one of the clearest statements of the way in which liberal rhetoric and action disarmed African suspicions and led them to a greater contentment with their allotted place in the colonial order of things:

This, the triumph of your act, has allayed our suspicions as to the soundness of the system of government; it has subdued our excitement and alarm, which had reached their utmost tension, and it has grounded and re-established the faith of the wavering, who had begun to fear that even religion itself was a political dodge intended to weaken the minds of men into submission. (50)

Nor was Jabavu's the only African response of this kind. By January 1886 a Don defence fund had been started. Africans at Osborne station, Mount Frere, sent a donation of £2. Thirty-nine "natives of Theopolis" sent a contribution of £1-14 with an address eulogizing Don:

We, as natives, feel that you are our friend, and pray that the number of those who would be like-minded with yourself may increase. (51)

In expressing to Don "the deep debt of gratitude which we all owe to you as a race", and reminding him that "we are the burden that is on thee laid", Jabavu is misinterpreting both Don's act and the ideology which produced it. If we look at Don's own reaction to his acquittal, we see how misplaced Jabavu's sentiments are:

The great trial is over and has ended with a complete victory for truth and right. God has maintained His own cause. I recognise His Hand very clearly in all that has happened. Though our cause was good, yet to the very end the jury was a source of anxiety ... one man stood out for three hours against the rest, and was only shamed into acquiescence. He had been seen drinking with Pelsler ... But he who holds all hearts in his hand was on our side. The Judge behaved nobly ... The plea of justification is deemed a dangerous one: but I was anxious to have that course taken as the only mode of probing the whole matter to the bottom ... Now, with few exceptions, the press of the country is on my side ... the interest of the whole country has been aroused, and public opinion has swung around to my side. (52)

Reading this correspondence, it becomes clear that public adulation has turned Don's head somewhat. (53) He is led by self-congratulation to see himself as a kind of lone hero, led by God to defend the interests of the weak. But most of all it is Don who is vindicated. In all the public celebration and the correspondence the name Zachariah Gqishela is not mentioned. From the time Hay took the case up, the debate centred around establishing a principle. Once that had been achieved, those involved were satisfied. Pelsler was not prosecuted. He did in fact "get away with it". The public argument was only obliquely relevant to the defence of African interests, and its legal resolution resulted merely in those who considered themselves

to be British and virtuous gaining a temporary victory over the "Dutch element".

Let us look more closely for a moment at Don. Throughout the century the Foreign Missions Committee urged the Scots missionaries to form independent African pastorates so that they themselves could move on to new fields of endeavour. The Presbytery of Kaffraria consistently avoided the issue, and this gave rise to rather sharp exchanges between the two bodies. (54) The missionaries in the field did not trust even ordained African ministers to carry out the work properly without direct supervision. As clerk to the Presbytery, Don was in the forefront of exchanges on this subject with his home committee; and he was one of those who stood out against an African ministry on the grounds that Africans were not competent to do the job.

... I do not think that the native churches possess men capable of guiding, governing, and successfully developing a church's work if thrown entirely upon themselves. (55)

And again:

We cannot afford to act upon the assumption that the native is really equal to the European. There is something wanting in the best of them ... I have been ... a partisan of the native ministry, but have sorrowfully modified some of my earlier ideas ... they are at their best ... working under the surveillance of Europeans. (56)

In 1901 the retiring convenor of the FMC, Dr Lindsay, complained that of all Free Church missionaries those in South Africa "do not seem to have grasped the idea of a Native Presbyterian Church". (57) They did not grasp it because, together with other settler liberals, their liberalism "did not depart from the major consensus of white South African politics, that power shall be retained by the white groups". (58) Trapido's judgement, that Cape liberalism was a brand of conservative paternalism, is correct.

I do not want to suggest either that liberal churchmen like Don were not on occasions courageous in their defence of African rights, or that African leaders were altogether their hapless victims. Yet, their activities did reinforce a pattern of dependence and trust which is, I would suggest, commonly traceable in any group who have undergone a process of dispossession and colonization. When faced with the problem of the economic and political pauperization of their people, African intellectuals held fast, like the children of freed slaves in the Southern States, to the belief that "the troops would not permit it". (59) In their case, the troops were that legion of Cape and later Union liberals who marched through their lives, after whom they named their sons, and in whom they placed their hopes for the future. (60) Those hopes were not always misplaced, nor were Africans slow to realize in time the treacherous nature of their dependency. For that reason I would not go so far as Genovese in his remark on post-reconstruction negroes in the States that they sealed their fate by relying on the protection of others. (61) The formation of the Congress Youth League in 1943, and the emergence of SASO in the mid-sixties were a summation of ideas and feelings which had been present in the articulated political consciousness of Africans for well over half a century. It is S. M. Molema, a man who felt very keenly the ambiguities of dependence, who, in quoting from Nietzsche in 1920, expresses what was and is necessary for a counter-thrust against a morality of political and social strangulation:

I say: as long as your morality hung over me I breathed like one asphyxiated. That is why I throttled this snake. I wished to live. Consequently it had to die. (62)



Author's Note

In this paper I have tried to move away from some of the larger abstractions in which historians often necessarily indulge. In dealing with the ideological level alone, I have invited accusations of having fallen into the trap of writing about "Cape liberalism" rather than about "liberalism in the Cape": a very nice distinction made by Stanley Trapido in his paper "Liberalism in the Cape in the 19th and 20th Centuries" (University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Collected Seminar Papers No. 17, 1972-73).

In accounting for the shortcomings of Don, and by implication other liberals, in terms of individual hypocrisy, political naivety, and betrayal, I have done precisely what Trapido warns against: that is, I have not discussed the social relationships which produced the contradictions and inconsistencies of liberalism in the Cape, either amongst whites or their African counterparts. What I have dealt with is a manifestation of liberalism in an area in which Trapido's conditions for the existence of the "small tradition" were in evidence: i.e. where Nguni peasant production was important to the economic life of the district. In such an area, where prosperity depended to a certain extent on the marketable surplus of African cultivators, attacks on the position of Africans were associated with an attack on the peasant sector, and therefore with the prosperity of the district at large. So that in a case like Pelsler's liberal rhetoric was not employed primarily as a matter of conscience or of the retention of standards from "home". Trapido points out that it was only in the Eastern districts of the Cape that actions such as I have described in the paper were questioned in any systematic way. And he comments quite correctly that liberals responded in the way they did because it was their way of life as well as that of the peasants which was perceived as being under attack.

Don and the liberals of King Williamstown were as much concerned with defending their own interests as they were with upholding African ones.

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Notes

- (1) This is the approach of Walshe, Roux, Benson, Carter, Denoon, Kuper, H. J. and R. E. Simons. The category "general literature" excludes those theses and papers devoted entirely to African politics and society in the 19th century. Instances are Stanley Trapido's 1970 University of London thesis, "White conflict and non-white participation in the politics of the Cape of Good Hope 1853-1910"; Colin Bundy's work on peasant societies; R. Hunt-David's continuing work on education and the educated in the Eastern Cape; and Chris Saunders's work on the Cape Eastern (or Western) frontier.
- (2) Leo Kuper, "African nationalism in South Africa 1910-1964" in the Oxford History of South Africa, p. 443.
- (3) Leo Kuper, "African nationalism", ibid., p. 425.
- (4) Shula Marks, "The ambiguities of dependence: John L. Dube of Natal", Jnl. of Southern African Studies, Vol. I, No. 2, 1976, pp. 162-80.
- (5) H. A. C. Cairns, Prelude to Imperialism (1965), p. 98.
- (6) Quoted by Sheila Brock in her 1974 University of Edinburgh thesis, "James Stewart and Lovedale: a reappraisal of missionary attitudes and African response in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, 1870-1905", pp. 222-23. From the time of Jabavu's editorship in 1881, Isigidimi carried a great deal of condemnatory material which its missionary proprietors found extremely alarming.

- (7) The most notable contribution in this area is Nosipho Majeke's The Role of Missionaries in Conquest, Society of Young Africa (Johannesburg, 1952).
- (8) In "The emergence and decline of a South African peasantry", African Affairs, 71 (1972), Bundy has shown that the emergence of a politically articulate elite in the Eastern Cape coincided with the emergence of a class of relatively wealthy peasants or progressive farmers. This applies especially to the Mfengu who were from the time of their "emancipation" in 1835 more closely integrated into the colonial economy than any other African people at the Cape, and who were the greatest "collaborators" also. It is against the structural background of the emergence of such a class of land users that the appearance of the elite should be seen. If the mass of this yeomanry (the term is Bundy's) exhibited something approaching an ideological identity with the colonizers, then its better educated members brought that identity to its highest expression.
- (9) Tengo Javabu to Chesson, 6th May 1880, APS papers, Rhodes House, Oxford. Mss. Brit. Emp. S18, C139/1.
- (10) African fears are expressed with violence at times by Tengo Jabavu in his correspondence with the APS from 1880 to 1909. APS papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S18, passim.
- (11) Evidence of James Fischer and Grahamstown, Regina v. Don, Eastern Districts Court, Grahamstown, 13 November 1885. Published in The Cape Mercury, King Williamstown, 19 November 1885.
- (12) Evidence taken at a preliminary hearing before the magistrate of Burghersdorp on Tuesday, 20th January 1885. Printed by order of the Cape Parliament, Al-85 Cape, and published in The Cape Mercury, 2nd May 1885.
- (13) Evidence of Abo and Martinus David, 20th January 1885. Al-85 Cape, and The Cape Mercury, 2nd May 1885. It is not clear whether Zachariah was in this case legally required to carry a pass.
- (14) Evidence of Abo and Martinus David, 20th January 1885, Al-85 Cape, and The Cape Mercury, 2nd May 1885. Evidence of Willem Jacobus Pelser and Abo, Regina v. Don, printed in The Cape Mercury, 17th November 1885.
- (15) Evidence of, amongst others, Martinus David, junior, 20th January 1885, Al-85 Cape, and The Cape Mercury, 2nd May 1885.
- (16) Evidence of Alfred Peters, Veldtschoen Gwacweka, Zwaartboy Mdlunya, Ntolyiya, Breakfast, Canteen. Al-85 Cape and The Cape Mercury, 2nd May 1885.
- (17) Evidence of Alfred Peters, Regina v. Don, 13th November 1885. The Cape Mercury, 19th November 1885.
- (18) Evidence of Ntolyiya, Regina v. Don, 13th November 1885. The Cape Mercury, 19th November 1885.
- (19) Evidence of Veldtschoen Gwacweka, Regina v. Don, 13th November 1885. The Cape Mercury, 19th November 1885.
- (20) Evidence of Frederick David, 20th January 1885. Al-85 Cape, and The Cape Mercury, 2nd May 1885. It is notable that of the three eyewitnesses and the four others who heard the shot, not one went to the spot where Zachariah lay because they were frightened. This is hardly surprising. Pelser had been charged several times with assaulting Africans, and his reputation would have been enough to discourage even mild curiosity. See his evidence, Regina v. Don, 12th November 1885. The Cape Mercury, 17th November 1885.
- (21) Evidence of Ferdinand Paul, 20th January 1885. Al-85 Cape, and The Cape Mercury, 2nd May 1885.
- (22) The Cape Mercury, 2nd May 1885.
- (23) Evidence of Edward Williams and Alfred Harmsworth, 20th January 1885. Al-85 Cape, and The Cape Mercury, 2nd May 1885.

An iron bar was found next to Zachariah's body. It is a notable feature of the evidence that both Pelser's cousin and his brother-in-law, who saw Zachariah at the tramp floor, swore that he had been carrying such a bar. Pelser's employees swore the same, with the exception of Abo, who insisted that he had been carrying a switch. Each of the independent witnesses swore that his hands were empty as he left them and walked to the dam.

Pelser's statement to Harmsworth was:

I was riding on my farm when I saw a Kafir going through the veldt. I rode up to him and asked him what he wanted there, he answered "I have come to look for a horse". I then demanded to see his pass, but he said he had none. I told him to leave my veldt, as I did not allow natives to roam about there without passes. I then went away ... and on looking back saw the Kafir still in my veldt. I thereupon rode up to him and told him that ... I would give him into custody ... he then said "You'll not stop me". He had a bar of iron in his hand, and with this he struck my horse a blow on the nose. My horse ... became unmanageable ... I turned the horse around and as I did so I saw his arm raised again to strike me, and I thereupon shot him.

(24) "Urgent. The Attorney-General is anxious to know at what stage the proceedings in the case against Pelser at Burgersdorp for shooting a native have arrived. Please wire at once." Al-85 Cape.

(25) Al-85 Cape. The completion of the examination refers to Pelser's second statement, which contradicted his first:

When the deceased came to me I asked him for a pass ... Deceased was determined to go into our veldt. Upon this I went to fetch him back. When I got to him he would not come back. At last he did go a few yards in the direction of the house, but he suddenly turned back and struck at me three times, in such a way as to show me my life was in danger. I had already my revolver out for the purpose of frightening him. The horse got restless, and when the horse gave way for the deceased, the revolver went off and hit the deceased ...

Printed in The Cape Mercury, 2nd May 1885.

(26) Hay quotes the case of a Mr Filmer who had at the last circuit been charged with wounding an African in the hip "for which he was charged £30, but then he had the misfortune to be an English European farmer, and therefore had to stand his trial". The Cape Mercury, 24th March 1885.

In this article Hay is less concerned with the "demands of justice" than with using the case as a stick with which to beat Uppington's ministry and Afrikaners in general. On 16th April, in the Mercury, he comments:

A man named Beer has been sentenced to seven years hard labour at Somerset East for the murder of a native. If he had only put de before his name or called himself Pelzer, he would probably not have been prosecuted.

(27) Letter dated 14th April 1885.

(28) Cape Mercury, 21st and 23rd April 1885, and Kafirarian Watchman, 20th April 1885.

(29) Letters from Bryce Ross and Richard Rose Innes, Cape Mercury, 21st April 1885.

(30) His brother, James Rose-Innes, had been returned to parliament in 1884, largely on the strength of African votes.

(31) Leader headed "Law and the Solicitor General", The Cape Mercury, 26th May 1885.

(32) The Cape Mercury, 7th July 1885.

(33) The courthouse in King Williamstown overflowed with the interested:  
The ladies were accommodated in the seats provided for the jury, and occupied the whole space at the left of the bench. The right-hand side was occupied by townsmen, and the whole space allotted to the Side Bar was taken up, and the body of the hall being also well filled.

The Cape Mercury, 23rd July 1885.

(34) Ibid., 5th and 12th November 1885.

(35) Don was not a missionary proper, but as clerk to the Presbytery of Kafiraria he reported to the FWC.

(36) Don to George Smith, 10th August 1885. Foreign Mission Records of the Church of Scotland, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. Ms 7797, folio 33 (hereafter NLS). Uppington is plainly not to be trusted in Don's book because his nationality



distorts his loyalties:

Our present Premier ... Upington, an Irishman of very questionable loyalty to the British Crown will snatch at every means of fostering a feud between the Dutch and the English ...

- (37) Don to Smith, 10th August 1885, ibid.  
This prosecution, though nominally by Pelser, is instigated by the Government, and there is every reason to believe that this is really a political trial.
- (38) Don to Smith, 19th August 1885. NLS, Ms 7797, folio 39.
- (39) Stewart to Smith, 11th September 1885. NLS, Ms 7797, folio 54.
- (40) Presbytery of Kaffraria to Smith, 2nd September 1885. NLS, Ms 7797, folio 56.
- (41) Don to Smith, 14th October 1885. NLS, Ms 7797, folio 68.
- (42) Don to Smith, 14th October 1885, ibid.
- (43) At one stage he claimed that it was "usual for Kafirs to walk about with pieces of iron in their hand". Evidence of Willem Pelser, Regina v. Don, 12th November, 1885. Printed in The Cape Mercury, 17th November 1885.
- (44) Evidence of Drs Greathead, Ross and Paul, Regina v. Don, 13th November 1885. The Cape Mercury, 19th November 1885.
- (45) The Cape Mercury, 17th and 19th November 1885.
- (46) Ibid., 17th November.
- (47) "Waiting for the Verdict", ibid., 24th November 1885.
- (48) "Vindicated", ibid., 21st November 1885.
- (49) Ibid.
- (50) Ibid., and The Christian Express, December 1885.
- (51) Ibid., 14th January 1886. The donations were sent to the offices of Jabavu's Imvo Zabantsundu.
- (52) Don to Smith, 27th November 1885. NLS, Ms 7797, folio 76.
- (53) William Hay, recently returned from a stay in Britain, where he had tried to get publicity for Don, wrote to George Smith claiming that Don was "the most popular man in South Africa". Hay to Smith, 28th December 1885. NLS, Ms 7797, folio 80.
- (54) The problems posed for the Free Church in establishing an African pastorate at the Cape were very much the same ones faced by the LMS in West Africa. In neither field were European missionaries prepared to leave the congregations they had gathered to African pastors; and what African pastors there were they tended to regard as their rivals. See Ajayi, Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891, p.179.
- (55) Don to Smith, 4th September 1886. NLS, Ms 7797, folio 134. At this time Makiwane Mzimba had been ordained 10 years.
- (56) Don to Dr Lindsay, 24th September 1898. NLS, Ms 7798.
- (57) Sheila Brock, "James Stewart and Lovedale", p. 50. Instead, they were confronted with one in the shape of Pambani Mzimba's independent African Presbyterian Church in 1898.
- (58) Stanley Trapido, "White conflict and non-white participation", p. 206.
- (59) "When Whitelaw Reid asked black schoolchildren what they would do if someone tried to enslave them, most responded that the troops would not permit it", Eugene Genovese, In Red and Black (1971), p. 140. Without going into it, some of the parallels between ex-slave political activity in the States and early African political activity at the Cape are illuminating.
- (60) Ultimately, of course, they placed their hopes in the British parliament, whence they directed many useless appeals. That was very much the liberal style also, and the correspondence between Don and the FMC, for instance, is packed with calls by Don for the arousal of "healthy public opinion at home". Don and others believed as fervently as any loyal African in the certain efficacy of such appeals. See NLS, Ms 7797, *passim*.

(61) Genovese, In Red and Black, p. 140.

(62) Quoted by S. M. Molema, in The Bantu Past and Present (Edinburgh, 1920), p. 335.