

THE TRANSKEI: INTERNATIONAL DECOLONIZATION

Can There Be a Single Formula for Peaceful Relations Between Black and White?

Thomas Molnar

In *Sponono*, Alan Paton's recent play, a message spelled out somewhat clumsily in the last act leaves the spectator breathless. The message is addressed by the African black man to the African white man: "You are responsible for us," it tells him; "you are, whether you like it or not, your brother's keeper. You must help and admonish us, but you must also endlessly forgive because we are bound together for better or for worse." This may be defective logic but it is realistic psychology. Those of us in the Western world who imagined that tomorrow or next year the Union of South Africa may break up in the fire of a revolution, or change radically its racial-legal structure know little about the real situation and its extraordinary complexity.

A book now read and quoted by many South Africans tries to come to terms with this complex situation. M. Paul Giniewski, a French journalist, visited South Africa just when the first Bantustan was being set up as a semi-autonomous land for the Xhosa people, one of the seven Bantu tribes inhabiting the country. In his *Bantustans: A Trek Towards the Future*, Giniewski calls the Transkei experiment a "Zionist" solution for it offers a homeland to a suffering race; and he concludes that the experiment now tried may set a constructive example for other parts of the world where contending populations live on contested land.

Historically, the Transkei is the territory where one of the advancing Bantu tribes, the Xhosas, settled when the whites, advancing from the Cape, met and stopped their migration. It is the largest of seven racially rather homogeneous lands on which the various Bantu tribes have lived for more than two centuries. They lived according to traditional tribal customs, engaging in rudimentary agriculture and cattle raising. When the gold and diamond mines opened up South Africa for an extraordinary boom, the Xhosas (and Zulus, Sothos, Tembus, etc.), flocked to the new districts in search of steadier incomes than the land could provide; when the second

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world war started South Africa on a tremendous industrial expansion, new masses of blackmen came to swell the number of their city-dwelling fellow tribesmen. Thus the situation as we know it today presents itself as two distinct but interdependent phenomena: the modern problem of a rural population attracted to cities and industrial centers, and the problem of racial antagonism. The two together have created the classical situation of colonialism: an industrialized white society and a black rural population "promoted" to the status of city proletariat.

This is further aggravated by the fact that the whites have been at home here since they first settled in 1652 (a date which curiously coincides with the first arrival of the Bantus from the North) and that they cannot "de-colonize" by simply leaving the country. Nor would the blackman want them to leave: his standard of living is certainly higher than anywhere in the rest of Africa; and this is a weighty argument when he views the insecure political future of most of the newly independent countries of the continent.

Yet decolonization is the order of the day and the white man knows it. The question is *How?* In the minds of responsible Africans, white and black, the idea begins to prevail that there is no single formula for decolonization and that each situation demands a degree of originality—perhaps even compromise. In South Africa these people argue that decolonization means first "Zionism," that is opportunity to settle on a land where a particular race or nation may develop its institutions, culture and language. In the second place, decolonization means continued help by the earlier master: financial aid, technical advice, industrial equipment, the organization of an educational system.

In two successive phases the South African government moved towards what one might call "internal decolonization": the Bantu Authorities Act in 1951, and the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act in 1959 aimed at setting up for the Xhosas of the Transkei a semi-autonomous State grouping the population of the territory itself, but representing

also the Xhosa-speaking elements no matter where they reside on the territory of the Republic. With the exception of the far-leftist Liberal Party, all political groups, officially even the Progressive Party, are opposed to integration and universal suffrage. Their argument is simple. In South Africa there are three million whites and seven million blacks (colored are one and a half million, Indians close to half a million): with equal rights under one parliament the whites would be outvoted in no time. Even Mrs. Helen Sussmann, Progressive Party deputy favoring qualified franchise for the Bantus, admitted to me that a Bill of Rights protecting minorities would merely be a piece of ineffective paper. Therefore, the Verwoerd government says, the parliamentary representation of the black men would be abolished: they should, rather, have their own homelands and Assemblies in the Bantustans. But—and this is an important but—the political-racial stability the white man would gain thereby must be paid for, the government argues, in the form of increased investment in the new territories whereby the Bantu would be attracted back to his homeland, and in the form of land purchased from white farmers so as to round out and make more viable the now fragmented Bantu-inhabited territories.

The reader should bear in mind that in South Africa there is a Boer and British element far more unyielding on the Bantu question than Dr. Verwoerd and his government. Say ten years ago the latter would have seriously risked its political existence had it proposed the Bantustan idea to an ultra-conservative electorate; today it still must use a great deal of caution when it wants to secure semi-autonomous status for the first Bantustan, the Transkei. Not only are many farmers opposed to selling land to black men, but so are the white labor unions which worry that when industry moves into the Transkei a generally low scale of wages would adversely affect their own income.

Consequently, it was by no means easy for a handful of Xhosa leaders to persuade Pretoria to embark on the Transkeian adventure. It is an original idea, based on faith and conviction, yet its successful outcome is questionable. Not because, as many people say inside and outside South Africa, "it is too late"; but because the idea is tortured with contradictions.

Before I traveled to the Transkei, I stopped at Pietersburg for a talk with Dr. W. W. M. Eiselen, former Secretary for Native Affairs, now Commissioner-General to the Sotho, Venda and Tsonga peoples. My presence in South Africa coincided with

the elections in the Transkei, the issues of which cut into the heart of the country's problems: Chief Kaizer Matanzima, favored by the government, wanted a gradually all-black Transkei, whereas Chief Victor Poto insisted on Transkeian multi-raciality. The day I reached Pietersburg was still a few days away from the elections, but Dr. Eiselen's preference was clear. "Just as the white farmer does not tolerate a black neighbor," he said, "the Transkeian black farmer rejects the idea that any part of his ancestral land be bought by whites. Moreover," he continued, "if we permit white men to settle there, he must also have voting rights. This, in turn, would bring us back to where we started a few years ago: voting rights for the black men in white areas. Thus the Bantustan idea would come to nothing and our problems of race relations would continue to deteriorate."

The Transkei begins about 100 miles after one leaves Durban, it has a long coastline on the Indian Ocean, and its rectangular shape reaches well into the interior. As our car left Kokstad, the last little town before entering the new territory, I expected to see signs of approaching statehood: flags, emblems, perhaps Xhosa-language inscriptions. The South Africans are very thorough organizers; if I found none of the above paraphernalia of autonomy the reason must be that Pretoria wishes to go very slowly, avoid anything irreparable, especially any provocation of the white farmer population. The Transkei question is handled as a strictly internal issue, the words "independence," and "statehood" are not pronounced, although Dr. Verwoerd has committed the government to the ultimate solution of independence in a speech before Parliament in January 1959. Yes, independence but with a view to forming a federation of white, black and Indian States in which the federal government would reserve for itself foreign affairs, defense, finances and railways.

We drove through a beautiful and at times picturesque hilly region on the easy slopes of which, as well as in the valleys, we saw farms and pastures. But crossing from white to black farmland always gave one a start: Bantu agricultural methods, still used to shifting agriculture and the unlimited land of centuries ago, are rudimentary, and thus the land barely secures subsistence. In contrast to lush and well-fertilized white farms, the aspect of Bantu lands is characterized by the nudity of the soil, absence of trees, scanty grass, erosion. The forests

are cut down for firewood, cattle graze everywhere—eating the crop and causing further erosion—for it is a status symbol and traditional currency for purchasing wives. When the white or black agronomer moves in with aid and advice, and the farmer has a good harvest, he more often than not abandons work for five-six months, having earned enough money to live on for a while.

This is why Pretoria wants no white competition in the Transkei and insists that even white and Indian merchants move out: their superior capital and skill would subject the Xhosas to internal colonization. This sounds like paternalism, and there is plenty of it. Conversations with government officials always have one conclusion: the Bantu must be taken care of, endlessly exhorted, instructed, rewarded for accomplishment even in the face of renewed frustrations.

The conservatism of the Bantu, of the African generally, is a tremendous force blocking change. Africa's new leaders claim that they will be able to modernize all this; it is only that blackmen resist the whites, even when the latter come to them with good intentions. The question all Africa seems now to be asking is precisely this: will the black leader do better than the white? The answer will not be simple: take, for example, Chief Matanzima who, in addition to his high government post, is a prominent Tembu tribal chief. Every year he visits his people twice, accompanied by lesser chiefs. When he sees slovenly work on a farm, he warns the farmer that unless he improves his cultivation, the land will be taken away from him and given to a better worker. The farmers obey: Matanzima's authority, when backed by his Council, cannot be questioned; the tribe, expressing one will through the Chief's mouth, has the last say on these matters. But neither the white government, nor a black government *merely* because it is a government, that is *without* tribal authority, may interfere with the individual's right to the land.

Arriving in Umtata, a neatly laid out small town with well-stuffed shops, clean hotels and movie houses, one is shocked to see apartheid observed exactly as it is in white territory. About the only buildings where blacks and whites share room and work are the offices of the newly appointed Ministers and the Parliament building. Some of these Ministers sit behind an empty desk and let their white secretaries answer all the questions. There is embarrassment in the air since the Republic's policy is never to have a white man work in a subordinate position to a black man. But there is also a great deal of good

will and personal contact which might dissolve the present tension.

On December 18 I was received by Kaiser Matanzima, by then Chief Minister. He is a tall, good-looking, well-dressed university graduate in his forties: one of the most impressive Africans I met, in every sense a leader and by no means shy in the presence of his white advisor who has a great deal of respect for him. When I went to see Mr. Matanzima he had been in office for exactly one week, but it was easy to see that he was experienced in controlling the affairs of the Transkei. He laughed as he told me: "We know that the local opposition and the African press in general call us 'government stooges.' But believe me," he added, "I have been trying to persuade Pretoria since the early forties of the necessity to set up the Bantustans. What you now see is the fruit of our relentless pressure on the white man."

I announced that I was going to ask embarrassing questions and he said he would answer them all. What would he do, I asked, if foreign powers (the U.S., the Soviet Union) offered him aid to develop the Transkei? Matanzima answered that he would only accept aid from and through the South African government, but that he would not hesitate to use his bargaining position to get from Pretoria all the concessions he can. One of these will be, he said, a demand for an all-Bantu administration for the townships where Bantus now live scattered on the entire territory of the Republic.

Next question: What does he think of the Progressive Party platform proposing qualified franchise for the educated African? "I oppose it," he answered unhesitatingly. "Qualified franchise would merely lead to permanent white supremacy electorally approved by a small number of educated Bantus." Universal suffrage, on the other hand, would bring about disaster: massacre, civil war, chaos. Among the peculiar circumstances of South Africa, Matanzima concluded, the black man must have his own country.

As a white official of Matanzima's entourage told me, Pretoria is aware of the risks involved in this situation: for example, one day Matanzima himself, or his successor might lift the ban from the African National Congress (on the government's list of subversive organizations) and extend it rights to organize in the Transkei. But, he added, everybody involved in this experiment will have gained one thing: the issues will be clearer, the black African will have his say—and he will say it.

This was a cautious approach, so much in line with the practical mentality of the South Africans.

But my next visit was to be no less interesting: Mr. J. H. Abraham may be called South Africa's Ambassador to the Transkei. He and Matanzima worked together for years: now one governs from the Parliament building, while the other finds even his spacious office a few miles from Umtata too small for his energies, still strong at more than sixty years of age.

Mr. Abraham illustrates in my eyes the qualities and defects of South African whites when they speak of race relations. He is robustly realistic, yet entertains some of the illusions which may bring down the edifice now a-building. The realism is manifest when he speaks of the favorable living conditions the Xhosas will have when the Transkei's resources are developed. Realistic too was his statement that multi-racialism in this territory is unfeasible for the Bantus can never expect to rule over whites. But illusion became obvious when the Chief Commissioner explained to me that with the possible exception of five percent urbanized Xhosas, the rest have deep roots in and strong ties with the Transkei. "Look at it objectively," he said to me. "The Bantu want to live and work in the white towns for three reasons: for the liquor he could not obtain at home, the cinema and the western-style suits. If these things become accessible in the towns and villages of the Transkei, he will have no reason to leave this territory."

Now, of course, this is an error. As Alan Paton underlines in the play I mentioned, the black African needs the white man: more than a century's history has forged a bond between them which may be weakened during the present period of convulsions, but will never be broken. In spite of fervent nationalism and even a pronounced black racism, the African admires the white man and associates the concept of progress with the white man's ways.

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What are the chances that the Xhosas will return to the Transkei, and that Zulus, Tembus, Sothos, etc., will also return to their respective Bantustans when they are set up? In other words, what are the chances that the Republic may solve its built-in conflicts in a multi-racial federation?

Not all Bantus are expected to return to the land traditionally occupied by the tribe. If this happened, the economy of the entire country would become unbalanced because the Bantus are an integral part of the industrial machinery of South Africa. In fact, the South African whites recognize today that for long decades they had neglected to pay sufficient

attention to technical training and industrial know-how. They were so sure that black labor would be theirs forever that today there is an insufficient number of white engineers, mechanics, etc. Too many whites are administrators and behind-the-desk men. Thus it has become urgent to train not only whites but also blacks and Indians for technical jobs if they want to maintain the present rate of industrialization. In fact, this is perhaps the best guarantee that the Bantus' lot will improve although the government does its best to encourage white immigration (tens of thousands come from England, Australia, etc.), industry can and will absorb several times more each year: Bantu, colored and Indian technicians are needed, their salaries will have to be raised, and with their incomes their political consciousness will increase too.

There are, of course, variations on the theme of apartheid. But the rigorous planning of race relations meets at each turn the formidable reality of economic facts. If the Transkei (and later the other Bantustans) is to attract the Bantus, it must be developed industrially. The great debate among South Africans, and even among members of the ruling Nationalist Party, is whether this development should be directed by the government's Bantu Investment Corporation (set up in 1959) which makes loans to deserving projects, or whether private capital should be allowed to take a hand in it. The government argues as Mr. Abraham did when I visited him in Umtata: if private (which means white) industry enters the Transkei, it will inevitably exploit the cheap labor and create racial frictions. Moreover, Bantu enterprisers, disposing of less capital and skill, will be discouraged from moving in or developing locally.

It is obvious that if white private investment becomes interested in the Transkei, it will insist on obtaining favorable conditions in the form of tax reduction, government-built housing, etc. After all, Pretoria which has launched the "border area" program, is willing to extend all sorts of facilities to industrial plants moving there. Business enterprises would demand at least the same advantages if they were to settle in the Transkei.

The arguments of those who favor private investment in the Bantustans was well summed up by Mr. Oosthuizen, editor of the Port-Elisabeth daily *Die Oosterlig*. Like that of so many young Nationalists, his outlook is quite liberal. He travels often in the Transkei and considers it a successful venture provided the government does not make it a *chasse-gardée* for its own experimentation. He agrees with

Paul Giniewski that white firms should be authorized to move in if they are willing to train Bantu personnel for an ultimate take-over with suitable compensation.

In spite of Pretoria's obvious efforts to make a success of the Transkei, the experiment has bitter opponents. There are, of course, cynics like the elderly doctor I met in the hotel restaurant at Umtata who said that "all this is useless," that if the black man cannot be "kept in his place," the whites better clear out—now. But there are those—more serious—who do not believe in the re-tribalization of the Bantu, whether in the Transkei or elsewhere. Here again we hit a controversy passionately argued all over Africa: will the tribe, as the political-social structure most adapted to the African mind, prevail after a short venture in democracy, parliamentary system and Statehood—or is the tribe already obsolete, maintained artificially by the white man and the chiefs who do not want to yield authority?

In the 1960's it is still too early to offer an answer, even a reasonable prediction; there are endless "proofs" on both sides. Pretoria naturally assumes that the tribe is the ultimate political grouping for the African: two-thirds of Transkei's legislators are tribal chiefs, only one-third are elected among the rest of the citizens. Many of these chiefs, like Matanzima and his opponent, Victor Poto, are admirable men with a progressive outlook and care deeply for their people. Other chiefs abuse their position, resist the betterment projects (because they may draw a good income from their squatters), and do not satisfy contenders before the tribal courts. In such cases the government reserves the right to intervene, even to depose the chief. But such intervention weakens the chiefs' authority and points to Pretoria, that is to the State (and the Courts and other white institutions) as the fountainhead of true authority.

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Often the best—perhaps the only—way to answer these questions is to put aside the method of statistics and interviews, and let a chance encounter dispel the confusion. In a December afternoon we were driving through the countryside and discovered a trading post managed by a middle-aged Bantu couple known as Mr. and Mrs. Pieter. In many respects I found them to be the kind of people who rejoice one's heart after hearing so many anguished comments. The man had worked for thirty years as assistant in a white man's store in Johannesburg and East London, then he came to the present location with a loan from the Bantu Investment Corporation.

The amount was 12,500 Rand (about \$17,500) with a six percent interest payable in twenty years. With the money he bought out the white owner: the stock, a neat little home attached to the store, and 14 morgens (about thirty acres) of land. Today he has in addition a herd of cattle, every year a good harvest of corn, and a new transport van. When he is away on business, his wife runs the store.

The Pieters are trilingual: they speak English, Afrikaans and Xhosa, which is not at all rare among the Bantus. I watched them for a full hour serve their customers; if "progress" is no mere slogan, then I can say I saw what it may really mean in a concrete situation. Since I had previously visited a number of native villages, I knew more or less the standard of living of the average *kraal* (family), the traditional customs and apparel, the resistance to change. In the Pieters' store I saw the local women arrive wrapped in their traditional brick-red blankets—washed perhaps three times in a lifetime—timidly finger yards of cotton print, and finally buy some for a dress. I saw farmers and their wives buy medicine, cosmetics, bedsheets and beds, even corrugated metal to replace their thatch roofs.

After signing their guest book, I engaged Mr. Pieter in conversation. He told me of the plan he wishes to submit to the new Transkei government concerning a regular exchange of students between the Transkei and the cities outside. He deplors the trend towards detribalization, the drifting of young men to the big cities, attracted, as he puts it, by "beds, white sheets, and other luxuries." At the beginning they send money home to the family, then they slowly forget to. True, in such cases the abandoned family complains to the Chief; but often the latter cannot do much to help.

While we were talking, Mrs. Pieter was quite busy: there was a steady flow of customers, indeed from 5 a.m. when the first farmers show up to buy spare parts for plows. In one corner I saw pieces of furniture: the Pieters encourage their customers to build square-shaped huts instead of circular ones because they are more easily furnished with beds, chests of drawers, tables, etc.

When we left, after making some purchases, I looked back at the neat porch of the Pieters' home, and at Mr. Pieter himself who was now hauling huge bags of corn into the store. He bought the corn from a farmer's surplus, and was going to sell it to some improvident. It was a picture of work and improvement; and, in the case of this lovable couple and others like them, it was a picture of constructive citizenship.