

The 1910 Union of South Africa and the Rise of the Early Black Political Awareness

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ABSTRACT: *The history of black resistance started by the white conquest and its domination of the South African land. However, this resistance underwent profound modifications in the years following the concrete settlement of the first colonists in the seventeenth century. Each form of resistance represented a specific reaction and attempted solution to the political, economic and social problems generated by a white supremacy. Later, the distinct forms of Black resistance were also determined by the changes in the natives' needs and consciousness, for they were bound by the historical and social context in which they originated and matured.*

KEYWORDS: South Africa, politics, blacks, awareness

RÉSUMÉ : *L'histoire de la résistance noire a commencé avec la conquête blanche et le rejet de la domination blanche. Puis cette résistance a subi de profondes modifications dans les années qui ont suivi la colonisation concrète des premiers colons au XVIIe siècle. Chaque forme de résistance représentait une réaction spécifique et une tentative de solution aux problèmes politiques, économiques et sociaux engendrés par une suprématie blanche. Plus tard, les formes distinctes de résistance noire ont également été déterminées par le changement dans les besoins et la conscience des autochtones, car ils étaient liés par le contexte historique et social dans lequel ils ont commencé et mûri.*

MOTS-CLÉS : Afrique du Sud, politique, conscience

الملخص: بدأ تاريخ مقاومة السود مع الغزو الأبيض ورفض الهيمنة البيضاء. ثم خضعت هذه المقاومة لتعديلات عميقة في السنوات التي أعقبت التسوية الملموسة للمستعمرين الأوائل في القرن السابع عشر. شكل إيتش المقاومة رد فعل محدد وحاول حل المشاكل السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية الناتجة عن تفوق البيض. في وقت لاحق، تم تحديد الأشكال المتميزة لمقاومة السود أيضاً بواسطة "التغيرات في احتياجات السكان الأصليين ووعيهم، لأنهم مرتبطون بالسياق التاريخي والاجتماعي الذي نشأوا ونضجوا فيه. يجب أن يكون الملخص مكوناً من فقرة واحدة لا تحتوي على أكثر من

Introduction:

The history of colonialism in Africa is usually centred around the European conquests and occupation that evolved into the scramble of the continent in the nineteenth century. For the Europeans, it had long – established positive effects on the political and economic development of Europe. However, for the African countries, colonialism was a multi-forms aggression of the African societies. Indeed, it negatively impacted on the social, economic and political spheres of the continent. As a matter of fact, colonial policies acquired control over the natives’ areas, seized lands, created boundaries, exploited raw materials, used the locals as a forced labour and diluted the African culture and traditions.

In one of his anti-colonial texts named *A dying colonialism*, Frantz Fanon mentioned that

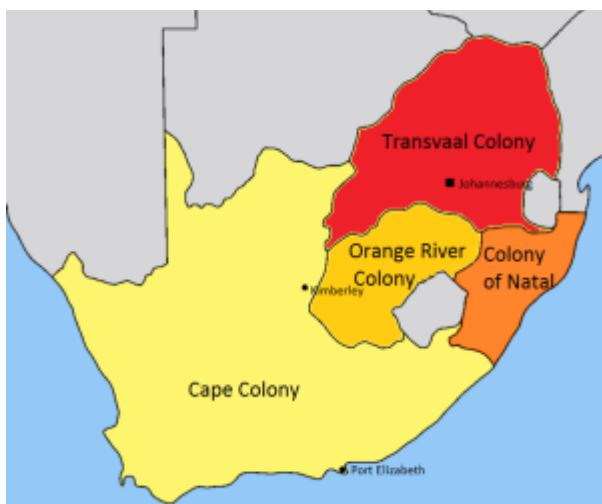
“There is not occupation of territory on the one hand and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final destruction. Under these conditions, the individual’s breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing”¹.

South Africa was one of these countries which witnessed subjugation by the European imperialism. Nevertheless, the country was a distinct case of a colonial dominion. Not only was it a matter of exploitation, but it was also a colonial policy based on racial discrimination that left the country shattered for centuries.

¹ Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) is a French West Indian psychiatrist, author, philosopher and a revolutionary from the French colony of Martinique. He is known for supporting the Algerian Revolution. Among his writings: *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), *A Dying Colonialism* (1963) and *Toward the African* (1969). Quoted from <https://kentakpage.com/the-wretched-of-the-earth>.

The creation of the South African Union:

The co-existence of the Boers and the English-speaking Whites led to the creation of the South African Union on May 30, 1910. This new union created a white government that established a new constitution and three major administrative Cape Town as the legislative capital, Pretoria and Bloemfontein were the administrative and judicial ones respectively. It also fixed the boundaries of modern South Africa. (See map 1)



Map 1: *The Union of South Africa of 1910*

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_of_South_Africa

The 1910 proposed constitution provided for the welfare of both the British and the Boers. The Boers who have already experienced the oppressive rule of the former British government decided to go beyond their differences and worked for their common welfare. Moreover, they worked for the implementation of the discriminatory political views for the maintenance of a white supremacy as stated in the former constitutions of the two Boer Republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The latter stated that the White race was a superior race and could never equal the Black one and forbade any equality between the two races. Therefore,

the Union constitution was the continuity of an already legalized racial discrimination.

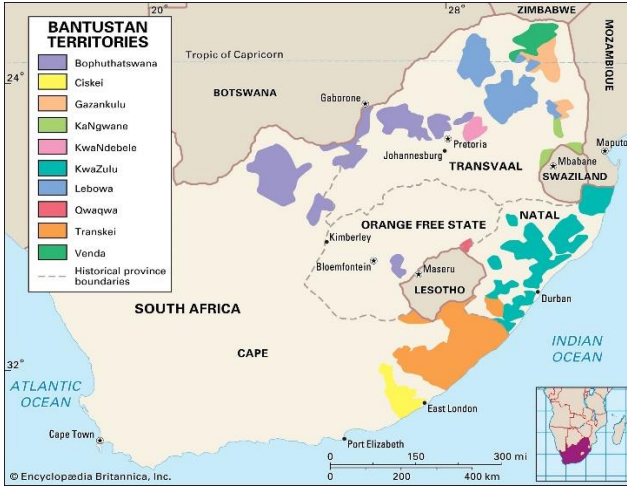
The factors that contributed to the emergence of a Black political class:

By 1911, more than 25% of Africans were Christians and many had degrees of missionary education. The growing educated Africans viewed the South Africa Union as a betrayal, especially which they had supported the British war against the two Boer Republics and many served in the British army.

Thus, it was clear for the African elite that political power would be used by Whites to advance their political, social and economic positions at the expense of Africans.

Meanwhile, the economy of South Africa witnessed an industrial revolution through the discovery of the Kimberley diamonds and the Witwatersrand gold mines in 1867 and 1886 respectively. Mine magnates like Cecile and Herbert Rhodes who founded the famous the De Beers Company wanted large numbers of natives to work for them. Therefore, the then government introduced the 1913 land Act. The latter restricted the area where the Blacks could purchase or owe land and drew separated reserves, homelands of the natives, in order to limit to move to the areas reserved to the white minority (See map 2).

Map 2: The Black Homelands



Source : <http://mapsof.net/south-africa/homelands>

Immediately after, families lost their lands; for others, it became very difficult to live in restricted areas where the daily life became limited in commodities and resources. The disastrous 1913 Land Act was the cause poverty and overcrowding. As a matter of fact, the Blacks were compelled to look for work on the mines.

The Act was followed by the introduction of the pass system. Its main function was to control their movements and made sure they worked either on the mines or on the farms, and compelled them to go back to their reserves as a permanent place of living.

The life of the Black people began to worsen and with no guarantee of rights. This situation was the turning point in their history of fighting. It became urgent for an organized political action against the oppression of the Whites.

While African people were not represented in the negotiation of the constitution, they were not prevented from petitioning the convention drafting it. The fear of losing what rights they did hold agitated many

African people and boosted support for the few organizations that represented their interests. Upon the convergence of such interests, African organizations consulted with each other to find ways of influencing the convention. This, in part, laid the basis for a single national organization.

The wars against the European settlers were characterized by courage, rejection, fighting and defeat, pathed the way to a Black maturity. Africans had to find new ways to fight for their land and their freedom.

The formation of the early Black political parties:

Initially, On January 8th 1912, chiefs, representatives of locals and Black churchmen, and other prominent educated people assembled in Bloemfontein and formed the first Black South African Party: The South African Native National Congress (SANNC, renamed in 1923 the African National Congress, ANC). The ANC aimed at bringing the Africans together to defend their rights as part of the South African nation. The ANC had to keep their ancestral spirit of resistance. It also had to bring millions of Blacks in the struggle for justice. Its policy it was a history of struggle.

However, as a first test, the lack of experience of the members of the SANNC was clearly confirmed when their representations to the South African Party (SAP) government to discuss the enactment of the Natives Land Act of 1913 were disregarded. Their eagerness to serve the Blacks was, yet greater. In 1919 the Party led a campaign against the passes in Transvaal, and then it supported the strike of the African mineworkers in 1920 even if most of the SANNC leaders disagreed with the launch of strikes or protests. For the leaders, discussion with the British government was the only legal issue for the recognition of their rights.

This unrealistic strategy meant that the ANC was not very functional in the 1920s; the trade unions had a better role such as the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) .It was formed in 1919 and the most effective body in rural and urban areas. The ICU won some crucial victories for its workers. It was then the Communist Party as the first non-racial political organization in South Africa to defend the rights of the Blacks through militant actions.

Conclusion:

To sum up, The Union of South Africa which was characterized by an official discrimination led to a divided country; however, the Black natives became conscious and protested against the spread of the official introduction of racial segregation.

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