Ideology and Self-Representation in *The Calling of Katie Makanya*[1]

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Social historians and anthropologists who have studied the social and cultural consequences of the encounter between Africa and the colonising Western countries have commented on the characteristic world-view of the Africans who embraced the coloniser's religion and its underlying cultural and political outlook[2]. As also shown in their own writings and utterances, Africans who converted to Christianity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seem to have understood the implications of accepting the religion of the Christian missionaries and the lifestyle associated with it: they were expected to renounce or radically re-define their own traditional belief systems, values and cultural practices and to adopt an alien world-view which was presented as having universal applicability and validity. As Albert Luthuli (1962:19) puts it in his autobiography, *Let My People Go*:

> The revolution which Christianity brought into the lives of converts was profound, as can perhaps be imagined. Conversion meant an entirely new way of life, a new outlook, a new set of beliefs—the creation, almost, of *a new kind of people* (e.a.).

This process of cultural and moral transformation which has been variously described as assimilation, deculturation, acculturation and, most recently, as transculturation, was characterised by numerous inherent ambiguities and contradictions.

Obviously, conversion to Christianity and its underpinning cultural system did not simply entail a displacement of one world-view by another, but involved complex processes of accommodation and adjustment between the contending

[1] This is a slightly revised version of a paper presented at the EACLALS conference at the University of Tübingen, Germany, 6-11 April 1999.

[2] See David Welsh (1971); Norman Etherington (1978); Gail Gerhart (1978); Shula Marks (1986); Absalom Vilakazi (1965) and Bernard Magubane (1979).

cultural systems. Francoise Lionnet's (1995:11) assessment of the dynamics of the colonial situation echoes what has become the fashionable view of most contemporary postcolonial theorists on this issue:

> It is not assimilation that appears inevitable when Western technology and education are adopted by the colonized, or when migration to the metropole severs some of the migrants' ties to a particular birthplace. Rather, the move forces individuals to stand in relation to the past and the present at the same time, to look for creative means of incorporating useful 'Western' tools, techniques, or strategies into their own cosmology of *Weltanschauung*.

To suggest, as Lionet does in the above-quoted statement, that the colonising and colonised cultures were interacting on equal terms in a relationship marked by reciprocity, seems to me to be a tendentious misrepresentation of the relationship of domination and subordination which characterised the colonial era. Any assessment of the colonial encounter which suggests that the colonised *deliberately* chose those aspects of the colonising culture which they found 'useful' for their purposes is bound to lead to a distortion and misrepresentation of colonial cross-cultural relations. Obviously, conscious choice and selection are incompatible with 'ideological coercion' which was the logical consequence of military conquest or invasion and dispossession. Postcolonial theorists and scholars who have taken it upon themselves to be the writers and interpreters of African 'history' have coined the term 'transculturation' to denote what they see as the essentially reciprocal nature of the colonial encounter. Mary Louise Pratt's (1992:6) conception of transculturation is in line with this fashionable trend in postcolonial theory:

> Ethnographers have used this term [transculturation] to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for.

Perhaps the analytical concept of 'transculturation' is not the most appropriate conceptual tool to describe colonial cross-cultural relations characterised by military conquest and the subsequent ideological manipulation which saw both the covert and overt coercion of the colonised into adopting the ideas, attitudes and values of the colonising nations. What is often overlooked by social scientists and critics who use this term is that the 'subordinated or marginal groups' were coerced physically and ideologically into the acceptance of alien cultural values. Whether

they later regarded the adopted moral and cultural outlook as inherently valuable and functional is beside the point. The effect of the inescapably hegemonic character of the ideology of the colonisers and the missionaries on the lifestyle and values of African converts to Christianity cannot be over-emphasised. As T.J. Jackson Lears (1985:568) reminds us,

> we need ... to recognise that the concept of hegemony has little meaning unless paired with the notion of domination. For Gramsci, consent and force nearly always coexist, though one or the other predominates.

As demonstrate in Katie Makanya's[3] self-portrayal in her autobiography, the underpinning ideology of a civilisation the code words of which were 'rationality', 'enlightenment', 'progress', 'morality' and 'justice' gradually gained acceptance among the converted Africans and provided the language or, more appropriately, a discourse of self-definition for the converted African Christian community. As a way of legitimating and reinforcing their newly acquired identities, the converts often presented themselves as having a fundamentally different moral and cultural outlook from the traditionalists. As Paul la Hausse (1993:196) rightly points out, there was an unbridgeable chasm between traditionalists and the Christianised African (Zulu) community of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

> As 'civilised', 'progressive' and, most importantly, 'respectable' members of colonial society who had left the 'backward' cultural and social organisation of pre-capitalist Zulu society behind them, the *kholwa* faithfully believed in the 'promise of Queen Victoria'.

Social historians who have written on the mission-educated African intelligentsia of the early twentieth century tend to focus on the inevitable contradictions and ambiguities evident in the moral outlook and practices of the *amakholwa* community and often portray the newly converted African Christians, quite rightly , as 'people of two worlds'. While this interpretation is obviously valid, it is also true that the *amakholwa* community exhibited qualities which clearly distinguished them from those Africans who clung to traditional beliefs and practices. As David Welsh (1971:300) rightly points out:

> There were, of course, many gradations between the views of the *kholwa* class ... and those of traditionalists. Many *kholwa* people could not share

[3] To distinguish between Katie Makanya's two roles as author and character I use her surname to indicate the former role and her first name to denote the latter.

> the missionaries' intolerance of traditionalism, ..., and many members of the independent African churches, too, saw no reason why Christianity and traditionalism should be regarded as mutually exclusive. But in general the *kholwa* people saw themselves as a special class, set apart from traditionalists and entitled to a measure of equality with the whites.

Thus the apparently deliberate valorising of the notion of 'cultural hybridity' evident in McCord's portrayal of Katie Makanya has the, perhaps unintended, effect of blurring the very deep-seated differences between the *amakholwa* social group and the traditionalists. In his essay on John Dube, R. Hunt Davis (1975-1976:515,527) offers a fairly accurate description of the status of what he describes as the 'acculturated Africans':

> His [Dube's] membership in the *kholwa* class provide him with the basic identity that he shared with the others of the educated African elite. The common element in all their lives was the fact that they had ceased to form part of so-called traditional African society.

David Welsh (1971) and Norman Etherington (1978) have shown that what distinguished the Christianised Africans from the traditionalists was the former's rejection of the cultural beliefs and practices which are seen by the latter group as central to African culture. These include the veneration of the ancestors (*amadlozi*), polygamous marriages (*isithembu*), the bride price (*ilobolo*) tradition, and reliance on traditional healers (*izinyanga*) and diviners (*izangoma*) for spiritual, mental and physical well-being.

This paper examines the effect of colonial Christian-liberal ideology in shaping self-conception and self-portrayal within the mode of collaborative autobiography. Like most life-stories of multiply marginalised people who wish to leave a record of their achievements for posterity, Makanya's story raises questions bout the relationship of the editor of an oral life story and the narrating subject, the danger of misrepresentation inherent in collaborative autobiography and perhaps most importantly, the issue of 'speaking for others'. In an essay provocatively entitled 'The Problem of Speaking for Others' Linda Alcoff (1991-1992 6f)reminds us that:

> ...there is a growing recognition that where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says, and thus that one cannot assume an ability to transcend one's location. In other words, a speaker's location (which I take here to refer to their *social* location, or social identity) has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker's claims and can serve either to authorize or disauthorize one's speech.

These and other related issues have received a fair amount of critical attention in the work of Philipe Lejeune (1989); Anne McClintock (1991); Carole Boyce Davies (1992); Anne E. Goldmann (1993); and Judith Coullie (1997). However, it is worth pointing out that, for historical reasons, edited life-stories are increasingly becoming a common feature of South African publishing industry[4].

The conception of ideology utilised in this paper is drawn from Rosalind Coward and John Ellis's book, *Language and Materialism*. Relying on the Althusserian view of ideology Coward and Ellis (1977:67) explain the constitutive function of ideology as follows:

> It [ideology] is the way in which the individual actively lives his or her role within the social totality; it therefore participates in the construction of that individual so that he or she can act. Ideology is a practice of representation; a practice to produce a specific articulation, that is, producing certain meanings and necessitating certain subjects as their supports.

As I hope to show, Makanya's self-portrayal in her life-story is largely shaped by the ideology of enlightenment underpinning the work of the American missionaries in South Africa. It is this ideology, functioning as a 'practice of representation', which provides her and her editor with the 'appropriate' language of self-definition. In Makanya's life-story, metropolitan representations of the colonised other are reinforced and validated by what seems to be her deliberate reliance on both the 'discourses' and the moralistic philosophy of the missionaries in describing her own experience. Thus instead of offering a counter-hegemonic interpretation of her subjectivity, Makanya presents, through her editor, a self-portrait which largely reflects the ideology of moral and social transformation underlying the civilising project of the missionaries. Betty Bergland's (1994:160) account of the function of ideology in 'creating' the autobiographical subject has a particular pertinence to Makanya's autobiography:

> Because autobiographical subjects reproduce prevailing ideologies, the issues raised by autobiography are not simply literary or historical, but cultural ones. If we consider culture in the broadest sense to be what is prescribed and what is prohibited, then as autobiographies naturalize certain subject positions they serve to prescribe these positions and guarantee social relations implied by the subject.

[4] As a genre of life-writing collaborative autobiography is gaining increasing popularity in South Africa. Editors or facilitators include E. Joubert (1978), S. Marks (1987); S. Bourquin (1986) and K.L. Kendall (1996).

The Calling is the product of collaboration between Margaret McCord the daughter of the American Board missionary doctor, James McCord who founded the McCord Zulu Hospital in 1909. Recognising the historical significance of her 'calling' as Dr McCord's first assistant and the inherent value of her various social roles, Katie Makanya appealed to McCord's daughter to preserve her story in writing for future generations (McCord 1995:3f). Katie's elder sister, Charlotte Makgomo Maxeke who earned herself the enviable title of 'Mother of Black Freedom in South Africa' had written her autobiography although it was not published. Her story would have had a far greater appeal than Katie's because of her prominence in a multiplicity of national roles including that of teacher, social worker, politician and founder of the Bantu Women's League of South Africa. Like her sister with whom she was always in competition, Katie Makanya wanted the story of her life to be told[5]. According to Margaret McCord, Katie believed that a book about her life as Dr. McCord's assistant would fill the gaps and omissions in Dr. McCord's own autobiographical book of his life in South Africa as a missionary doctor[6].

While critics and general readers may read Makanya's life story as history, ethnography or even as 'fiction', Margaret McCord wrote *The Calling* as a very close friend of Katie's who had been prevailed upon by the latter to publish her story. *The Calling* is the story of a retired semi-literate black woman written by her younger and more educated white friend. The story was told orally and recorded on tape in 1954 and, forty years later, transcribed, edited and presented as a readable narrative in book form. In one of the early reviews of the book when it appeared in 1995 it was hailed as 'a moving act of feminist retrieval' by a reviewer who went on to remark:

> Even in her extreme old age Makanya had a zest for life, demonstrated in her determination to leave a record of her experiences. It is this zest that Margaret McCord captures in her biography of a courageous woman whose history is both individual and emblematic of the lives of many black South African women (Kossick 1995:34).

In keeping with the status of Makanya's book as a carefully researched quasi-ethnographic collaborative autobiography[7], my discussion will focus on what I regard

[5] Author's interview with Margaret McCord, 3 August 1999, Durban. For the impressive biographical sketch of Charlotte Maxeke, see E.J. Verwey (ed): *New Dictionary of South African Biography.*

[6] Author's interview with Margaret McCord, 3 August 1999; Durban. James McCord's autobiographical book is entitled *My Patients Were Zulus* (1946).

[7] In her acknowledgement, McCord mentions the names of people who assisted her in various ways with the research which formed part of the writing process.

as McCord's attempt to 'balance' African traditionalism and Western modernity in the process of 'writing up' her friend's oral story. The process of 'writing up' requires a structuring interpretive framework provided by the competition between Katie and her elder sister as well as by the inevitable discrepancies between African traditionalism and Western modernity.

Although most African Christians of Katie's time often displayed largely ambivalent attitudes towards some aspects of Western culture, she seems to have had no major reservations about what she saw as the inherent superiority of the imperial culture. Her rather dismissive attitude towards traditional African cultural values and practices is confirmed by her consistent self-portrayal as an almost fundamentalist Christian who has completely renounced traditional beliefs and practices. However, in the process of writing her story McCord attempts to problematise issues of identity and consciousness by portraying her as 'a person of two worlds'. Thus for McCord, editing the oral version of Makanya's story involves more than merely giving the reader an 'accurate' account of Makanya's understanding of key events in her life. Among other things, the editing process entails the conscious deployment of interpretive and analytical skills, an attempt empathetically to understand her subject's experiences, as well as reliance on the conventional techniques of story-telling such as plausibility, narrative sequence and credible characterisation. Moreover, like an ethnographer, McCord assumes the apparently incongruous role of participant-observer in Makanya's life. As James Clifford (1988:34) points out, the ethnographer combines the perspectives of 'experience' and 'interpretation':

> 'Participant observation' serves as shorthand for a continuous tacking between the 'inside' and 'outside' of events: on the one hand grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically, on the other stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts.

I will argue that McCord's strategically positioned editorial comments (all seven of which are captioned *'Durban 1954'*) which form part of the text, suggest her awareness of her rather precarious position as a writer and analyst of Katie's oral narrative. In these 'interludes' McCord adopts a self-reflexive and analytical perspective as she comments on the actual recording and writing process. As I have explained elsewhere[8], in these 'editorial interventions' McCord cleverly anticipates the criticism of those readers who may be critical of the privileged white intellectuals (including writers like McCord) who arrogate to themselves the right to *speak for* the

[8] See Thengani H. Ngwenya's review of *The Calling of Katie Makanya* in *Southern African Review of Books* 39&40,1995:6f.

underprivileged black women. In the first of these 'editorial interventions' McCord (1995:n.p.) records the following revelatory dialogue between her and Katie:

> When you were little you slept in my bed, ate my food, played with my children. When I was too busy to answer your why-why-why, you tied my baby John to your back and pretended that he was your brother. You were like a daughter to me.

It would not be inaccurate therefore to categorise Makanya's life story as a mode of autobiographical writing which Paul John Eakin has aptly called 'the story of the story' in which 'the story of the other, of the informant ..., is accompanied by the story of the individual gathering the oral history' (Eakin 1998:70f). For McCord, interviewing Makanya also entails reliving significant events and occurrences in the history of her own family[9].

I Formative Experiences

Although *The Calling* is presented to the reader as a 'true story' like most autobiographies, it could also be easily categorised as 'fiction'[10]. Makanya's moral outlook is so typical of the Westernised African elite of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that McCord could easily have created a fictional yet credible character of Katie Makanya on the basis of historical accounts of the behaviour patterns and attitudes of her social group. Clearly, Makanya's autobiography is not simply a story of a woman who was 'called' into the Christian faith to serve as a missionary doctor's general assistant as suggested by the book's title, but it is also a story which provides valuable insights into the discourses which in part 'created' and sustained the class of the converted Africans (*amakholwa*).

Perhaps the most noticeable feature of converted Africans was their willingness to give up their African names and their eagerness to adopt the so-called Christian names. The name change was supposed to be emblematic of significant

[9] See Thengani H. Ngwenya's review of *The Calling of Katie Makanya* for a discussion of McCord's relationship with Makanya and the interweaving of this relationship into the published text. Significantly, it is Katie who gave Margaret McCord her Zulu name, Ntombikanina when the latter was an infant.

[10] James Clifford (1986:6) reminds us that 'the word fiction as commonly used in recent textual theory has lost its connotation of falsehood, of something merely opposed to truth. It suggests the partiality of cultural and historical truths, the ways in which they are systematic and exclusive.

changes in moral consciousness and self-conception. As the children of 'progressive' parents, the Manye (Katie's maiden name) children all had so-called Christian names inscribed in the family Bible by their almost fanatically religious mother:

> Ma was not like other mothers who told their children they were born in the time of this war or that war. Ma was an educated woman. She wrote everything down in the family Bible. First the record of Charlotte's birth, and then 'a second daughter, Katie, born on July 28, 1873 at Fort Beaufort in the Cape of Good Hope .... Pa was a Christian too, but not in his early years, and he did not altogether put aside the customs of his people. He called her by her home name, Malubisi—which means 'Mother of Milk'—because she was born at milking time' (McCord 1995:9f).

As shown in the depiction of Katie's father in this passage, the editor's intention seems to be to give the two competing world views (African traditionalism and Western modernity) equal and balanced representation in the book even when this is not entirely warranted by the people and events she is describing. For example, Katie's African name was rarely, if ever, used outside the extended family and there is no mention in the book of any significant African custom of which the missionaries disapproved but which Katie's father did not give up. So it is not entirely accurate, on the evidence of the text, to say that 'he did not altogether put aside the customs of his people' (McCord 1995:16). However, portraying him in this manner serves to reinforce and validate the writer's narrative and analytical framework.

Apart from their function of giving added authenticity to the events described in the book, the photos which take up the first eleven pages of the book text serve to foreground Katie's 'transcultural' status. In their arrangement there seems to be a deliberate attempt on the editor's part to juxtapose images and symbols of African traditionalism with those of Western modernity. Although there is ample evidence in the autobiography itself to suggest that Katie had, as far as this is possible, renounced African and, more specifically, (Sotho) customs and traditions, McCord consciously presents her moral sensibility as characterised by cultural hybridity which is often portrayed as a consequence of Katie's own choice[11]. For instance, when Katie is with the traditional Batlokwa community of Soekmekaar whom she repeatedly refers to as 'heathen', the editor, assuming the role of an omniscient narrator who has privileged access to her 'character's consciousness describes her as follows:

[11] See Katie's response to Dr McCord's question about believing in traditional healing methods (p. 178).

> As the days passed, Katie felt that even though she was a Christian girl, she belonged among the heathen Batlokwa. It seemed to her that all the years of her life had been one long journey home to Soekmekaar (McCord 1995:80).

Characterising the young Katie in obviously self-contradictory terms as a 'Christian girl' who also belongs to the 'heathen Batlokwa tribe' is part of the editor's strategy to give the two competing world views a semblance of equality. Perhaps unwittingly casting doubt on her own assessment of Katie's moral awareness, the editor goes on to tell us how she could not adapt to the lifestyle of her age-mates in Soekmekaar and ultimately had to leave for Johannesburg to look for an educated Christian husband (McCord 1995:90). As her father's birth place, the rural village of Soekmekaar could only be a symbolic cultural 'home' for Katie, her real home would be in the shanty towns and mission stations of Johannesburg and Durban where people of her class and aspirations had congregated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in search of a way of life which suited their interests and aspirations.

When the Manye family went to settle among the Batlokwa tribe of Soekmekaar both Katie and her elder sister Charlotte had been to London as members of the African Native Choir which toured England from 1891 to 1893. The membership of this choir included teachers, clerks, nurses, social workers and other educated Africans. The selection of Katie and her elder sister Charlotte who was already a trained teacher, confirmed their class status as members of the very class-conscious emergent black petty-bourgeoisie of the time.

Mainly because of her Christian upbringing as well her exposure to British manners, Katie found it difficult to adjust to traditional life in Soekmekaar. When her playmates told her stories that were part of their community's folklore she would reciprocate by telling them about her experiences in London:

> ... they told Katie stories about Huveana, a little man who lived in the reeds and tossed a magic spell on anyone who came too near. In return Katie told them of all the wonders she had seen in London. The girls laughed at her stories, knowing such things to be impossible, just as Katie laughed at theirs (McCord 1995:81).

Katie is shown to be both an insider and outsider in most of the groups or situations described in the book: she is a Christian who has discarded the customs of the so-called heathen relatives yet she seems to appreciate the practical value of some traditional beliefs and customs. For instance, she finds the way the heathens treat unmarried mothers more humane than that of the Christians (McCord 1995:81). She also seems to take her grandfather seriously when he says he will come back from the dead in the form of a snake to protect his family (McCord 1995:85,89).

II Katie as a Domestic and Social Worker

After moving to Johannesburg in search of employment and a life that would accord with her tastes and interests, Katie joined the largely unskilled urban community in the informal settlement of Doornfontein. But the fact that she had been to England and could speak fluent English set her apart from the illiterate country girls who came to Johannesburg to sell their labour as domestic servants. Nevertheless, because of her lack of training the only job she was likely to get was that of a domestic worker. In her first job when she accidentally mentioned things she was not supposed to know as a domestic worker her employer suspected her of being a witch with magical powers. McCord (1995:103) describes her ambiguous status as follows:

> Everywhere she went it seemed that she was set apart—in England because her skin was black, in Kimberley because she had lived too long among the English, in Ramkgopa's village because she was a Christian, and now here in her work because Mrs Height thought she had magic powers.

Mrs Height could not have guessed that Katie as a 'Christian girl' would never think of herself as even remotely connected with traditional African beliefs and cultural practices. The most articulate spokespersons of the *amakholwa* community who saw themselves as mediators between the two cultures openly declared their opposition to traditional beliefs and customs. A typical comment in this regard was made by John L Dube in his 'Address to the Chiefs and People of the South African Native Congress', presented in absentia on his appointment as president in 1912:

> Upward! Into the higher places of civilisation and Christianity—not backward into the slump of darkness nor downward into the abyss of the antiquated tribal system. Our salvation is not there, but in preparing ourselves for an honoured place amongst the nations[12].

In line with her deliberately ambiguous portrayal of Katie Makanya, McCord's attempts to create 'contact zones'[13] marked by mutual exchange or reciprocity between African traditionalism and European modernity. For example, Katie's grandfather (referred to as the Old Man in the book) and the chief of the Batlokwa tribe (Ramkgopa) are presented as articulate spokespersons of the indigenous Sotho

[12] Qouted in Shula Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa*, p.53.

[13] According to Pratt (1992:4) contact zones are 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.

culture. By recreating convincing dialogue between Katie's mother and the Old Man on such controversial topics as arranged marriages, ancestor worship, traditional medicine and other cultural practices McCord ensures that the defining features of both cultures have an equal representation in Makanya's life story.

Katie's first job as a domestic worker was hardly consistent with her own chosen status as a member of the educated African elite. However, in an urban environment in which jobs were scarce she had to play the role of an unsophisticated country girl in order to keep her job. Things began to change when she joined her husband's church, the American Board Mission. She soon became an outspoken member of the Women's Association and was subsequently asked to act as interpreter to Mr. Dickson who had been hired by the Chamber of Mines to teach black workers about the dangers of intoxicating drink. Like her later role as Dr. McCord's assistant, this was a job befitting her status and self-conception. In an attempt to make her message accessible to mine workers most of whom were illiterate, Katie spoke to them in their various home languages using appropriate African imagery and exploiting their prejudices and fears:

> 'Are you afraid of my words?' she shouted back in Xhosa. 'Then you are right to be afraid. Because my words are not the words of a woman. I am the mouth of the white *inyanga* who comes to warn you of the evil spirits waiting for you in all the drinks you buy from the old witches in this town. Pretty soon the spirits will burn you up inside until you die' (McCord 1995:124).

Adopting the perspective of the enlightened social worker Katie spoke to her own people in what is supposed to be their 'language'—the language of superstition and apparently irrational fears and beliefs. Following the example of her sister Charlotte who was then an active member of the Temperance Movement in America, Katie began visiting women in other churches, schools and even shebeens urging them to join her new Temperance Union. As a person who judged everything from a religious perspective, Katie regarded her job as having an inherent moral and social significance. Although she was always busy she was contented with her efforts:

> There were meetings to plan, parades to lead, and songs to teach to the children after school. At last her life was complete. Even without a high school education, she was doing important work. If Pa could see her now, he would be proud. Charlotte, too, would think she was doing an important work (McCord 1995:125).

In many ways Katie's involvement in social and humanitarian projects was in emula-

tion of her sister Charlotte Maxeke whose achievements are nothing short of phenomenal. The following extract from an entry in the *New Dictionary of South African Biography* illustrates both her versatility and commitment to improving the quality of life of her people:

> Maxeke was known country-wide for her political activities. In 1918 she was the driving force behind the establishment of Bantu Women's League of the South African native National Congress (SANNC, African National Congress; (ANC) after 1923). As president of the Women's League she led a delegation to Prime Minister Louis Botha in 1918 to discuss the question of passes for women as proposed in an amendment of the pass laws (1995:169).

III Katie's Calling

When the Anglo-Boer War broke out in 1899 Katie and her family had to move from Doornfontein in Johannesburg to Amanzimtoti Mission Reserve in Natal. Katie must have believed that her marrying a Zulu brought up and educated in an American Board Mission station was God's plan for her to meet Dr. James McCord for whom she worked for 35 years. From the perspective of hindsight Katie could see everything she did prior to her meeting the missionary doctor including her education and her visit to Britain as forming part of the long preparation for her job as Dr. McCord's general assistant. Being a Christian who could read, write and speak English and six indigenous languages and who also had a keen interest in the improvement of her people's standard of living were her most outstanding credentials for this job. In his own autobiographical account of his life in South Africa Dr. James McCord (1946:119) explains Katie's role as follows:

> Katie Makanya faithfully carried out any work assigned to her, but her knowledge of six native dialects made her so invaluable as interpreter that I kept her much of the time in the consulting room.

Although her relationship with Dr. McCord was characterised by mutual understanding, respect and loyalty what really kept them together was their shared religious beliefs. According to Katie, Dr. McCord was doing God's work and needed the support and assistance of educated Africans (McCord 1995:178). Interestingly, the uneducated Zulus believed that Dr. McCord had trained secretly under a famous *inyanga* (Zulu traditional healer) because he understood and could treat what they regarded as uniquely African diseases, especially those caused by the dreaded 'evil spirits'. When Dr. McCord jokingly asked Katie whether she also believed these stories about his secret

initiation into traditional medicine she was deeply offended by what she saw as a sign of the doctor's failure to understand her moral outlook as an 'enlightened' African. Katie's response to the doctor's question as carefully paraphrased by Margaret McCord (1995:178) is worth quoting at length as it reveals the definitive features of both her moral consciousness and self-conception:

> He had no right to ask her such a question, not when he knew she was a good Christian like her mother and her grandfather and her great-grandmother .... Not when he knew she had lived among white people in England. Not when he knew her own sister had graduated from a university in America and even now was building a school among the heathen in Soekmekaar. Not when she had also left her husband and her eldest son alone in the country to follow him in God's work.

This generalised yet comprehensive and detailed account of Makanya's insight into her own moral awareness is at the core of her autobiographical self-portrayal in *The Calling*. As readers we can only grasp the significance of Katie's self conception if we look at the *assessment* given above as McCord's interpretation of the key constitutive features of Makanya's moral awareness and concomitant self-conception.

As a Christian, Katie was sceptical of the value of traditional healing methods and wouldn't have anything to do with traditional healers. However, when her own son was suffering from what the doctors diagnosed as a nervous breakdown, she desperately tried all possible remedies. But when his condition did not improve she began considering something that would have been unthinkable to a person of her beliefs and convictions—seeking help from traditional healers. When she ultimately decided to consult an *inyanga*, she was prevented from entering his home by his messenger who told her to go back home as she was not welcome. This incident raises a number of knotty questions not only about the veracity of McCord's presentation of this incident but also about the interpretive and selective nature of the editing process: was Katie refused assistance because she was a known Christian, or because she worked for a white missionary doctor, or is this one of the instances of deliberate distortion of events by the editor for the sake of portraying Katie as consistent in her beliefs, or did Katie, for obvious reasons, prefer this version of this incident? Sadly, Katie's son was eventually sent to an institution for the incurably insane.

IV Katie's Political Outlook

Obviously, the influence of religion on African converts was not confined to spiritual matters. Katie's involvement in politics is thus in line with the dominant world view

of moderate black leaders such as John L. Dube, the first president of the African National Congress. Like Dube, Katie regarded herself as a *hamba-kahle* (moderate) person as opposed to radical members of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union such as Bertha Mkhize and Violet Makanya. Katie is therefore describing her own moderate political orientation when she says of Dube: 'John Dube doesn't rush about like a wild bull, frightening everyone. He looks for the right path, one that may be a long way round but will in time take him safely home' (McCord 1995:214). There seems to have been a direct correlation between the political outlook of leaders such as Dube and Albert Luthuli and their religious beliefs. To most of them political problems which required militant political mobilisation appeared as moral issues. As Luthuli (1962:39) explains in his autobiography:

> It became clear to me that the Christian faith was not a private affair without relevance to society. It was, rather, belief which equipped us in a unique way to meet the challenges of our society. It was a belief which had to be applied to the conditions of our lives; and our many works—they ranged from Sunday School teaching to road-building—became meaningful as the outflow of Christian belief.

Confirming Luthuli's views, Gail Gerhart (1978:34) offers a convincing account of the attitudes of mission-educated leaders of the African National Congress during this period:

> Though not cut off from contact with traditional society, this African elite was in many ways alienated from traditional customs and norms. A belief in the superiority of European culture was basic to its world view, and its goals were unabashedly assimilationist. Having come through the experience of missionary boarding schools, it was well steeped in the liberal and Christian presumptions which prevailed in these institutions, including the optimistic liberal faith in the inevitability of progress.

Besides moral reservations which provided an ideological deterrence to political agitation by the oppressed, there was also the obvious military superiority of the white man's army to contend with. Thus when the Zulu chief Bhambatha Zondi led a violent rebellion against the British rulers of the Natal province in 1906, African Christians and other 'loyal natives' considered his actions not only foolhardy but also as unacceptable on moral grounds. As McCord (1995:180) remarks, Katie's views on this matter reflected those of the African elite in Natal:

> Katie, like most of the educated Christian Zulus, was dismayed. How can a

> little chief like Bambatha (sic) do this when our great King Cetshwayo, failed? the people around Durban asked .... To stop Bambatha (sic), some of the Zulus formed their own cavalry regiment, the Natal Native Horse, to fight on the side of the British.

Dr. McCord, urged by the white officers most of whom were sons of the missionaries, enlisted as a medical officer to care for the wounded in the Native army. This episode provides a graphic example of ideological divisions between the politically-aware radical traditionalists on the one hand and Christianised Africans on the other hand. The willingness of the latter to take up arms against their own brothers is evidence of the unbridgeable chasm between these two groups. James McCord explains the attitude of Zulu volunteers in rather facile terms when he says, 'none of our natives saw anything incongruous in fighting their own people, for the Zulus have always practiced intertribal warfare' (McCord 1946:153). To attribute this division to Zulu military history, as James McCord does, is to ignore the potent role of ideology in shaping self-conception and social roles. Besides, McCord seems to have overlooked the obvious fact that this was intra-tribal warfare as distinct from what he terms 'intertribal warfare'.

Both Margaret McCord's and Katie's reflections on the past are shaped by dominant discourses of the latter's time as well as by the editor's analytical paradigm without which a coherent, plausible and interesting story could not have emerged. As I have tried to show, the imposition of an analytical framework on the subject's oral story often results in misrepresentation. However, it must be pointed out that the distortion of events and misrepresentation of ideas and ideologies constitute an inevitable feature of life-stories which originate from oral testimony. This inescapable shortcoming, however, does not detract from the capacity of edited life stories to provide opportunities for multiply marginalised people like Katie Makanya to enjoy the well-deserved status of active participants in the drama of history.

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