

Introduction

A growing literature on Bantustans has recognised the enduring impact of these bygone political formations. In the preface to a special issue of the *South African Historical Journal* entitled ‘Let’s Talk about Bantustans’, Shireen Ally and Arianna Lissoni declared ‘From struggles over land, to contestations of chieftainship, and the transformation of local elites, the histories of the former Bantustans proved critical to understanding the contemporary landscape of some of the dry, dusty expanses of the rural north.’¹ This article takes areas covered by two Bantustans in South Africa’s rural north as its subject, and, by telling a history of the role elite (trans)formation and political contestation in one Bantustan institution, it argues that people used Bantustans and their structures in a multiplicity of ways, for a variety of causes. It subverts dichotomies of collaboration and resistance, and aims to deepen our historical understanding of this region of South Africa.

It also takes seriously a call by Laura Evans for historians of South Africa’s Bantustans to engage with histories of decolonization elsewhere in Africa. Evans argues that, as European colonial powers devolved governance responsibilities and African colonies moved towards independence during the 1950s and 1960s, in South Africa ‘a policy of mimicry was commenced that would ‘modernise’ existing patterns of segregation through the development of ethnic national units in which black South Africans might exercise ‘democratic’ rights and ‘national sovereignty’.² By the early 1970s, during what is typically considered the height of apartheid, these ethnic reserves became ten politically distinct Bantustans, scattered across the country. Evans calls for

¹ S. Ally and A. Lissoni, ‘Let’s Talk About Bantustans’, *South African Historical Journal*, 64,1 (2012), 1-4. p. 1

² L. Evans, ‘South Africa’s Bantustans and the Dynamics of ‘Decolonisation’, *South African Historical Journal* 64,1 (2012), 117-137. p. 122

historians to resist the simplistic dichotomies of ‘collaboration’ versus ‘resistance’, which have often underpinned discussions of Bantustans³, and to follow the example of historians elsewhere on the continent in highlighting the agency of African people in shaping and using state institutions for their own ends, not only through overt resistance, but through a variety of forms of engagement.⁴ Fred Cooper’s work on French colonial Africa offers a guide: he argues that historians must resist the temptation to read the period of decolonization teleologically ‘as the inevitable triumph of nationalism’ because this risks losing the ‘the ways in which different groups within colonies mobilized for concrete ends and used as well as opposed the institutions of the colonial state’.⁵ In the South African context, applying Cooper’s advice means not reading the consolidation of apartheid laws and structures – including Bantustans – teleologically, either as the triumph of the apartheid state, or as creating the landscape for resistance. Both of these readings, though partially correct, miss the various ways that groups in South Africa and its Bantustans mobilized for a range of ‘concrete ends’, among them (though not exclusively) resistance to the state.

Following Cooper and Evans, in this article I use Bantustans as a South African colonial analogue, investigating the role of the University of the North (Turfloop) as one institution of the

³ This was common during the era that Bantustans were operating. For scholarly examples of flattening forms of engagement with and within Bantustans, Evans points to the work of Southall, Innes, and O’Meara on the Transkei, which depicted these regimes as ‘top-down’ impositions (*Ibid.* 124-5) to the relative exclusion of the way that people on the ground used these formations. Contemporary political commentary also often resorted to narratives of collaboration in relation to those working in Bantustan administrations. See S. Biko, *I Write What I Like* (London: Heineman, 1987), pp. 81-86.

⁴ Evans, ‘South Africa’s Bantustans’, p. 126.

⁵ F. Cooper, ‘The dialectics of decolonization: Nationalism and labor movements in post-war French Africa’, in F. Cooper and A. Stoler, eds. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 406.

developmental Bantustan state, and the ways in which it was used for political and personal ends. I also consider its impact on two of the Bantustans it served, with particular attention to Gazankulu, where it played a key developmental role, and Lebowa, where the university was situated and where it functioned both as an institution of the state and outside the state.

This article is based principally on archival sources, and draws on collections from the Wits Historical Papers Archive, the National Archives of South Africa, the archives of the Gazankulu government, which are housed in Giyani, and private collections. To the best of my knowledge, the documents included from these latter two, and the comprehensive minutes of meetings around the founding of the Matshangana Territorial Authority (housed in Pretoria) have not yet been used in a history of this period and area. My analysis of these documents has been aided by a series of oral histories conducted with former ministers and employees of the Gazankulu state, in Giyani, Hlaneki, Mhinga village, and Johannesburg.

In addition to this primary material, this article contributes to a growing body of literature on South Africa's northern Bantustans, including the work of Peter Delius⁶ and Ineke van Kessel⁷ on Sekhukhuneland and Lebowa, and Fraser McNeill⁸ on Venda. It is the first, albeit truncated, contribution to the political history of Gazankulu.⁹ It also contributes to a smaller collection of work on the University of the North. Most scholarship on this institution has focused on its

⁶ P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal*, (London: Heineman, 1996).

⁷ I. Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000).

⁸ F. McNeill, *AIDS, Politics, and Music in South Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁹ Scholarship on this homeland has thus far been restricted to medical, botanical, and agricultural studies.

reincarnation as a post-apartheid university¹⁰, though Christopher White's analysis of pedagogical change and transformation at the university includes sections of institutional history¹¹, and various authors have included reference to Turfloop in histories of student protest.¹²

Apartheid aims and unexpected outcomes at the University College of the North

In 1959, the apartheid government extended the power and scope of its earlier Bantu Education Act (1953) by passing the Extension of University Education Act and the University College of Fort Hare Transfer Act. These two pieces of legislation served to extend the policies of separate development to South Africa's universities and created five 'university colleges' (or, pejoratively, 'bush colleges'). These were segregated by race and ethnic group, and conceived to be institutions where African, Indian, and Coloured students could separately pursue higher education. In the northern Transvaal, the University College of the North at Turfloop (later simply the University of the North) was, according to its founding act, designed to educate students from the Sotho, Tswana, Tsonga, and Venda 'national units'¹³. In this sense it was, from the start, more ethnically diverse than its fellow black universities, which were required only to admit students of a single ethnic background.

¹⁰ M. Nkomo et al. *Within the Realm of Possibility: From Disadvantage to Development at the University of Fort Hare and the University of the North* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006), see particularly chapters 1, 2, 4, and 6.

¹¹ C. White, *From Despair to Hope: The Turfloop Experience*, (Sovenga: UNIN Press, 1997), see chapter 3.

¹² See J. Brown, *The Road to Soweto: Resistance and the Uprising of 16 June 1976* (Oxford: James Currey, 2016), pp. 64 – 70, 141-149; and C. Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi: the Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000), pp. 161-162.

¹³ J.G.E. Wolfson, *Turmoil at Turfloop: A Summary of the Reports of the Snyman and Jackson Commissions of Inquiry into the University of the North* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1976), p. 5.

The campus of the University of the North was erected on a local farm (called Turfloop, which gave the university its enduring nickname), 30 kilometres outside the white town of Pietersburg, and remotely located from the busy African township of Seshego, situated on Pietersburg's northwest side, in the opposite direction from Turfloop. Rural farming areas and open veld bounded the university on its northern, eastern, and southern edges. The small township of Mankweng flanked the campus on the west, and provided shops, services, and housing for black staff and some students. This choice of location was no accident on the part of early university planners and administrators. Like Ngoye, in Zululand, which was built at the same time and under similar circumstances, these 'bush colleges' were designed to be remote, and to focus students' energy and attentions on the local areas and homelands they inhabited. Courses were designed to produce graduates who would build the Bantustan 'homelands' that apartheid envisioned. A 1958 Commission, established to comment on the Extension of University Education Act recommended the following:

Each [University College] should serve an ethnic group, enriching it both spiritually and materially, as well as promoting the broader interests of South Africa. Each should be entrusted with the task of developing all aspects of the culture, technological development and the promotion of the general progress and welfare of the ethnic group concerned. Each should guide the ethnic group towards greater responsibility, knowledge, self-sufficiency and self-development. Each should develop the individual to the fullest extent imbuing him with pride, self-respect, and the ideal of service to the community. Each should encourage its students to play an active part and train them in all facets of life of their group. The students should be the pioneers in the whole process of civilizing the ethnic group concerned.¹⁴

¹⁴ Main Report of The Commission of Enquiry on the Separate University Education Bill, 1958. pp. 14-15 (Quoted in White, *From Despair to Hope*, p. 74).

The University Colleges, then, were not only physically isolated from South Africa's urban centres, and ideologically focused on building black communities outside South Africa proper; they were designed to produce graduates who would support and embody apartheid's policies.

At its founding, the University College of the North was a tiny institution with only 87 students but it grew quickly and by the end of the decade its enrolment had increased more than seven fold to 630.¹⁵ The student body had doubled again by the middle of the 1970s, and was over 1200 in 1974. Over the next five years growth continued, and in 1979 the student population at Turfloop was more than 2100.¹⁶ Students came from a wide geographical swathe of South Africa.

Uniquely among the university colleges Turfloop drew its student body, as mentioned above, from four ethnic groups: the Tswana, the Sotho, the Venda, and the Tsonga or Shangaan.

Students came from the Western, Northern, and Eastern Transvaal, as well as from the Orange Free State, and from five different homelands: Lebowa itself, Venda to the north, Gazankulu to the east, Bophuthatswana to the west, and eventually Qwa Qwa to the south. These were the political structures that the university had been founded to support, and consequently in some key ways their development remained linked to its. During the 1980s there was a concerted push to extend educational segregation and develop campuses in each homeland, resulting in the establishment of branch campuses of Turfloop in QwaQwa at Phuthaditjhaba in 1982, and Gazankulu at Giyani in 1984. Turfloop administrators and academics also played an advisory role in the establishment of the independent University of Venda in 1982.

However, until the early 1980s, the main campus of Turfloop at Mankweng was responsible for educating students from all of these homelands, well beyond its Lebowa borders. It was both an institution of the homeland, and outside it. Though it existed in Lebowa - and ostensibly for

¹⁵ 'Turfloop: Growing the University of the North', *Star*, 16 May 1968. [Wits Historical Papers Archive, hereafter WHP, AD1912/258.16]

¹⁶ Data from White, *From Despair to Hope*, UNIN Rector's Reports, and press reports.

Lebowa and neighboring homelands - it was administered by the government of South Africa, through the Department of Bantu Education. Who was actually in control at Turfloop remained an open and hotly debated question for the first three decades of its existence.

From its founding the entirety of Turfloop's administrative staff and the majority of its academics were white. This revealed an important disconnect between Turfloop's articulations of its own purpose, and how the institution actually functioned with regard to its staffing. In the early years of its formation, Turfloop's staff gave the lie to the premise of an African university for Africans: white academic staff outnumbered black by approximately three to one, and all senior positions were occupied by white academics and administrators. Turfloop's white staff had long been drawn from a particularly conservative section of Afrikaner society, and many, especially the most senior, were linked to the secretive Afrikaner group, the *Broederbond*.¹⁷ White has argued that the *Broederbond* exerted powerful control over various aspects of campus life through the 1960s and 1970s: 'The Broederbond in turn continued to maintain its influence on [The University] Council, and not only on Council's decisions; it exerted its authority even in seemingly insignificant internal financial matters [including catering contracts and investments].'¹⁸ This lack of autonomy and black leadership was to become a theme in protests on campus throughout the first two decades of the university's existence.

The composition of the student body also challenged the ideals of Turfloop's founding as a Bantustan institution: a significant portion of students came to Turfloop from South Africa's urban townships – mostly from those surrounding Johannesburg and Pretoria. In his institutional

¹⁷ Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, p.96; White, *From Despair to Hope*, p. 115, 142; "The repositioning of two South African Universities" by B. Maja, A. Gwabeni, and P.A. Mokwele in M. Nkomo *et al.* (eds). *Within the Realm of Possibility: From Disadvantage to Development at the University of Fort Hare and the University of the North* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006), p.25.

¹⁸ White, *From Despair to Hope*, p. 142.

history of the university, Chris White has demonstrated that, while during the early 1960s numbers of rural and urban students remained relatively balanced (with slightly higher rural numbers), from 1968 the balance shifted and during the 1970s and 1980s there was a ‘constant increase in students from urban areas’.¹⁹ Given such varied backgrounds, Turfloop students comprised a much more diverse group than had been envisioned by the framers of the Separate University Education Bill, and their affiliations were often divided between urban townships and rural homelands. Many of those who came out of township schools had family connections to rural areas, and some who were raised by nuclear families in places like Soweto were sent away to extended family in villages for primary or secondary schooling. Even from its inception, the constituents of the Turfloop student body bore little resemblance to the ‘pioneers’, with singular affiliations to homelands, that the University Colleges were trying to shape.

A 1969 *Rand Daily Mail* editorial articulated another important problem with the premise of all the University Colleges:

[The African University Colleges] ha[ve] the difficult task of trying to educate people without arousing their expectations; of opening their eyes and minds to the world and yet trying to ensure that they still know their place and will be content with second class status. [...] Events at Fort Hare and Turfloop have shown that you cannot open minds and control them at the same time.²⁰

Indeed, as the *Rand Daily Mail* quote alludes, the reality of life and politics at Turfloop were to be very different from those imagined by the Commission of Enquiry in 1958, and its students, uniquely diverse in their composition as a student body, bore little resemblance to those ‘pioneers of the civilizing process’ that the Commission described. In spite of the conscious effort to tailor students at Turfloop and its fellow black universities into model apartheid citizens, by the early 1970s Turfloop had defied these roots and become a crucible for the student political activism

¹⁹ White, *From Despair to Hope*, p. 83.

²⁰ ‘Different “Freedom”’ in *The Rand Daily Mail*, 26 May 1969. [WHP AD1912/258.16]

that came to characterize that decade of South African history, as I will discuss in later sections. It also played an influential role in the development of the Bantustans around it, though one that was not as straightforward as its architects may have hoped. In both of these iterations, staff and students used Turfloop as a platform to effect political change and personal advancement.

Gazankulu: building a different type of homeland

Shortly after the founding of Turfloop, in 1961 the territorial authority of Matshangana was established under the auspices of the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act and the 1959 Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act. These laws, respectively, created the legal basis for ethnically grouping black South Africans into self-governing reserves and then paved the way for transforming those reserves into self-governing homelands.²¹ Matshangana is a transliteration of ‘Ma [a plural prefix for people] Shangaan’, an ethnic group that extends through parts of South Africa, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. From the middle of the 1960s, a group of Shangaan chiefs and councilors was assembled to spearhead the Territorial Authority and, in consultation with officials from the Government of South Africa, to move it towards self-governance. These approximately twenty men met almost monthly for more than three years between 1966 and 1969; working closely with WH Olivier, Assistant Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, this executive committee debated every facet of governmental provision for the new Territorial Authority, from schools to care for the elderly, from the name of the new capital to the boundaries of its borders.²² The composition of the group was predominantly chiefs and

²¹ L. Evans, ‘South Africa’s Bantustans and the Dynamics of ‘Decolonisation’, *South African Historical Journal* 64,1 (2012), 117-137. p. 119

²² For example, the composition of the council and their deliberations can be found in Matshangana Gebeidesowerheid – Shangaan Volkseenheid, 12 September 1966. [National Archives of South Africa – Pretoria Branch, hereafter NASA-PTA, KGS 20 N11/3/2]; Minutes of the Twenty-eighth Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Matshangana Territorial Authority, 20 June 1969, [NASA-PTA KGS 23 N11/3/3].

headmen, representatives of the structures of traditional Shangaan authority, but it also included a small number of other prominent members of the Shangaan community. One of these was Professor Hudson Ntsan'wisi, one of Turfloop's most prominent black academics.

Ntsan'wisi was one of the first black academics to be employed at Turfloop in 1960, and by the middle of the decade he had become head of the Department of Tsonga and Chair of African Languages at the university. As his academic career advanced, so did his involvement as a councilor of Matshangana. In December of 1968 the minister of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development (BAD), M.C. Botha, met with Ntsan'wisi to discuss plans to develop the Territorial Authority.²³ On behalf of the Territorial Authority, Ntsan'wisi was to lobby the minister to put resources toward creating a self-governing territory for the Shangaan people.

Five years before Ntsan'wisi and Botha met, the Transkei had received self-governing status as a territory and became South Africa's first Bantustan in 1963. Similar projects were beginning to take shape in Matshangana's northern neighbours, Lebowa and Venda, where Territorial Authorities were established in 1962.²⁴ From their inception, homelands were contested and drew criticism from many segments of South African society, as they restricted the movement of Africans and contributed to their disenfranchisement and oppression within South Africa itself. Steve Biko described them as 'nothing else but sophisticated concentration camps where black people are allowed to 'suffer peacefully'.'²⁵ But William Beinart has pointed to the ways in

²³ Correspondence: du Plessis to H. W. E. Ntsan'wisi, 18 December 1968. [Giyani Provincial Archives, hereafter GPA].

²⁴ McNeill, *AIDS, Politics, and Music in South Africa*, p. 49.

²⁵ S. Biko, 'Let's talk about Bantustans', in *I Write What I Like*, A. Stubbs, ed. (London: Heinemann, 1987), p.86.

which citizens of these new formations also used them to exercise political agency, through the formal processes of voting, and by organizing around labour politics, banned political parties, and institutions like homeland universities,²⁶ and Saul Dubow has demonstrated the real variety and difference that existed across the ten different homelands over the decades of their existence.²⁷ One major difference was the size and prominence of the ethnic group that each homeland was meant to house. The Shangaan in Gazankulu in 1980 numbered slightly more than half a million people, while their nearest neighbor, the Northern Sotho of Lebowa numbered approximately 1.7 million.²⁸

Isaak Niehaus has argued persuasively that, over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, Shangaan and Northern Sotho ethnicity developed in an increasingly integrated – rather than oppositional – way, in the multi-ethnic area of the lowveld around Bushbuckridge.²⁹ He marks the breakdown in this integration, and the beginning of ethnic conflict over land, boundaries, and political positions as commencing in the early 1960s, with the construction of the Territorial Authorities that would become Bantustans. The area around Bushbuckridge, one of the ‘most ethnically heterogenous areas of South Africa’³⁰ found itself torn between two regional authorities, and eventually, between the boundaries of Gazankulu and Lebowa.

²⁶ W. Beinart, ‘Beyond “Homelands”’: Some ideas about the history of African rural areas in South Africa’ *South African Historical Journal* 64,1 (2012), 5-21. pp. 10-12

²⁷ S. Dubow, *Apartheid 1948-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 109.

²⁸ L. Platzky and C. Walker, *The Surplus People: Forced Removals in South Africa*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985).

²⁹ I. Niehaus, “Ethnicity and the Boundaries of Belonging: Reconfiguring Shangaan Identity in the South African Lowveld” *African Affairs*, Vol. 101, No. 405 (Oct. 2002), pp. 557-583, 565.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 559

Niehaus' argument, that political division precipitated ethnic conflict, supports my contention that the counselors of the Matshangana Territorial Authority were aiming to use apartheid impositions to advance the Shangaan as an ethnic group. Using the system of ethnic division to carve out dedicated and protected space for the Shangaan in South Africa certainly seems to be what Hudson Ntsan'wisi set out to do in his meeting with Botha in the late 1960s; though over the following decade his approach to homelands would shift.

The content of the meeting in December 1968 between Botha and Ntsan'wisi has been lost due to decades of archival loss and deterioration, but correspondence between the professor and a Johannesburg-based lawyer (a Mr du Plessis) in advance of the meeting reveals the goals with which Ntsan'wisi planned to approach Botha. Following years of deliberation amongst the Matshangana Territorial Authority's Executive Committee, he aimed to delineate the Authority's ability to make decisions regarding who could work in their territory, and to limit the BAD's power to impose appointments of officials on and interfere in the ruling of the Territorial Authority. This was in keeping with the letter of the policy of separate development, and in his letter, du Plessis advised Ntsan'wisi to make this plain to the minister:

From your side, make it very clear that you have personally taken it as your responsibility to have the state policy accepted and that your people have accepted it and that now it is up to him to follow up in practice what has been preached in theory. Now is the pshycological [sic] time for the white man to establish everlasting sound relations with the Tsonga people. You are no children to be satisfied and sent away with vague promises.³¹

³¹ Correspondence: du Plessis to H. W. E. Ntsan'wisi, 18 December 1968 [GPA]. Emphasis original.

This emphasis on autonomy and independence seems calculated to address many of the critiques that had dogged homelands, and to set the Matshangana Territorial Authority off on a strong foot in its relation to Pretoria.

After the meeting between Botha and Ntsan'wisi the political development of the Territorial Authority proceeded quickly. In October 1969 the Executive Committee was dissolved and a new, elected Executive Council was constituted along with a General Assembly. These marked incremental moves toward establishing more formal democratic structures, and were accompanied by efforts in nation-building, with a clear ethnic bent. On 16 October the Territorial Authority held a "national festival" with Shangaan songs and dance, and the introduction of new national symbols including a mace.³² Departing from Niehaus' research on confluences of Shangaan and Northern Sotho identity in Bushbuckridge, this festival made clear efforts to put a new form of Shangaan ethnic identity at the centre of Gazankulu citizenship.

That month Hudson Ntsan'wisi was unanimously elected Chief Councilor of the territory by the other members of the new executive council, and secured a secondment from his position at Turfloop to take up the post.³³ He was joined by the white rector of Turfloop, Professor E.F. Potgieter, who resigned in order to become the Commissioner General of the

³² Minutes of the twenty-eighth meeting of the Executive Committee of the Matshangana Territorial Authority, 20 June 1969 [NASA-PTA KGS 23 N11/3/3].

³³ Correspondence: Ntsan'wisi to the Rector of the University of the North, 27 October 1969 [GPA]; Correspondence: Galloway, registrar of the University of the North, to Ntsan'wisi, 12 November 1969 [GPA]; Correspondence: S.C. Marivate, Secretary of Matshangana Territorial Authority, M.C. Botha, the Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development, Re: Matshangana Territorial Authority: Election of Office Bearers, 29 October 1969 [NASA-PTA KGS 23 N11/3/3].

Matshangana Territorial Authority. Potgieter was an anthropologist whose paternalist views influenced his approach to administration both at the university and in the Territorial Authority. In an interview with Christopher White he explained that ‘he hoped to develop blacks from what he termed the ‘African emotional’ approach towards life to what he termed the ‘first-world thinking’ approach’.³⁴ In this he distinguished himself from apartheid’s architect, Hendrik Verwoerd, declaring that ‘the task of the white was not, as Verwoerd envisaged, to guide the black back into the third-world’.³⁵ It is noteworthy that Potgieter, whose position as both rector of Turfloop and Commissioner General of Gazankulu situated him firmly in the core of the apartheid project, consciously differed from Verwoerd in its aims. Even at the very heart of apartheid’s institutions, these ideals were contested. Both Ntsan’wisi and Potgieter played key roles in developing both the University of the North, and the Matshangana Territorial Authority, which went on to become the homeland of Gazankulu. The tension between autonomy and paternalism characterized both institutions during the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1971, the South African government passed the Bantu Homelands Constitution Act (later renamed the Self-governing Territories Constitution Act), enabling it to grant independence to some of the homelands (though this did not happen until Transkei was granted independence in 1976). A few months after the Act was passed, Matshangana Territorial Authority was replaced by the Gazankulu Legislative Assembly in a move toward becoming a fully-fledged homeland.³⁶

³⁴ Interview of E.F. Potgieter by C. White, Warmbaths 1988. Quoted in White, *From Despair to Hope*, p. 85.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 85-86

³⁶ Government of Gazankulu Official Annual Diary 1979/80, ‘The Constitutional Development of Gazankulu’ [GPA].

Questioning the role of an apartheid university

In April 1972 Turfloop, whose isolation and small size relative to South Africa's white universities had previously kept it in obscurity was catapulted into national headlines. Abraham Tiro, a student leader and prominent member of the South African Students Organisation, gave a rousing indictment of apartheid education in general, and of Turfloop in particular, in a speech at the university's graduation. "The system is failing," Tiro argued. "It is failing because even those who recommend it strongly, as the only solution to racial problems in South Africa, fail to adhere to the letter and spirit of the Policy."³⁷ He strongly critiqued the hypocrisy of having white leadership and privilege (through contracts issued to white businesses, vacation jobs to white students, and seats to white visitors rather than black parents at the very same graduation) enshrined in a black university. He also directly challenged the idea that homelands could be vehicles of political change, demanding, 'Do you think that the white minority can willingly commit political suicide by creating numerous states which might turn out to be hostile in future?'³⁸ These criticisms reflect Tiro's position as a leading member of the South African Students' Organisation on campus and a proponent of Black Consciousness philosophy.³⁹

The white administration of Turfloop reacted strongly to Tiro's critique; he was expelled from the university, triggering protests and boycotts at Turfloop and other black campuses around the country. Waves of protest at Turfloop followed, expelled students made their way into South

³⁷ OR Tiro, 'Bantu Education', appendix to GM Nkondo, ed., *Turfloop Testimony: the Dilemma of a Black University in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1976), pp. 91-3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³⁹ A more thorough analysis of these events and Turfloop's role as a space of incubation for black student protest politics can be found in A. Heffernan, 'Black Consciousness's Lost Leader: Abraham Tiro, the University of the North, and the Seeds of South Africa's Student Movement in the 1970s', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41,1 (2015), 173-186.

Africa's secondary school system as teachers in township schools around the country. (Tiro himself was employed as a history teacher at Morris Isaacson High School in Soweto, and taught many of the students there who became prominent figures during the Soweto uprising of 1976.) Protest action even extended – for the first time – to Turfloop's black academic staff. In a meeting of both black and white staff to discuss the (all white) council's recommendation to expel Tiro, black staff walked out in protest. They were led by the most senior black academic, Professor William Kgware. These staff went on to form a Black Academic Staff Association (BASA) to represent their interests to university administrators, and later as a more public lobbying group.

Less than a year after the protests over Tiro's expulsion, Hudson Ntsan'wisi gave the opening address at Turfloop for the beginning of the 1973 academic year. In a surprise move for a homeland leader during the height of 'grand' apartheid, and during the same month that Gazankulu became a self-governing territory, he criticized the very foundational idea of segregated universities:

I was present in this hall when this University was first launched as a shrine of learning for certain sections of the Black people of South Africa.[...] I believe now, as I believed then that it was unfortunate that this university was established at a time in history when the doors of open universities were being closed to black people [...] Being in possession of no ethnic brain, and no ethnic mind, I believed then and I believe now that this action was as unnecessary as it was unfortunate, and I believe that some aspects of student unrest in this university can be traced back to that unfortunate beginning.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ H. Ntsan'wisi, 'Opening Address to the University of the North, Academic Year 1973', in *Deeds Speak*, (Nelspruit: Lowveld Printers, 1987). p. 38

He overtly sympathized with the plight of segregated black students, and called for the university council to move that ‘the doors of intellectual opportunity and intellectual freedom be widened by allowing Black students to gain free admission to any university in the country which is willing to accept them’.⁴¹ He stopped short of allying himself with the political ideas that had swept campus only months before, however, and offered a thinly veiled critique of Tiro:

It is not the function of this university to allow any student or student leader to convert his fellow students to a particular ideology or any particular philosophy of life. Intellectual freedom should not be replaced by prophetic propaganda based solely on prejudice. Mr Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, this university should in my opinion have no place for political demagogues.⁴²

Ntsan’wisi went on to advise that students at Turfloop should ‘speak courageously, but with demeanour and decorum’ when fighting for their political rights. Despite his criticism of Tiro’s methods, the rest of Ntsan’wisi’s speech substantially agreed with the student activist’s message: he lamented the estrangement of black staff at Turfloop from all of the university’s decision-making structures. ‘As things are,’ he noted ‘the majority of black personnel find themselves as passengers in the development of an institution which is primarily built for their development.’⁴³

The Snyman and Jackson Reports and the push for Africanisation at Turfloop

Tiro’s call in 1972 for apartheid structures like Turfloop to adhere to their own founding principles, and Ntsan’wisi’s 1973 criticism of Africans being relegated to the role of passengers at the institution, formed part of a larger movement pushing for Africanisation – that is installing Africans in leadership positions – at the university during the mid-1970s. It coincided with moves to self-governance, and even independence, in some Bantustans and was frequently explicitly

⁴¹ Ntsan’wisi, *Deeds Speak*, p. 39-40.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 41

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 42

related to this process. The issue became the subject of two separate government commissions of inquiry related to the university, both in response to incidents of unrest on campus.

The Snyman Commission was commissioned after a Viva-FRELIMO rally on campus in 1974 erupted in clashes between students and police⁴⁴ and released its report in February 1976. It called for important changes at the university. Though it broadly affirmed the principles of separate development, and said that ‘the development of the University of the North as a university has been sound since its inception and its establishment has been justified,’⁴⁵ it also called for major changes in the structure of the university itself, to address the discontent among students and black staff. Among the changes suggested were parity of pay between black and white staff, greater financial autonomy for the university (like that enjoyed by its white counterparts), and a reorganisation of the (white) council that ran the university:

The commission visualises a university controlled by a council consisting of a majority of Blacks designated by the homeland governments concerned, while the teaching and administrative functions will be the joint responsibility of Whites and Blacks. The Blacks would thus have the predominant say in the control of the university established for them.⁴⁶

These proposed changes were supported, in part, by testimony from the student and staff bodies; both vocally supported the process of ‘Africanisation’ at the top levels of the university. In its submission to the Snyman Commission, the Black Academic Staff Association criticized the

⁴⁴ For more information on this rally and its aftermath at Turfloop and beyond, see J. Brown ‘An Experiment in Confrontation: the Pro-Frelimo Rallies of 1974’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38,1 (2012); Brown, *The Road to Soweto*, pp. 131-149.

⁴⁵ Untitled, *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 February 1976. [WHP AD1912/258.16]

⁴⁶ ‘Equal pay with help to ease tension’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 February 1976. [WHP AD1912/258.16]

inequitable practices of employment and promotion for black and white staff at Turfloop⁴⁷, and the system of advancement governed primarily by racial, rather than academic, qualifications:

The fact that Black people are not put in positions of authority over White persons at the University of the North has often been considered as formidable evidence in support of the impression that the University of the North continues to express and extend views of white supremacy often to be found outside the homelands. [...] A Black academician would most certainly not object to working under a White man merely because he is White. He would object if there are objective grounds for such objection. [...] Fundamental in this regard is also the Black man's desire that the University must be controlled and administered by Black men of ability. The choice of White personnel in positions of authority will then be made by them in exercise of their own sovereignty and free will, not imposed from without.⁴⁸

Turfloop's situation as a homeland institution played an important role in justifying the push for Africanisation. Snyman's recommendation that the council should include representatives of the relevant homeland governments and BASA's indictment that Turfloop was beset by racism more 'often to be found outside the homelands' both point to the unique position that the university occupied as an institution of the homelands, but also to some degree removed from them. It also indicates the degree to which actors at the university endeavoured to use its position as an ostensible institution of the state(s).

In broad agreement with the structure of racialized authority at the university, the SRC issued a statement on 16 October 1974 declaring that 'the need for a black rector for the University of the

⁴⁷ Nkondo, *Turfloop Testimony*, pp. 28-31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

North could not be overemphasised.⁴⁹ However, race was not to be the only salient factor in the appointment of a new rector. ‘The rector of the university should not be a member of any political body *that was not representative of the Black people*, the students said.’⁵⁰ This insistence is a reminder of Turfloop’s place during the 1960s and 1970s as a catchment of students from four separate homelands, and the fact that it was purpose-built to educate the future elite of these areas. While BASA had indicated that homelands represented an arena that was protected from attitudes of white supremacy, the SRC remained suspicious of them, and this reflected the position of many students and student organisations. SASO, in particular, distrusted members of the black elite who participated in the Bantustan system, and it was hugely influential on campus at Turfloop when the SRC issued their call for a black rector in October 1974.⁵¹

Students were not the only ones calling for change at Turfloop. Gessler Nkondo, head of BASA, also called for blacks to take ‘complete control of the university,’ rather than just nominal or symbolic posts. Nkondo was a member of a politically active family from the Northern Transvaal by way of Soweto; one of four sons, his brothers entered various forms of political life. Zinjiva was a student at Turfloop and an organizer for the Black Consciousness group Black Community Programmes (BCP) before going into exile in 1977; he was later arrested and detained by security police when he returned to South Africa in 1979.⁵² Ephraim joined *Umkhonto we Sizwe* but allegedly criticized some leaders (Joe Modise and Mzwai Piliso were

⁴⁹ ‘Students call for Black rector’, *Natal Mercury*, 22 November 1974. [WHP AD1912/258.16]

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* (emphasis mine)

⁵¹ From July – September 1974 the Turfloop SRC president, Pandelani Nefolovhodwe, was simultaneously the national president of SASO, and the organization received a great deal of financial and political support from the student body. [A. Heffernan, A history of youth politics in Limpopo, 1967-2003, unpublished PhD thesis (Oxon, 2014). pp. 108-111.]

⁵² ‘Where is Zinjiva, asks brother’, *Argus*, 19 December 1979. [Gerhart Personal Papers, hereafter GPP]

named in a later exposé article) and was subsequently tortured and presumed to have been killed in 1984 at MK's notorious camp in Angola, Quatro.⁵³ Curtis, the most politically prominent of the brothers, also entered education as a profession, and as a teacher in Soweto he was supportive of the students' 1976 uprising. He went on to become the first president of the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), and his role in that organisation is further discussed later in this chapter. Of the Nkondo brothers, Gessler was the most academically successful, and he melded this success with political activism similarly to his brother Curtis. He was one of the University College of the North's earliest cohort of students, and became the president of its first SRC in 1961. He was later appointed to a junior lectureship at Turfloop in 1966, after the completion of his honours degree. After earning masters degrees at UNISA (1968) and then abroad at Leeds University in the UK (around 1972), Nkondo returned to Turfloop as a senior lecturer and quickly became a leading member of the black faculty. He became the chairman of BASA in or around 1974, and came to prominence beyond the campus as the spokesman for black staff in the aftermath of a pro-FRELIMO rally on campus in September 1974, which was broken up by Lebowa police and the South African security police. Gessler Nkondo was the editor of BASA's joint submission to the Snyman Commission.

In spite of many points of commonality, Nkondo and other staff did not completely align with the concerns of the SRC in their testimony. Rather than adhering to SASO's ideological denigration of the homeland system, Nkondo was willing to use it as a justification for the goal of complete Africanisation, saying, 'This [complete black control at Turfloop] should not be regarded as an unreasonable request since it is in line with Government policy for the homelands.'⁵⁴ Even many of Turfloop's white staff supported the move to Africanisation (though perhaps a version less 'complete' than that advocated by Nkondo), hoping that it would ameliorate the 'bad relations'

⁵³ 'The execution of a camp commander', *Mail and Guardian*, 30 October 1998. [GPP]

⁵⁴ Quoted in 'White Staff quitting Turfloop over disturbances', *The Star*, 11 October 1974. [WHP AD1912/239]

between blacks and whites on campus.⁵⁵ This view was supported by BASA's joint submission to the commission, which argued that '[...] the abolition of discrimination between Black and White at the University and the power to administer and control the University by Blacks, are considered to be the basic foundations on which improved co-operation can be built.'⁵⁶

This widespread support within the university community for the process of Africanisation was reflected in Snyman's findings. His report called for substantive changes in the way Turfloop was structured and run, thus validating many of its students' complaints. Despite being tame by SASO's standards, the Snyman report was praised for its calls for change by the liberal press; a *Rand Daily Mail* editorial noted that:

A proper sense of alarm is a necessary commodity in South Africa today [...] to generate the will to act so that ills can be redressed before it is too late. [...] Now, thankfully, the judge has sounded a warning bell from a politically dispassionate watchtower. He has provided not only the incentive but also the opportunity to introduce change without fanning political tempers.⁵⁷

The editors of the *Rand Daily Mail* were particularly pleased by the muted response from the government to the Commission's report, noting that Minister of BAD and Bantu Education M. C. Botha 'implicitly accept[ed] some guilt for the situation by promising to do "everything possible and within the powers of existing legislation" to improve things [at Turfloop]'.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ 'White Staff quitting Turfloop over disturbances', *The Star*, 11 October 1974. [WHP AD1912/239]

⁵⁶ Nkondo, *Turfloop Testimony*, p. 35.

⁵⁷ Editorial, *Rand Daily Mail*. 11 February 1976. [WHP AD1912/258.17]

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

This cautious acceptance of the report was echoed by the University Council, which endorsed its recommendations for Africanisation and autonomy. According to Turfloop's public relations director, Mr Casper Squier, speaking two months after the report's release, implementation of the recommendations 'was now obviously out of the university's field of competence. It is over to the government department [Bantu Education] concerned and we all hope that the Minister will speedily decide to implement the recommendations.'⁵⁹ But this was not to be the case; though Minister Botha paid lip service to the recommendations, no timeline was adopted for implementation and, in spite of support from quarters as diverse as the *Rand Daily Mail* editors and the university council itself, many of the recommendations were never implemented after the report's release.

A second report, the Jackson Report on Africanisation at Turfloop, was released in tandem with the tabling of the Snyman report in Parliament. The Jackson report, which had been commissioned by the university council in early 1974 but was withheld until the release of the Snyman report, had similar and even further-reaching findings. Led by Professor Stanley Jackson of the University of the Witwatersrand, it called for improvements to black schooling at the earliest levels, and 'recommended that colleges be established, in close association with the universities which would select and train students of proven capacity for university work'; in addition, it advocated a reversal of apartheid policy in higher education, recommending that 'Black academics be allowed to move freely between White and Black universities.'⁶⁰ Though relations between black and white members of the Turfloop community were outside the purview

⁵⁹ 'Turfloop: what next?', *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 April 1976.

⁶⁰ 'Black education not good enough, says report', *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 February 1976. [WHP AD1912/258.17]

of the Jackson Commission, it noted that ‘The university will not function satisfactorily so long as [animosity between the groups] continues.’⁶¹

On the subject of its commission – Africanisation of the university staff and leadership – the commission ‘considers that some important preliminary steps should be taken in order to Africanise the university and at the same time maintain its educational standards.’⁶² This relatively cautious recommendation was reiterated, ‘Africanisation must [...] take place at a pace that does not require lowering of standards, either in teaching or management. The high quality of the institution must not be sacrificed to the ideal of Black control.’⁶³ The Snyman Commission cited the Jackson Report in its own findings on Africanisation as well, and echoed its findings:

The [Snyman] Commission endorses the [Jackson] Committee’s findings on the problems connected with the Africanisation of the University, especially the fact that it is not possible to draw up a plan according to which Africanisation can take place. This should take place at a pace that will not lower the standards of administration or tuition.⁶⁴

Though these endorsements may seem less than full-throated, one of the few recommendations that *was* pursued after the release of both the Snyman and Jackson reports was Africanisation at the top-most level of the university. For years students had been calling for a black rector to lead Turfloop. The retirement of E.F. Potgieter’s replacement, Rector J.L. Boshoff, in October 1976,

⁶¹ ‘Committee report on Turfloop accepted’, *Eastern Province Herald*, 11 February 1976. [WHP AD1912/258.17]

⁶² ‘Committee report on Turfloop accepted’, *Eastern Province Herald*, 11 February 1976. [WHP AD1912/258.17]

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ J.H. Snyman, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Certain Matters Relating to the University of the North*, (Pretoria: Government of the Republic of South Africa, 1975), p. 100.

close on the heels of the reports calling for substantive changes in the structure of Turfloop, presented an ideal moment. Ironically Jackson, who had led the commission of inquiry into Africanisation, had been considered for the post as an intermediary to black leadership because it was perceived that his politics would make students sympathetic to his appointment.⁶⁵ However, the recommendations of Jackson's own report, together with Snyman and pressure from both staff and students prevailed. Prior to his own retirement Boshoff announced that his successor would be the first black rector of any university in South Africa: Professor William Kgware.

From the perspective of the university council, Kgware was an ideal choice for the post. Having arrived there in 1960, he was the most senior black academic at Turfloop, with a long history at the institution. He had demonstrated his authority among his peers, leading them to walk out of the meeting on Abraham Tiro's expulsion in 1972,⁶⁶ but he also enjoyed a close relationship with the university administration. As early as 1968, his daughter Manana Kgware noted in a letter to Catholic Chaplain and political activist Colin Collins that her father had been asked to account for her and her brother Bob's activism within the University Christian Movement, but that 'Pop' had diffused the situation because neither she nor Bob had been questioned directly by the rector.⁶⁷ Kgware resigned his own membership to UCM later in 1968 to avoid conflict with the university, and also later resigned from the Black Academic Staff Association in late 1974, as that organisation became more radical.

After the news of his appointment was announced, Kgware himself declared in an interview:

There is no way that I am going to become a so-called radical in these times.

I have been consistent in public life for 40 years and I will not change now,

⁶⁵ 'Turfloop move puts ball in Botha's court', *The Star*, 2 April 1976. [WHP AD1912/258.17]

⁶⁶ Author's interview with Percy Mokwele, Turfloop, 20 September 2011.

⁶⁷ Letter from M. Kgware to C. Collins, 30 September 1968. [WHP AD1126/F]

but somewhere a start has to be made to get all our people to regard each other as allies in the greater plan to develop all of South Africa.⁶⁸

That interview, given in August 1976, could hardly have come at a more volatile moment in South African student politics: two months after the initial Soweto Students' Uprising that township was still a major site of protest, stay-aways, and police-repression, and over the course of the winter solidarity protests were erupting across South Africa.⁶⁹ At pains to reassure a skittish staff, of which two-thirds were white, and to appease a restive and sometimes militant student body, Kgware tried to walk a fine line in his new public role.

After 1976: Turfloop and the homelands in a changed South Africa

The Soweto uprising and its aftermath – when students across the country made their schools, campuses, and townships ungovernable – fundamentally changed the public perception of students in South Africa. It also changed the dynamics of resistance politics in the country. No single liberation organisation had been prepared for the scope and scale of the uprising, and the way organisations like SASO and the African National Congress (ANC) dealt with the aftermath would have an important effect on the future shape of student and liberation politics.

Another critical factor impacting this future was repression by the South African government, which increased significantly on the organisations that existed under the umbrella of Black

⁶⁸ 'New rector is no radical', *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 August 1976. [WHP AD1912/258.17]

⁶⁹ B. Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto schoolchildren's revolt that shook apartheid* (London, Zed Books: 2016, 1979), p.214. See S. Lekgoathi, 'Youth politics and rural rebellion in Zebediela and other parts of the "homeland" of Lebowa, 1976-1977', pp. 109-118, and T. Moloi, 'Let's Begin to participate fully now in politics: Student politics, Mhluzi township, 1970s', pp. 128-137, for case studies about the spread of protests to the northern and eastern Transvaal; both in A. Heffernan and N. Nieftagodien, eds, *Students Must Rise: Youth Struggle in South Africa Before and Beyond Soweto '76* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016).

Consciousness in the late 1970s. The death of Steve Biko and mass bannings in 1977 diminished the Black Consciousness Movement's capacity to influence student politics at the level it had achieved just a year or two earlier. It also inspired unlikely solidarity in homeland leaders, some of whom found themselves uncomfortably caught between the segregationist politics of the white Nationalist government and the black radical politics of some of their citizens. In a speech to a prominent group of Afrikaners, given the day after the South African government banned 17 Black Consciousness affiliates in October 1977, Hudson Ntsan'wisi said, 'Yesterday's bannings, like the June riots, will now help to build bridges between urban and rural blacks, between radicals and moderates. They will now speak with one voice.'⁷⁰ At Turfloop the administration tried to chart a middle road, but for many students and staff the moves toward Africanisation, and the administration of Rector Kgware were little more than a political sop – too little, too late.

The news of Biko's death on 12 September 1977 came to Turfloop in the midst of ongoing class boycotts. These reflected a growing trend in protest politics, both at Turfloop and on a national scale.⁷¹ September 1977 also marked the mass resignation of Soweto teachers, led by Curtis Nkondo and the Soweto Teacher's Action Committee. The Turfloop protest was playing out against a national stage where student boycotts and stay-aways were becoming all too familiar. But it followed even longer trends of such protest at Turfloop itself: in 1969 students had used mass protest when the university refused to allow them to affiliate with the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). In May of that year more than two-thirds of the student body marched on the Rector's office with a list of grievances including complaints about the affiliation

⁷⁰ H. Ntsan'wisi, 'Is there hope for peaceful change? Address to a group of prominent Afrikaners, Pretoria – 20 October 1977', in Ntsan'wisi, *Deeds Speak*, p. 90.

⁷¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the changing face of public protest among South African students, see Brown, *The Road to Soweto*.

controversy, student suspensions, and being disallowed from speaking to the press.⁷² The following year a celebration of the university's 'independence' from UNISA was met with similar protests. By the time of the student strike in September 1977, Turfloop had experienced ten similar, and increasingly serious, student protest actions, including the mass boycotts following the expulsion of Abraham Tiro in 1972. This latest round of protests differed from its precedents in a key way, though – it was the first to happen under the administration of Turfloop's first black rector. What is most remarkable, however, is how little changed in the university's response.

As a result of the September 1977 protests, and property damage incurred during them, six students – including the president and vice-president of the SRC – were expelled, and university authorities dissolved the SRC. This precipitated another round of lecture boycotts.⁷³ These continued for more than two weeks until, on 28 September, approximately 1000 students were asked to leave campus and return to their homes. Less than a year into the job, Rector Kgware had fallen back on Turfloop's old method of removing protesting students from campus. In addition, the dissolution of the SRC and the expulsion of its leadership recalled the crackdowns of 1972 and 1974. Though it was five years later, and now a black man lived in the Turfloop Rector's mansion, little had changed from the time of Tiro's graduation speech in the way the university dealt with dissent in its student body.

⁷² NUSAS local committee report, 'Turfloop Erupts', May 1969. [Rhodes University Corey Library, hereafter RUCL, MS 18 180/2]; NUSAS open memo regarding 'Demonstration at Turfloop', 14 May 1969. [RUCL MS 18 170/4]; 'Turfloop Students backed by Wits. mass meeting', *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 May 1969. [WHP AD1912/258.16]

⁷³ 'Turfloop Students backed by Wits. mass meeting', *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 May 1969. [WHP AD1912/258.16]

In addition to criticisms of being an apartheid sell-out, Kgware was increasingly accused of merely providing a black face to hide the white power that continued to call the shots at Turfloop. Perhaps no one made this argument more eloquently than respected author Es'kia Mphahlele. Mphahlele had grown up during the 1920s in the rural northern Transvaal outside of Pietersburg, near what is now Lebowakgomo.⁷⁴ After joining the ANC in the mid-1950s, he left South Africa in 1957 to teach abroad with the understanding he would not easily be able to return to his home country because of his politics.⁷⁵ After spending twenty years in exile and earning a doctorate in the United States, he returned home to South Africa in 1977 to participate in the political turning of the tides that he saw heralded by the student uprisings. He applied to teach English literature at Turfloop, but failed to get the post due to the 'disapproval of the then Minister of Education and Training.'⁷⁶ He went on to take up a post in English literature at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Years later in his autobiography, Mphahlele wrote of his experience applying to Turfloop:

Here is an institution that purports to be for Africans, and yet does not reflect the African character; has a Rector who is a mere signature, a megaphone for orders that are issued by whites who are above him. The government imposes its own system of university administration. There is hardly any meaningful control between the University and the African communities in the same district. The people regard it as distinct, inaccessible and alien to their culture and aspirations.⁷⁷

Mphahlele's accusation that Kgware was simply a signature, or megaphone, for whites who were really in charge of what happened at Turfloop was published in the early 1980s but similar

⁷⁴ E. Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), pp. 11-14.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-16.

⁷⁶ White, *From Despair to Hope: the Turfloop Experience* (1997), p.126.

⁷⁷ E. Mphahlele, *Afrika My Music* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984), p.182.

sentiments circulated among students and staff at the university at the time. In addition to having to answer to ministers in various government departments, it was widely believed that the reviled Academic Registrar of Turfloop, Professor J.C. Steenkamp, wielded more power than Kgware himself. Steenkamp had been a campus figure for many years; in 1974 he had survived a motion by the Black Academic Staff Association calling for his expulsion 'due to alleged racism and mismanagement.'⁷⁸ They made another call for his resignation in 1980, saying that his attitude towards students 'has consistently reflected his arrogance and impatience which borders on contempt and lack of respect for blacks.'⁷⁹ According to Dr Ntatho Motlana in 1981, when he was the chairman of the Soweto Committee of Ten, '[Steenkamp] has always been the power behind the throne at Turf, the manipulator of people and events. [...] For too long now Turfloop has been under the shadow of domination of rightwing whites, and it is time the situation changed.'⁸⁰

The furore around Mphahlele was not Kgware's only high profile staffing problem at this time: Gessler Nkondo, one-time head of the Black Academic Staff Association, had published the text of BASA's joint submission to the Snyman Commission under the title *Turfloop Testimony* in 1976. Nkondo acted as editor of the text and provided a historical preface about the founding of the university. Though originally a signatory on BASA's submission before he took up the post of Rector, Kgware strongly objected to the publication in his new administrative role. He and the university council alleged that the book contained 'untrue and/or false statements concerning the university,' and required BASA to approve a retraction.⁸¹ In the UNIN News, an on-campus newsletter, the book was called 'a misleading and incorrect reflection of the true state of

⁷⁸ White, *From Despair to Hope*, p. 107.

⁷⁹ 'Turf Prof to go', *Sunday Times*, 20 June 1981. [WHP AD1912/258.16]

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ 'Turfloop lecturer faces "trial" over book', *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 July 1978. [WHP AD1912/258.17]

affairs.’⁸² After an emergency meeting in November 1976, BASA reaffirmed its position behind the statement of its joint submission as represented in *Turfloop Testimony*. BASA was subsequently suspended ‘at the university council’s pleasure’ in March 1977, but by this stage Nkondo was no longer on campus. Shortly after the book’s release in early 1976, he took academic leave and went to the United States to pursue a doctorate in English at Yale. Two years later, on the verge of his return to his post at Turfloop, the university administration under Kgware began disciplinary proceedings against him for the publication of *Turfloop Testimony*. In addition, the administration accused Nkondo of issuing a press statement regarding the university, which neither staff nor students were allowed to do. Nkondo faced a hearing before an all-white disciplinary committee, but refused to attend. After a short return to South Africa, he left Turfloop and took up a teaching post in the United States in 1980.

Conclusion

William Kgware’s tenure as Rector at Turfloop ended suddenly with his death in 1980. He was replaced by his deputy, P. Mokgokong, and the project of Africanisation at Turfloop’s highest levels continued, as did criticism of it from corners of the student and staff bodies. In July of 1981, Hudson Ntsan’wisi again returned to campus, this time to address the Black Academic Staff Association on the subject of ‘the modern university’. A university, he said,

[...] is a forum for the free exchange of ideas, and in that way [it] contributes to our liberation; it trains people to be capable of shaping and leading our society; it produces new knowledge; it uses ideas to influence and shape the lives of people; it listens to new voices; it allows men to speak and others to criticize; it encourages honest and dispassionate discussion of things which matter, and is fair to all.⁸³

⁸² Quoted in White, *From Despair to Hope*, p. 111.

⁸³ H. Ntsan’wisi, ‘The Modern University’, in *Deeds Speak*, p. 95

Few would argue that, in the two decades of its existence, Turfloop had represented many of these lofty ideals. Indeed, Ntsan'wisi himself would not, and did not. He exhorted the faculty in the audience to 'make our university a centre of intellectual freedom', implicitly recognizing that it was not that yet.

Though Turfloop may not have lived up to Ntsan'wisi's ideal of a university, it did provide a space and a structure through which a variety of actors worked to achieve both political and personal ends. It was fundamentally a Bantustan institution, in its conception and in its evolution over the first two decades of its existence. As such – as an apartheid university - it was one of the key institutions tasked with implementing Grand Apartheid in the north of South Africa. In the case of Gazankulu, the secondment of Ntsan'wisi and Potgieter to set up the new Matshangana Territorial Authority demonstrated the university's close ties to the Bantustan project. In later years, the establishment of campuses at Phuthaditjhaba and Giyani, and the University's assistance in establishing the University of Venda, further emphasized its institutional commitment to ethnically segregated higher education.

However, the people who made up Turfloop – its students, its staff, its administrators, and its alumni, many of whom lived and worked in Bantustans like Gazankulu and Lebowa – often conflicted on what its role should be. Men like Abraham Tiro, Gessler Nkondo, and Hudson Ntsan'wisi openly criticized it, but also used it as a vehicle to pursue very different types of political change. Tiro and Nkondo both took the university to task for failing to realize the ultimate ideal of a segregated black university: that it have black leadership. Their Black Consciousness politics did not countenance the existence of a Bantustan university, but they recognized the possibility to critique it on its own terms, and to use it as a site for political mobilization – through the Black Academic Staff Association, and through the South African

Students' Organisation and the SRC. Ntsan'wisi's position as a senior academic at Turfloop allowed him to move beyond the university into Bantustan government, and to try to leverage his position within the system to create a unified Shangaan nation. But his growing disillusionment with the segregationist project led him to use the university as a space and a subject to criticize apartheid's exclusionary nature. Even William Kgware, who embraced the ethos of the institution, became the embodiment of change in South African universities, when he became Turfloop's first black rector. During the 1970s in particular, Turfloop was a space where competing political ideas – particularly those relating to Bantustans and black self-governance – were aired, tested, and tried.