

# Writing, authorship and I.B. Tabata's biography: From collective leadership to presidentialism

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## Rethinking I.B. Tabata's biography

A conventional political biography of Unity Movement resistance leader, Isaac Bangani Tabata would draw on the archive to construct a chronological narrative of his life as a means of understanding issues about the individual, the political movement and the nation. However, this article is a study of the cultural history of Isaac Bangani Tabata's biography, and is part of a wider project that pushes political biography beyond modernist documentary methods and social history frames of individual and social context.<sup>1</sup> It focuses on writing and authorship as one of the circumstances out of which the idea emerged that I.B. Tabata had a biography: that of a great leader of a South African liberation movement. The rendition of Tabata's life underwent a transition from biographic denial and a stress on collective leadership, to biographic narration under conditions of repression. This process culminated in the embrace of biography as an element of a politics of presidentialism, in which Tabata's biography became a means of projecting the Unity Movement in exile. This article examines the production of pamphlets, articles and books by Tabata, and shows that his work of writing and authorship, characterised by a process of individuation, constituted a biographic threshold. The most significant relationship through which Tabata became a writer and author was that with socialist literary critic Dora Taylor. Often, Taylor's work with Tabata has been understood as that of the secretary and amanuensis. However, it is possible to argue that her labours extended beyond this, with Taylor being the co-author of ideas and strategies, as well as a range of written works that were published under Tabata's name or pseudonym.

Tabata did not always have a biography. His life, like the lives of other political figures such as Ben Kies, had been submerged within public organisational identities of the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department (Anti-CAD), the All-African Convention (AAC) and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) as part of what was seen as a 'collective leadership', a cumulative system of ideas. This conception was seen as an advance upon older political approaches. 'There should be no leader or leaders', Tabata argued at a meeting in Durban in 1949, but only a 'common leadership on a given programme under certain principles'.<sup>2</sup> One aspect of this was undoubtedly the security and protection of individuals, a notion of

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1 See Ciraj Shahid Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa', Ph.D Diss University of the Western Cape, 2004.

2 I.B. Tabata, speech to an 'informal get together' in Durban, reported in *Ilanga lase Natal*, 15 January 1949.

safety in the collective, and care not to expose individual leaders or render them unnecessarily vulnerable to state attention. This was an important factor, particularly following the increased state repression after 1950. Another aspect was a desire never to give any impression that the political positions expressed and political acts carried out within or in the name of the Unity Movement and its constituent bodies were the work of a small, conspiratorial group but were rather an expression of wider political loyalties and commitments.

Collective leadership also entailed a principled rejection of any sense of exaltedness and personal ambition. Indeed this collective principle was understood almost as a code of political organising, and was expressed even as part of the exhortation to build the Society of Young Africa (SOYA) in 1951. In his written appeal to prospective members, which also circulated the new SOYA constitution, secretary Dan Kunene outlined this understanding:

We want intelligence rather than romantic enthusiasm: we want patience and courage rather than exhibitionism and impetuosity. We want sound co-operation and loyalty rather than personal ambition. We want loyalty to principle rather than loyalty to personalities. We want a sound, reliable leadership rather than a leader.<sup>3</sup>

This collective leadership code manifested itself as considerable reluctance during the 1940s and early 1950s to accede to requests from journalists for biographical information of leaders of the Unity Movement. In an article published in *Drum* in 1954, considered by the magazine to be a ‘scoop’ (indeed, an ‘exposé’ in the light of such media reluctance and individual ambivalence), the leaders of the Unity Movement were described as ‘intellectuals, shy and retiring and opposed to any sort of publicity’. The article went on to report that these leaders believed that ‘the loyalty of members should be towards the movement and not to individuals; and that the ‘building up’ of leaders should be avoided’. Nevertheless, Tabata himself was described as the ‘master mind’ of the movement, a ‘writer, politician and scholar from Cape Town’ who ‘dislikes photographers’.<sup>4</sup>

Later, from the 1960s, following early biographic intonations in the late 1940s and mid-1950s, I.B. Tabata’s biography became a key element of organisation-building and the consolidation of political organisation (and a political presence) in exile. In the struggle for recognition by the Unity Movement from post-colonial governments of African countries such as Zambia and from the newly formed Organisation of African Unity, and in the setting of various fund-raising and publicity tours, especially of the United States, the Unity Movement took on a more pervasive biographic character. Tabata’s biography was circulated as that of the ‘outstanding’, heroic leader of a liberation movement, who had suffered for his commitments, but who now stood as a potential leader of a government-

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3 ‘To the Young People of Africa’, Issued by the Executive Committee of the SOYA, Cape Town, 3 May, 1951, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town (UCT).

4 Tony Seboni, ‘Who’s Who in the Unity Movement’, *Drum*, April 1954.

in-waiting.<sup>5</sup> The biographic imperative gave way to a cult of presidentialism, and the movement's political work in exile was firmly connected to the propagation of Tabata's biography and to assembling, reassembling and circulating his writings.

Tabata's political life almost became synonymous with the existence of the Unity Movement, and his biography became an integral element of the codes of its political practice. Tabata's biography was deployed to build and support the movement in exile. Biographical essays and appendices usually accompanied the publication and republication of Tabata's writings and conference addresses, or a biographic blurb was included on the back cover of such edited compilations.<sup>6</sup> These texts, usually with a formal portrait photograph of Tabata on their covers, came to acquire canonical status and often constituted the main public evidence of the existence of the Unity Movement and the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA) in exile. As we shall see, this work of biographic formation and biographic maintenance occurred primarily through Tabata's political and personal relationship with Dora Taylor.

The telling and retelling of Tabata's biography became a central feature of membership of, and commitment to, the Unity Movement and APDUSA in exile. The learning of a settled narrative of Tabata's life seemed to become a key element of younger members' political lessons in the movement, and its ingestion a demonstration of members' political commitment.<sup>7</sup> Members and supporters looked to Tabata to share 'gems from his life and his vast experience', as well as leadership lessons based on stories about heroic dedication, steadfast principle and legendary escapades.<sup>8</sup> Tabata's biography was told as a story of political challenges and obstacles, and of what solutions were fashioned to overcome these. In demonstrating what they had learnt, some members even exercised appropriate discretion, knowing when to incorporate overt Marxist elements into their narration, such as Tabata's membership of an underground Trotskyist party.<sup>9</sup>

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Tabata's biography was marshalled as an instrument of sustaining a movement, and as a treasure chest of political lessons of leadership, as part of the education of younger members. It also came to form the basis of a cult of presidentialism. During this time and after, Tabata became habituated to this cult and to the historic importance accorded to the story of his political

5 Alexander Defense Committee, Tabata biography on letterhead (untitled; undated), Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 81: EAI:84/3; Alexander Defense Committee, 'I.B. Tabata' (1 page flyer), Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. The Alexander Defense Committee (ADC), under whose auspices Tabata toured the United States in 1967 as part of an appeal for funds, was one of the main forums through which the Unity Movement propagated Tabata's biography. Documents issued by the ADC also found their way into other collections, such as the Carter-Karis Papers, as Tabata moved from city to city in the United States.

6 See for example I.B. Tabata, *Apartheid: Cosmetics Exposed* (London: Prometheus Publications for Unity Movement of South Africa, 1985).

7 The extent of biographic knowledge of Tabata's political life and formation was shown in official movement obituaries and tributes after Tabata's death. The degree to which people were schooled in basic elements of the established biographic narrative was also apparent from interviews with members (See Norman Traub, 'I.B. Tabata' (obituary), *The Independent*, 3 November 1990; Interview with Norman Traub, Leigh-on-Sea, 8 March 1992; see also Roger Galant, 'Tribute at I.B. Tabata's grave' (text of oration at tombstone unveiling, Lesseyston, 20 September 1995).

8 Amina Hughes, video interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, 10 September 1989 (I am in possession of an audio copy of this video interview).

9 See for example the incorporation of information about the Lenin Club and Workers Party in the memorial tribute to Jane Gool by Zina Scholtz after Gool's death in 1996 (Zina Scholtz, 'Jane Gool-Tabata; Obituary presented at the Memorial Meeting for Jane Gool, Athlone Civic Minor Hall (Unity Movement of South Africa, 18 May 1996').

life.<sup>10</sup> Researchers who sought out Tabata and Jane Gool in the 1980s found an ageing revolutionary couple who had long become accustomed to the practice of narrating their life histories - especially Tabata's - as those of resistance veterans, in relation to the evolution of the political principles and practice of the Unity Movement.<sup>11</sup> In addition, as we shall see, from the 1960s, as much as Tabata's biography was projected and ingested, its narration was also challenged.

The particular narration of Tabata's life, which was promoted, ingested and retold in this shifting order of education, was constituted in the 1960s and 1970s with his active participation. This was a tale of a coherent life of political action and leadership that began in the 1930s in political structures of the Lenin Club, the Spartacus Club and the Workers' Party of South Africa (WPSA).<sup>12</sup> Tabata's life was narrated as part of a remarkable group, which included Jane Gool, who was publicly his partner, and her deceased brother Goolam Gool. Together they constituted 'The Three Musketeers',<sup>13</sup> the 'first generation of black leaders whose political training did not take place under the tutelage of white liberals'.<sup>14</sup> In the detail of this narrative, it was Claire Goodlatte, the 'Red Nun' who had been Gool and Tabata's WPSA mentor and trainer in political theory, who had granted 'the responsibility of leadership' to Tabata and Jane Gool.<sup>15</sup> Jane Gool recalled this moment in Goodlatte's house in York Street, Woodstock, in about 1935 in solemn terms:

I got such a shock that the hairs on my skin rose, I got cold.... [Tabata] stammered [and said] 'I never thought of myself as a leader....' It was like a tidal wave had hit us all. Both of us grew pale with shock. We moved out of the house. I looked at him and he at me, and we stood naked, as it were. We knew then that we were going to be burdened with the responsibility of leadership.... There was nobody else. And although we denied it ... although we pushed it to the back of our

10 The celebration of Tabata's 80th birthday in Harare in 1989 was indeed a festive biographic occasion in which speeches honouring him connected his political biography to a political legacy. See for example, 'A Speech in honour of Com. Tabata on his birthday on the 10th of June 1989', Harare, 1989, Jane Gool Papers (I am in possession of a copy of this text). Amina Hughes' video interview with Tabata and Jane Gool was conducted to mark his 80th birthday. Alie and Ursula Fataar remembered a celebration of Tabata's birthday in Lusaka in c. 1970, when Wycliffe Tsotsi, in a celebratory speech, suggested that while their membership might have been few then, 'one day there would be a public holiday on the President's birthday'. (Interview with Alie and Ursula Fataar, Harare, 19 July 1991).

11 See for example, Alison Drew, interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, December 1987 (author's possession); Shamil Jeppie and Eugene Cairncross, interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, 16-22 January 1989, Western Cape Oral History Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, UCT; Julie Frederickse, interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, 1986 (South African History Archive, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand); see also the article 'Veteran of SA freedom fight tells her story', *The Herald* (Zimbabwe), 14 January 1986.

12 These Marxist formations were sometimes simply referred to more vaguely as 'left discussion clubs', as a shorthand in certain settings, where more precise details were not required. See for example Amina Hughes, video interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, 10 September 1989.

13 This was the formulation put to me by Jane Gool, and is also contained in Amina Hughes' interview with Tabata and Gool. After Jane Gool's death, APDUSA member, Zina Scholtz repeated this formulation in her description of the early political relationship between Jane and Goolam Gool and I.B. Tabata. See interview with Jane Gool, Harare, 18-19 July 1991; Amina Hughes, video interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, 10 September 1989; Zina Scholtz, 'Jane Gool-Tabata'.

14 Norman Traub, 'I.B. Tabata' (obituary), *The Independent*, 3 November 1990.

15 Interview with Jane Gool, Harare, 25-28 January 1991; younger members would have been taught to be circumspect about the specifically Marxist, underground elements of this narrative. In a speech at Dora Taylor's memorial service after her death in 1976, Tabata himself referred cryptically to Goodlatte (without mentioning her name) as one of the people who had 'helped to mould' him. It was she who 'showed us how to live' (I.B. Tabata, oration at Dora Taylor's Memorial Service, 1976, copy in author's possession, courtesy of Doreen and Michael Muskett). On Claire Goodlatte more generally, see Baruch Hirson, 'Spark and the "Red Nun"', *Searchlight South Africa*, No 2, February 1989.

minds, nevertheless we knew that that was a task which we could not avoid.<sup>16</sup>

The Unity Movement of South Africa was given a seamless history, which went back to the formation of the Non-European Unity Movement in 1943-44.<sup>17</sup> This represented an attempt to create ‘non-European unity’ through uniting the Anti-CAD and the AAC, and it was Tabata who had outlined the foundations for the ‘building of unity’ in an address to the Second Unity Conference in 1945.<sup>18</sup> The key methodology of nation-building through the medium of these organisations was the federal structure in which organisations from civic bodies and cultural societies to sports clubs and church bodies could affiliate and be brought into the fold. Another breakthrough in organisational terms had been the formation of AP-DUSA in 1961, the ‘unitary’ body formed to draw in ‘workers and peasants’. These organisational forms emerged under Tabata’s influence, and it was Tabata who was projected as the leading thinker and orator of the movement, a leader forced into exile under threat of repression, after having survived a five-year ban. He was a ‘brilliant political analyst’, as shown by his writings and speeches, and he was also an ‘outstanding organiser and orator’, who was able ‘to convey to all sections of the population, workers and peasants’, the ‘complex nature’ of the struggle in South Africa and ‘the solution to the political problems facing the people in clear, unambiguous terms’.<sup>19</sup>

A key moment in this fairly settled narrative was Tabata’s arrest at Mount Ayliff in 1948. His acquittal ‘galvanised the spirit of resistance among the peasantry’, and this ‘spread throughout the rural areas and continued into the 1960s’. It was because of their ‘revolutionary’ politics that Tabata and his comrades were ‘thwarted’ in their efforts to secure recognition and support from the OAU. Nevertheless, in this narrative, Tabata’s life did not culminate in failure. Mindful of the ‘continuity of the struggle’, and concerned about ‘leaving behind a worthy heritage for the young’, Tabata was ‘very interested in the youth and devoted a great deal of energy’ to training them.<sup>20</sup> The culmination of this biographic narrative of political consistency was Tabata’s life and work turned into a realm of memory, through the continuing sale of his writings, and in the creation of the Tabata archival collection. This was the final stage of biographic work in the ongoing moulding and reproduction of Tabata’s life history.

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16 Interview with Jane Gool, Harare, 25-28 January 1991.

17 Indeed, the name UMSA (chosen to build and propagate the organisation in exile after ‘Non-European’ had been dropped in 1964 in favour merely of ‘Unity Movement’ or ‘UM’) was anachronistically transported back in time and given an existence in the 1940s in some biographic narrations. See Amina Hughes, video interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, 10 September 1989.

18 “The Basis of Unity” (by B.M. Kies) and “The Building of Unity” (by I.B. Tabata), two addresses delivered at the 3rd Unity Conference Held in the Banqueting Hall, Cape Town on 4th & 5th January, 1945’, issued by the Non-European Unity Committee, 1945. Crowe-Rassool Papers (in author’s possession).

19 Norman Traub, ‘I.B. Tabata’ (obituary), *The Independent*, 3 November 1990. See also Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA), ‘I.B. Tabata’, memorial pamphlet issued by the Unity Movement of South Africa, Eikefontein, October 1990.

20 Norman Traub, ‘I.B. Tabata’ (obituary), *The Independent*, 3 November 1990.

## ***Inyaniso* and biographic disavowal**

But Tabata did not always have a biography. His refusal to narrate his life and distribute his own image reared its head at an early stage in the history of the Unity Movement. This biographic disavowal was expressed in 1946 in a remarkable set of epistolary exchanges. The youthful editor of a newly formed newspaper, *Inyaniso* ('The Truth'), B. Mnguni, wrote to Tabata requesting him to write a review of a pamphlet on influx control which had been published shortly before.<sup>21</sup> Ironically, the pamphlet, *Influx of Natives into Towns*, was a piece that Tabata himself had authored under a pseudonym.<sup>22</sup> Realising the 'predicament' he was in, and clearly not wanting to do a review of his own work, Tabata nevertheless wanted to give the new publication and the group behind it 'every encouragement and help' he could. Mnguni and his colleagues at *Inyaniso* saw themselves as 'an independent youth league not connected with Mbede's (sic) group'.<sup>23</sup>

Within a few days, Tabata wrote off<sup>24</sup> to Wycliffe Tsotsi, who had earlier complained to him of being 'snowed under with work'. Tabata nevertheless suggested that Tsotsi could help him solve the problem. He proposed to Tsotsi that he help out 'by either fathering or writing the review'. Tabata explained that he had asked Dora Taylor to write the review, and asked Tsotsi 'to do what you like. You have a completely free hand. You can tear the document to pieces. You can alter it, knock it into shape in your own style, use it as a basis, anything you like'. Tabata implored Tsotsi to let 'the boys' have the review 'under your name'. 'For obvious reasons' it could not go under Taylor's name. Tabata enclosed Taylor's review, saying that it was already about '10 lines too long'.<sup>25</sup>

Mnguni and *Inyaniso* had, in fact, asked for more than just a review from Tabata. They also asked him to write an autobiographical sketch and submit a photographic portrait for their forthcoming paper. For Tabata, this request was absolutely 'out of the question'. While seeming to 'appreciate its implications', Tabata's response was to 'emphatically reject' the request. In his letter to Tsotsi, Tabata tried to find an explanation for Mnguni's request:

One sees from their request exactly the way they think. They still cling to this "little leader" business. Their little hero must be boosted and have his pictures all over the show. They must [rather] learn to respect and turn their devotion to ideas rather than the individual.<sup>26</sup>

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21 I.B. Tabata to B Mnguni, 21 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection (BC 925), The original letter from Mnguni does not survive, but it is referred to in Tabata's reply.

22 B. Somvinane (I.B. Tabata), *Influx of Natives into Towns: What it Means*, (All African Convention (WP), May 1944) (Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University).

23 I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 12 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection (BC 925). 'Mbede' was obviously a reference to Anton Lembede of the newly formed Congress Youth League.

24 Note that this is not entirely true. The letter in the collection is in Dora Taylor's handwriting, and may have been narrated by Tabata, as if to a secretary. However, it is more likely that the strategy it proposed was the result of careful discussion, planning and resolution by both Tabata and Taylor. See below.

25 I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 12 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection (BC 925).

26 I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 12 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection (BC 925).

In his response to Mnguni, Tabata was moved to enter the mode of the educator and political mentor. After explaining that he had asked Tsotsi, ‘a very able and well-known man belonging to the younger school of thought’, to do the review for *Inyaniso*, Tabata commended Mnguni and his colleagues for the task which they had set themselves of ‘unearthing the *Inyaniso* and carrying it to the people’. The ‘Bantu Press’ (*Umteteli wa Bantu* and *Inkundla ya Bantu*) had refused to refer to the ‘Influx’, much like ‘the old reactionaries and government agents amongst us’, who ‘muzzle up the message that such pamphlets carry to the people and cast over them the blanket of silence’. However, *Inyaniso* had boldly selected to review pamphlets such as the *Influx*, which were ‘anathema’ to the government, and this was ‘indicative of the role it intends to play in the life of non-Europeans’.<sup>27</sup>

Mindful of his position as educator, Tabata explained his refusal to submit an autobiographical sketch and photograph. Unlike *Umteteli wa Bantu*, whose reports tended to ‘boost personalities and splash in their pages the faces of such people, *Inyaniso* had much more important work to do’. *Inyaniso* was concerned ‘not just with advertising personalities, but with the spread of ideas’. ‘Too often in the past’, Tabata continued, ‘have we concentrated on building up individual leaders’. Individuals, he argued could be ‘bought and sold’. Tabata advocated that it was time ‘to teach the people to fix their attention on the idea and to give their devotion and energy to the cause, rather than the leader’. The time of ‘passionate and slavish obedience to a leader’ was over.<sup>28</sup> Tabata urged that *Inyaniso* ‘bring consciousness to the people’ so that ‘they must know the nature of the forces they are up against; they must know what to fight and how to fight’. Armed with knowledge, the people would be able to support a leadership which expressed their aspirations, so that ‘the moment a leader departs from the correct road, they will kick him out’.<sup>29</sup>

A number of issues related to Tabata’s ‘biographic disavowal’ emerge out of this exchange between him, Mnguni and Tsotsi. What was the meaning of Tabata’s photographic ambivalence in 1946, and how can one historicise his relationship with the camera and the conventions of portraiture? The correspondence also raises issues of paternalism and patronage that characterised Tabata’s structured relations with young people and organisations of youth on the one hand, and with fellow-activists who held leadership positions in local affiliates of the movement on the other. These relations were part of the peculiar educational character of political formations in which identities and selves were defined, and leadership was performed.<sup>30</sup> How can one understand the notions of writing, authorship and publication raised by the 1946 correspondence, the contradictory ways in which they featured at different times, and the relations through which writing occurred and authorship was claimed? It was these relations of writing and authorship that generated the materials out of which the Tabata archive was constructed. More

27 I.B. Tabata to B Mnguni, 21 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

28 I.B. Tabata to B Mnguni, 21 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

29 I.B. Tabata to B Mnguni, 21 March 1946, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

30 These issues are explored in Rassool, ‘The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa’, Chapters 6-8.

generally, how can one understand the constitution of the Tabata archival collection and the processes of its creation? The most significant relationship through which Tabata became a writer and author, and through which he acquired a biography, was that with fellow WPSA member and fellow writer, Dora Taylor. Indeed, it can be argued that it was Dora Taylor who was the primary author of Tabata's biographic narrative.

## Writing without authorship

The transition from 'selflessness'<sup>31</sup> to 'presidentialism' was a fundamental feature of Tabata's history as a writer and author. Indeed, the subsuming of the self by the political activist into the political formations and ideas of the collective was not always as clear-cut as Tabata made it seem in 1946 in his correspondence with Mn-guni and Wycliffe Tsotsi. In the first place, in exhorting Tsotsi to author a text that had already been written by Dora Taylor as a review of a written intervention circulated under the name 'B Somvinane', Tabata was exercising the authority of his leadership in the All African Convention, in spite of the fact that he held no formal office at the national level in that body.<sup>32</sup> Leadership may have been conceptualised and projected as collective and the rejection of individualised leadership may have enabled the public performance of collective leadership as a means of rejecting older political approaches. However, Tabata became increasingly committed to writing and authorship, and these provided ambiguously for individualising modes of communication which seemed to contradict notions of 'selflessness' and the collective.

Having immersed himself in the intellectual worlds of the clubs and fellowships connected to the WPSA from the 1930s, it seems that I.B. Tabata's writing began to take off in the early 1940s. It seemingly began as notes made for lectures to the New Era Fellowship (NEF) in which ideas were carefully set out, surveying the historical development of African political organisation through a sequence of stages.<sup>33</sup> Soon this gave way to official written submissions on behalf of the AAC (WP) to the Native Affairs Commission on major questions that affected the daily

31 In a speech to the 1955 Cape African Teachers' Association (CATA) conference, Tabata contrasted 'selflessness' and 'complete devotion to the cause', conceptualised as 'greater than the individual', with the 'reckless actions' and 'stunts and pranks' of the 1950s campaigns by Congress, which were predicated on 'individual sacrifice'. See 'Notes for speech, CATA Conference, 1955', Tabata Collection, BC 925.

32 It is clear that Tabata drew a distinction between leadership and the holding of political office in the 'straitjacket of officialdom'. In December 1948, Wycliffe Tsotsi was elected to the Presidency of the AAC, as part of a strategy to 'get rid of Jabavu'. Someone had to be found to replace D.D.T. Jabavu who was 'young, well-known, acceptable to the country and above all trustworthy and in full accord with the policy of Convention'. In taking responsibility for Tsotsi's election, Tabata expressed his guilt to him as follows: 'I felt I had sacrificed you in a way to the exigencies of the time'. This 'sacrifice' he argued, had been 'forced upon us' and he saw it as temporary, to 'tide us over a difficult period' 'Your job and my job are in the field', he suggested to Tsotsi, '[and] on the floor of the house, hammering out a new policy or fighting for the implementation of one that has been decided upon'(I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 22 February 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925). In the 1940s and 1950s, Tabata was at most a provincial representative on the AAC executive. It was only in 1961 that he was elected President of APDUSA.

33 Lecture to the NEF on the AAC, 14 June 1941, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. In the organisation of the Collection, Dora Taylor tried to establish Tabata's 'first attempt' at writing, and this resulted in an incomplete document, 'Manifesto of the AAC', marked as 1939 in spite of its clear references to events of 1943-44.

lives of African people.<sup>34</sup> These presentations resulted in some of Tabata's earliest writings, which were published in the independent intellectual magazine and critical review, *Trek*,<sup>35</sup> and also generated his first substantial political pamphlet, the *Influx*. What is noteworthy about these early pieces of writing is that almost all of them were published under pseudonyms.<sup>36</sup> During the 1940s Tabata continued to submit written interventions for publication under pseudonyms to *Trek*<sup>37</sup> as well as to the mining capital-owned *Umteteli wa Bantu* and the African-owned (but anti-Communist) *Inkundla ya Bantu*.<sup>38</sup> However, the latter two were often hostile to the emerging positions on non-collaboration and the building of unity taken by Tabata, and often his submissions went unpublished.<sup>39</sup>

This rejection might have been expected from *Umteteli*, which was in the Bantu Press stable, but for Tabata, it was especially galling that the supposedly independent and African-owned *Inkundla*, which had claimed to be 'a forum for African opinion', acted 'in the exact manner as the Chamber of Mines press'.<sup>40</sup> After complaining to its owner about the failure of its editor, Jordan Ngubane, to ensure open discussion, Tabata was moved to ask whether *Inkundla ya Bantu* had not in practice become *Inkundla ka Rulumente*, as a result of its declaration that 'our community has wisely decided not to boycott the ... elections'.<sup>41</sup> By the beginning of 1948, after Ngubane had advocated participation in the NRC elections (in order to return the protesting MRCs –so-called 'boycott candidates' - en bloc) and the 'breaking' of the boycott movement, Tabata went on the offensive. By then virtually the only forums willing to publicise and promote political positions which rejected 'trusteeship', 'segregated institutions and dummy councils' and advocated the 'New Road' of 'Non-Collaboration with the oppressor' and 'National

34 All African Convention Committee (WP), 'Memo on the Proclamation restricting the entry of Africans into the Cape Town Municipal Area' (June 1941); 'Memo of the AAC Committee (WP) for submission to the Native Affairs Commission on the Beer Question', n.d. I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. The latter was in response to a Notice from the Department of Native Affairs, in which the AAC (WP) was asked to submit a memorandum as part of the Native Affairs Commission's enquiry into the production, supply and sale of 'kaffir beer'. It is interesting that this brief co-operation with the procedures of the Native Affairs Department occurred at an early stage in the evolution of the policy and meaning of non-collaboration. Considered together, these pieces of writing constituted a veritable social survey of Langa.

35 B Ywaye (I.B. Tabata), 'We don't want beer halls', *Trek*, 24 October 1941; 'Commissioning Native Affairs', *Trek*, 8 May 1942; 'From him that hath not', *Trek*, 23 October 1942; 'The Native elections: a post-mortem', *Trek*, 20 November 1942.

36 Tabata used the pseudonyms B Ywaye and B Somvinane. The exceptions were the address on the history of the AAC which Tabata delivered to the 1941 AAC conference, and the address on 'The building of unity' which Tabata presented to the Third Unity Conference of the NEUM in 1945. These addresses were published and circulated under his own name, probably because they had been presented as part of the official quasi-parliamentary proceedings of the AAC and NEUM conferences. In addition, the latter address was published alongside B.M Kies' address on 'The basis of unity'. See I.B. Tabata, 'Six years of Convention' (address delivered at the Conference of the All African Convention, December 16, 1941), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; "The Basis of Unity" (by B.M. Kies) and "The Building of Unity" (by I.B. Tabata). The former published address had its origins in Tabata's lecture on the AAC delivered to the New Era Fellowship a few months earlier. See lecture to the NEF on the AAC, 14 June 1941, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

37 I Funeka (I.B. Tabata), 'African milestone', *Trek*, 11 February 1944. One of Tabata's sisters was known as Funeka.

38 For contemporary discussions of South African newspapers directed at black readers in the 1940s, see Edward Roux, 'The Bantu press', *Trek*, 24 August 1945 and A.J. Friedgut, 'The Non-European press', in Ellen Hellmann and Leah Abrahams, eds., *Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1949). See also Les Switzer and Ime Ukpaham, 'Under siege: *Inkundla ya Bantu* and the African nationalist movement, 1938-1951', in Les Switzer, ed., *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

39 A list of these submissions can be found in the Tabata Collection, BC 925. Some of these were: B Penza (I.B. Tabata), letter submitted to *Umteteli wa Bantu* August 1941; I Bangani (I.B. Tabata), 'The manoeuvres of the Indian leadership', submitted to *Umteteli*, May 1946. 'Reply to Rev JJ Skomolo', submitted to *Umteteli*, December 1946; I Bangani, 'This bogus unity', submitted to *Inkundla ya Bantu*, c.1947.

40 I.B. Tabata to C.P. Motsemme (Owner of *Inkundla*), c.1947, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata had submitted an article about Xuma's policy, which was not published.

41 I Bangani, 'Inkundla ya Bantu? or Inkundla ka Rulumente?: (The people's forum? or The oppressors' forum?)', Typescript, c.1947, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

Unity' were those created by the AAC and the Unity Movement.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, these institutions became critical instruments deployed in a modernist political project of 'building a nation from words'.<sup>43</sup>

In the monthly *Bulletin of the All African Convention* and in *The Torch*, the fortnightly newspaper of the NEUM, I.B. Tabata provided written materials to be published either anonymously, without an authorship by-line, or under a pseudonym.<sup>44</sup> Occasionally, this writing gave rise to pamphlets or leaflets, also published without clear reference to Tabata's authorship. This writing without authorship emerged out of a conscious and deliberate programme of political intervention and textual production. This programme was incorporated into a political code of 'selflessness', collective leadership and commitment to 'the cause'.

The maintenance of collective leadership as a code of political mobilisation was an important element of the critique of the 'old road', which had as one of its features the building up of leaders 'from obscurity into the political limelight' through the 'din and boom' of newspaper reports.<sup>45</sup> The anonymity of the pseudonym was an attempt to shift the focus away from specific activists and producers of written ideas in order to encourage adherence and loyalty to the movement and to the ideas of the 'new road'. This undoubtedly resulted in knowledge being produced behind a veil of collectivity, while the individuated and collaborative processes of production went unacknowledged in the service of collective mobilisation and principled unity. In the process, it is possible that the potential individuating consequences of writing and authorship may have been temporarily offset.

### **I.B. Tabata and Dora Taylor**

However, Tabata's writing, whether or not under his own name, was not entirely individual. The Tabata Collection provides ample evidence that his writing emerged out of his relationship with fellow-WPSA member Dora Taylor, one that was marked by intense and on-going political and personal interchange. The home of academic psychologist J.G. Taylor and his wife Dora was a studious one, 'two people in two different rooms, working'.<sup>46</sup> According to Jane Gool, it was with Dora Taylor's encouragement that Tabata started to write. Indeed, with Taylor and in the studious atmosphere of her Claremont home, Tabata became immersed in a programme of writing that was one of the core elements of his full-time political work. In Gool's words Taylor 'became his secretary, took down the writing, and

42 I Bangani, 'We accuse', Typescript, 13 January 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925 (published as a pamphlet in early 1948); *The Voice of the All African Convention*, No 17, February 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. In 1947, Tabata's article on Xuma's policy, which had been rejected by *Inkundla*, was published in *The Torch*. See I Bangani, 'A dummy Unity Movement: Whither Xuma?', *The Torch* 14 April 1947.

43 Here I borrow a key phrase from Isabel Hofmeyr's seminal study of the cultural history of Afrikaner nationalism. See Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and ethnic identity, 1902-1924', in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, eds., *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London: Longman, 1987).

44 After *The Torch* was created in 1946 as the main written forum in the NEUM, it seems that Tabata stopped submitting political analyses to *Trek*. Tabata encouraged activists around the country to support *The Torch* in its' important task 'of enlightening the people politically'. Its 'weighty political message' needed 'news items from all over the country' alongside it in order to be effective. See I.B. Tabata to Mkele (Durban), 31 January 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

45 I Bangani, 'A dummy Unity Movement: Whither Xuma?', *The Torch* 14 April 1947.

46 I.B. Tabata, oration at Dora Taylor's Memorial Service, c.1976.

criticised and so on'. Consequently, the quality of this writing surprised Gool, who up till then thought that Tabata was more at home 'on the platform'.<sup>47</sup>

Dora Taylor herself had been immersed in a programme of creative and political writing as well as literary criticism, having herself been encouraged to 'fulfil herself' and 'do what she was qualified for' by Claire Goodlatte.<sup>48</sup> In the WPSA's Spartacus Club in the late 1930s, Taylor wrote plays which were performed by members.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, from 1939 in *Trek* she found an outlet for her political analyses, social commentary and literary scholarship.<sup>50</sup> While she became known mainly as a literary scholar, it is interesting that Taylor's first writings were studies of political and social questions including analyses of war and imperialism, the economics of political life, women and fascism, the role of education, the meaning of democracy and ideology and propaganda.<sup>51</sup> At this time she also wrote a critical discussion of the findings on social poverty identified by the 1938-39 Social Survey, which had been undertaken in Cape Town under the directorship of UCT's Edward Batson.<sup>52</sup>

From late 1941 Taylor's focus switched almost entirely to cultural and literary analyses, with major assessments of international and South African literary production.<sup>53</sup> This was a shift that seemed to coincide with the submissions to *Trek* of political analyses under Tabata's pseudonyms. It was as if Taylor and Tabata came to adopt an intellectual division of labour, with Taylor as cultural critic and Tabata as political analyst. If political intervention was needed through the written word, little could be gained organisationally by this being done in Taylor's hand, and under her name. Instead, from some time in the second half of 1941, the energies of Taylor's political analyses became directed towards assisting Tabata in the production of political interventions under his pseudonyms. Tabata's writings were thus not those of the lone, self-sufficient writer. They were produced in a relationship with Dora Taylor, at her encouragement, with her active assistance and drawing on her prior experience as a writer. At times this help was merely that of the secretary

47 Interview with Jane Gool, Harare, 25-28 January 1991.

48 I.B. Tabata, oration at Dora Taylor's Memorial Service, 1976.

49 Dora Taylor to 'Comrade Tabata', nd.[1936/7?], Tabata Collection, BC 925.

50 Dora Taylor expressed her delight at the emergence of *Trek* in 1939 as a bilingual, biweekly 'family magazine for all South Africans' out of its predecessor, *Independent*. She had found the first issue "stimulating", and found that there was 'something for everyone on every page' (letter from Dora Taylor, *Trek*, 31 August 1939).

51 Dora Taylor, 'War and ourselves: The road to peace', *Trek*, 31 August 1939; 'When are politics not politics', *Trek*, 28 September 1939; 'Women and Fascism', *Trek*, 1 February 1940; 'Is our education...?', *Trek*, 19 December 1940; 'What have we done for democracy?', *Trek*, 2 January 1941; 'Education for democracy', *Trek*, 16 January 1941; 'The proper goose for propaganda', *Trek*, 27 February 1941; 'Facts and fancies in education', *Trek*, 18 July 1941.

52 Dora Taylor, 'Challenge and warning', *Trek*, 23 May 1941; 'Challenge and warning II', *Trek*, 6 June 1941.

53 Taylor's literary writings in *Trek* began with a number of reviews of socially and politically relevant books such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (*Trek*, 9 May 1941), André Malraux's *Storm of Shanghai* and *Days of Contempt* (*Trek*, 6 June 1941), Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* (*Trek*, 20 June 1941) and C.L.R James's *The Black Jacobins* (*Trek*, 29 August 1941). Soon these gave way to major, extended essays of cultural and literary analysis. See for example Dora Taylor, 'Our colonial complex', *Trek*, 21 November 1941; 'Olive Schreiner - A challenge to today I - IV', *Trek*, 30 January 1942 - 13 March 1942; 'They speak of Africa I - VI', *Trek*, 22 May 1942 - 31 July 1942; 'Africans speak I - II', *Trek*, 28 August 1942 - 11 September 1942; 'Can Afrikaans Survive', *Trek*, 14 January 1944; 'Ivory Towers: New Models I - II', *Trek*, 5 May 1944 - 19 May 1944. *The Rôle of the Missionaries in Conquest* (Alexandra, Johannesburg: Society of Young Africa, November 1952) published under the pseudonym Nosipho Majeke was a significant exception. Its origins, however, lay in research for her unpublished historical play, *Hintsia*. See Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa', Chapter 7.

(as Jane Gool described her), wordsmith and grammarian. Sometimes she was the amanuensis,<sup>54</sup> and at others, the silent, unacknowledged co-author.

As a WPSA member, Taylor was charged with the task of providing administrative assistance to Tabata in his full-time political work in the AAC and other formations from at least August 1941. Sometimes she performed other backstage administrative duties such as the recording of special meetings and conferences.<sup>55</sup> She continued to give lectures, particularly on literary subjects.<sup>56</sup> But for the most part, Taylor became immersed with Tabata in the almost daily work of written composition as politics: letters and telegrams to national and local leaders and activists inside and outside the movement, letters to newspapers, political manifestos, reports of meetings, drafts of written texts for the monthly pamphlet, *The Voice of the All African Convention*, articles for *The Torch* and texts of conference speeches. Often this immersion also entailed assisting Tabata with basic printing and roneoing of materials for distribution.<sup>57</sup>

This joint work seemingly began with contemporary strategic editorial suggestions, rewordings and reformulations made by Taylor to a draft of a letter in Tabata's handwriting, which had been prepared for submission to *Umteteli wa Bantu*.<sup>58</sup> By 1943 she was intervening significantly, making suggestions for wording and paragraphs in the preparation of a text for presentation to the AAC Conference of December 1943.<sup>59</sup> Drafts of letters were often prepared in both Tabata and Taylor's script, but mostly solely in Taylor's script, indicating the possibility of dictation or the work of an amanuensis. Many strategic letters often saw substantial overwriting by Taylor, the adding of words into sentences and the incorporation of new sentences in ways that contributed substantially to their meaning.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes, critical written interventions under Tabata's pseudonym seem to have had their origins in texts in Taylor's handwriting, which may have resulted from dictation, but more likely may have been the product of joint thinking, discussion and formulation.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, it can be argued unequivocally that at crucial moments, Dora Taylor participated directly in the setting out of political policy and in the

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54 This was the term used by Wycliffe Tsotsi to describe Dora Taylor's position. See Wycliffe Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 3 February 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. After sending his 'warmest regards' to Tabata's 'amanuensis', Tsotsi bemoaned not having one himself to 'bring a little order' into his 'chaotic existence'.

55 Among these was the special meeting of the NEF convened at the Stakesby Lewis Hostel on 28 February 1943 to strategise a political response to the proposed Coloured Affairs Council (seen as a step en route to a Coloured Affairs Department – CAD – along the lines of the Native Affairs Department). It was here that Tabata proposed the formation of an Anti-CAD committee as a United Front. Other gatherings where she was present and took notes at were the Anti-CAD Conference held in the Mowbray Town Hall on 27 March 1948 and the NEUM Conference held in the Woodstock Town Hall on April 2-3 1951. Notes of these gatherings in Taylor's handwriting are to be found in the I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

56 Taylor gave a lecture at the first Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) Spring School held in Red Hill, Simonstown on 5 & 6 October 1950. As a white WPSA member, Dora Taylor participated in public formations only as an invited lecturer with special expertise in the literary field.

57 See I.B. Tabata, pocket diary, entries for 21 February 1945; 27 March 1945, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

58 B Penza (I.B. Tabata), draft of letter to Editor, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, c. August 1941, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. This letter demanded that Jabavu and the rest of the older leadership of the AAC commit themselves to the AAC Conference at Bloemfontein in December 1941, or else 'give way to younger and more energetic men'. Many other documents in the collection, which date to the early 1940s, bear Taylor's annotated markings which had been added *subsequently* as part of editorial work that she did in the planning of publications.

59 See for example, 'Full text of political review presented to the Conference of the AAC, December 1943', Tabata Collection, BC 925.

60 See for example circular letter from I.B. Tabata, n.d. (c.1943), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

61 See for example the various handwritten and typed (and annotated) versions of 'We Accuse', published eventually as a pamphlet in early 1948, but which bore a draft title, *Mountains, Labour and Produce: A Rat*.

production of meaning in what was a single, productive, knowledge-producing unit.

Michael Muskett expressed the full range of Tabata and Taylor's collaborative efforts in the following way:

They worked together in absolute collaboration, teasing out precise meaning and dressing it to give it colour. And they would ... think nothing of spending fifteen minutes on a sentence ... until they got the formulation and the sensitivities to it just right and the balance right. [If they] didn't quite like the way that document [came out] they would re-write it. [Later] he would come over and stay for a few weeks and again the writing would continue, whether it was letters or analyses or [work on] the international situation. Whatever it might have been, they worked on it together. [Their's] was a most unusual collaboration.<sup>62</sup>

### **Authorial responsibility and political persuasion**

Quite anomalously, at the end of 1945, a few months before his correspondence with Mnguni and Tsotsi over the *Inyaniso* request, the AAC Committee published a 16-page pamphlet written by Tabata (undoubtedly with Taylor's assistance) under his own name.<sup>63</sup> It is not clear why this authorial decision was made in strategic terms. Perhaps the prior publication of the 'Building of unity' address under Tabata's name was an influencing factor. The purpose of the pamphlet was 'to enlighten the people' about the government's 'rehabilitation scheme' for the reserves, and to provide an analysis of the scheme in relation to the political economy of labour supply and rural relations.<sup>64</sup> The publication of the pamphlet was also meant to enhance 'the prestige of the organisation in the eyes of the people', and to raise funds for the AAC.<sup>65</sup>

The rural areas of the Eastern Cape and Transkei were seen as important areas for the distribution of the pamphlet, especially in areas like Butterworth, Mount Ayliff and Pondoland, which had been earmarked for the implementation of betterment. This distribution occurred through the structures of the AAC, with office-bearers and local activists sent batches of 50 or 100 to be sold.<sup>66</sup> The distribution of this pamphlet with Tabata's name on its cover would assist in foregrounding his planned speaking and organising tour of the area in October 1946. By 1947, the pamphlet had gotten into the hands of state officials in Umtata and Pondoland, who were concerned about its possible 'subversive results' in 'creat[ing] dissent'.

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62 Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Doreen and Michael Muskett, 22 March 1992.

63 I.B. Tabata, *The Rehabilitation Scheme: 'The New Fraud'* (All African Convention Committee, Cape Town, December 1945).

64 For subsequent studies of the history of rehabilitation and betterment schemes, see Fred Hendricks, *The Pillars of Apartheid: Land Tenure, Rural Planning and the Chieftaincy* (Uppsala: Studia Sociologica Upsaliensia, 1990) and Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil*.

65 I.B. Tabata to George Padmore (London), 25 May 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

66 List of names with amounts of *The Rehabilitation Scheme* sent, n.d., I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

tion among the native people'. The view was expressed that instead of suppressing it, the arguments of the pamphlet needed to be counteracted by 'intensified propaganda' by officials about the 'true aims' of rehabilitation.<sup>67</sup> This did not stop the people of Mount Ayliff from rising up against the police and government officials in 1947 in the face of attempts to implement betterment.<sup>68</sup>

This was how Tabata began to take authorial responsibility for the publication of political analyses of state strategies, for insisting on an understanding of 'the inescapable unity of oppression' and for advocating 'the gigantic task of bringing together and unifying all the struggles of all sections of the Non-Europeans'.<sup>69</sup> Embracing the unambiguous position of authorship also entailed leaving the less exposed space of 'collective ideas' and taking on political risks personally. Indeed, when Tabata was arrested at Mount Ayliff in September 1948, a search of his car by the Kokstad police resulted in 62 copies of the pamphlet being found along with other documents and materials. These were confiscated by the police and handed in as evidence at Tabata's trial. During the trial, the prosecution relied on extracts from the pamphlet as part of presenting their case against Tabata.<sup>70</sup> And when A.C. Jordan circulated his appeal for funds for Tabata's case, the struggle biography that he disseminated included an exhortation for people to read Tabata's pamphlet, which was available from him at '8d post free'.<sup>71</sup>

The risk of authorship was also financial. By claiming authorship of *The Rehabilitation Scheme*, Tabata nevertheless forewent any rights to royalties and financial proceeds. After all, the pamphlet had been written for the AAC, partly to raise funds for its organisational work. However, as author, it was Tabata who had to address financial difficulties that arose around the republication of *The Rehabilitation Scheme* in the United States by Max Yergan, of the Council on African Affairs. After giving Yergan permission for the pamphlet to be republished in the US, neither Tabata nor the AAC ever received a copy of the republished pamphlet, nor was anything earned for the AAC in spite of Yergan's knowledge of 'the perpetual financial difficulties which organisations have to face'.<sup>72</sup>

These issues of authorship and its associated risks came to a head in 1950, when a manuscript on the history of the AAC was prepared by Tabata for publication, no doubt with Taylor's assistance. In the writing of this history, 'what was originally intended to be a pamphlet turned into a book'. Tabata, of course, had been writing on the history of Convention, and on the historical evolution of African political formations since at least 1941.<sup>73</sup> He was at the centre of efforts to

67 'Letter from the Chairman of the Planning Committee, Libode, to the Chief Magistrate, Umtata, 8 February 1947 (Document 63), in Allison Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*, Volume Two (Cape Town: Buchu Books; Mayibuye Books; UCT Press, 1997), 315.

68 Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 182-3.

69 I.B. Tabata, *The Rehabilitation Scheme: 'The New Fraud'*. (All African Convention Committee, Cape Town, December 1945).

70 Record of proceedings of case, Rex vs Tabata (1948), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

71 Circular letter from A.C. Jordan, 27 September 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

72 I.B. Tabata to Dr Max Yergan, Council on African Affairs, USA, n.d. (c.1946); I.B. Tabata to George Padmore (London), 25 May 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Max Yergan had been at Fort Hare in the 1930s, and was the AAC's Secretary for External Relations in 1937.

73 See for example, I.B. Tabata, 'Six Years of Convention' (address delivered at the Conference of the All African Convention, December 16, 1941); I Bangani, 'A dummy Unity Movement: Whither Xuma?', *The Torch*, 14 April 1947.

build the AAC and to theorise its historic significance. He was also concerned to find ways of winning over younger activists within Congress to the federal structure and the politics of non-collaboration. To this end, in 1948 he had spent time meeting with and corresponding (with Dora Taylor's assistance) with members of the Congress Youth League, treading a difficult path of advocating principled unity on a federal basis, while simultaneously trying to present a convincing argument about the historical limits of the ANC.<sup>74</sup>

The upshot of these efforts was a long, considered letter which Tabata wrote to Nelson Mandela (undoubtedly with Taylor's help), where he tried to grasp the nettle of open criticism of Congress which he couched within an argument about the evolutionary development of political forms. In his argument Tabata was careful to draw a strategic distinction between the Youth League and Congress itself. 'The African National Congress is rooted in the past', he suggested, 'whereas the Youth League is the product of modern conditions with a modern outlook'. The creation of the AAC in 1935 had represented 'a turning point in the organisational history of the African people'. The AAC's argument for a federal basis of political unity would 'remove competition', 'eliminate all rivalry between organisations' and provide a platform for a 'unified leadership'. A 'spirit of co-operation' would replace 'mutual antagonisms'. Unfortunately, Tabata argued, to Mandela, the ANC had accepted 'the theory of inferiority and trusteeship, with all its political manifestations'.<sup>75</sup>

Near the end of his letter to Mandela, Tabata was moved to explain the modernity of principled unity in historical terms:

Principles are the backbone of any Movement. To put it another way: any organisation which is not founded on the rock of principles is a prey to every wind that blows. It was the failure to recognise this important fact that was primarily responsible for the fall of so many of our organisations in the past. We have had large organisations which were at first hailed with enthusiasm. But they have vanished away, leaving no trace behind.<sup>76</sup>

A young man such as Mandela who wanted to enter politics needed to 'establish the habit of basing his actions on principles', Tabata contended. He needed to be ready 'to swim against the stream'. Armed with principles, the young man would be 'protected against the temptations of seeking popularity and ephemeral success'. Tabata ended his letter by suggesting that they both turn their 'combined energies towards stamping out all opportunism and aim at the unity of the people on a principled basis'.<sup>77</sup>

74 I.B. Tabata to A.P. Mda, 11 March 1948; N.R. Mandela to I.B. Tabata, 22 May 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Mandela had spent time in Cape Town with Tabata discussing the possibilities of cooperation between the AAC and ANC, and his distrust of the Communist Party provided a common basis for discussions with Tabata.

75 I.B. Tabata to N.R. Mandela, 16 June 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

76 I.B. Tabata to N.R. Mandela, 16 June 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

77 I.B. Tabata to N.R. Mandela, 16 June 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata ended by sending his regards to Mandela's family, and expressed the hope that Mandela would be able to return to Cape Town 'when we can exchange our views'.

This letter turned out quite a bit longer than intended, and came to be seen as a treatise on the history of political organisation and the question of unity. Indeed, Tabata soon began to include copies of the letter in his correspondence with his comrades and local cadres in different affiliates of the AAC, deploying it as a document which gave a much needed ‘historical survey’ of political ‘schools of thought’, and the emergence of ‘a principled basis of struggle’.<sup>78</sup> Among the people he sent it to in July and August 1948 were Nathaniel ‘Tshutsha’ Honono, Wycliffe Tsotsi, Leo Sihlali.<sup>79</sup> Tsotsi, in turn, had half a dozen copies made to be sent, with Tabata’s permission, to Livingstone Mqotsi ‘and his small group’ at Fort Hare, and to others ‘in our camp’ in Queenstown, Grahamstown and elsewhere. In addition, Tsotsi discussed it ‘with several people’ in Port Elizabeth, as he saw it as a document ‘so full of important matters’.<sup>80</sup>

During the following year, Tabata also sent copies of his letter to Mandela to a number of young people, including members of the Congress Youth League. One such young activist was Robert Sobukwe, to whom he wrote congratulating him on the stand he took at the Cape ANC conference, defending the boycott of NRC elections in the face of the ANC leadership. In circulating the letter to Mandela outside the AAC, Tabata had removed Mandela’s name, and simply called it a letter ‘to a friend’.<sup>81</sup> During 1949, Tabata had been ‘inundated with correspondence from people eager to know more about Convention and what it stands for’. The copying and circulation of the letter to Mandela was a temporary means of responding to these requests. The letter, written as part of the politics of discussion and persuasion between individual activists, one of whom (Mandela) was almost ten years younger, was raised to the status of an organisational document that was widely circulated as a clarificatory text. But ultimately, it was seen as insufficient for the purposes of historical explanation and Tabata resolved to write ‘a fuller picture’ of the history of Convention.<sup>82</sup>

### ***The Awakening and individual authorship***

During 1949 and 1950, amid mounting organisational work, Tabata spent some time researching and framing this history. In August 1949, he presented a lecture to the Forum Club on the history of the AAC,<sup>83</sup> and a week later, he wrote to senior African leaders to ask for assistance with information and chronology.<sup>84</sup> At the same time Tabata and Dora Taylor started to write a narrative of the AAC’s history,

78 I.B. Tabata to N. Honono (Nqabara Secondary School, Idutywa), 21 July 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

79 I.B. Tabata to N. Honono (Nqabara Secondary School, Idutywa), 21 July 1948; W. Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 25 July 1948; L. Sihlali to I.B. Tabata, 6 August 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

80 W. Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 25 July 1948, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

81 I.B. Tabata to R. Sobukwe, 13 August 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

82 I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 25 July 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. In that same month, Tabata had received a letter from a student in Johannesburg, E.J. Vawda, who complained about the ‘paucity of material about the All Africa Convention’. What people knew was ‘merely a superficial idea’. He asked Tabata for information so that his study circle could make themselves ‘perfectly clear’ about the AAC’s history. See E.J. Vawda to I.B. Tabata, 12 July 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

83 I.B. Tabata, pocket diary, entry for 23 August 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

84 See I.B. Tabata, circular letter to selected African leaders (including D.D.T. Jabavu and Z.R. Mahabane, 1 September 1949; D.D.T. Jabavu to I.B. Tabata, 6 September 1949; Z.R. Mahabane to I.B. Tabata 15 September 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925

sometimes writing for almost 15 hours per day.<sup>85</sup> At the AAC Annual Conference held in Bloemfontein in mid-December 1949 it was recommended that the history that Tabata was preparing be taken over by the Convention and published by them.<sup>86</sup> By April 1950, the manuscript was completed, and Tabata made an entry in his pocket diary to mark the significance of this moment. ‘On this day, at 10.20 pm’, he wrote ‘we finished the magnum opus, the history of the AAC’.<sup>87</sup> The manuscript was presented to Wycliffe Tsotsi, the AAC president, who expressed his appreciation. However, the AAC could not be expected to meet the steep costs of publication and printing, and Tabata agreed to take this financial responsibility on his own shoulders. Both Tsotsi and Tabata nevertheless wanted the book’s cover to make it clear that it had been published by the AAC. This would serve to ‘enhance the prestige of Convention’, and create an association between the ideas and positions taken in the book and the politics of the AAC.<sup>88</sup>

In planning the manuscript’s publication, Tabata also had to address the issues of political and financial risk. Tabata sent a copy of the manuscript through Ben Kies to George Padmore in London, and wrote to him asking his advice on publishing. By providing ‘a background to and an analysis of the political awakening of the people’, Tabata suggested that a study of this nature had not been written before. There was little hope of finding a publisher in South Africa, and with the AAC named as publisher, there was every chance that it might be affected by repressive legislation and banned. Tabata appealed to Padmore’s political comradeship and asked him to arrange for the book’s publication in Britain or the US, whatever he considered best. While making it clear that ‘neither the organisation nor myself can meet any expense of publishing’, Tabata asked Padmore to negotiate with any publisher ‘the business side of publication’.<sup>89</sup>

On financial matters, Tabata also made it clear to the Reverend Mahabane, the President of the NEUM and the AAC’s Vice-President that ‘if I have to raise the money, then I will have to take the proceeds as well’. He would have to borrow money at ‘great risk’. If the book were banned, he would be ‘financially ruined’, but this was a risk he was willing to take because ‘the publication of the book will benefit the movement in general’.<sup>90</sup> Tabata, of course, was not employed, and had received a small stipend from the WPSA for his full-time political work.<sup>91</sup> It is not surprising that the question of earning some money from his political publishing was raised as an issue. By December 1950, Tabata received the first 66 copies of the printed books, without covers, which had been typeset and printed by Baruch Hirson’s People’s Press, and facilitated by Seymour Papert, Tabata’s protégé in the Progressive Forum in Johannesburg. Tabata was very disappointed with the quality

85 I.B. Tabata, pocket diary, entry for 7 December 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; Ciraj Rassool, interview with Doreen and Michael Musket, 22 March 1992.

86 Minutes of the All African Convention, 16-17 December 1949, Crowe-Rassool Papers.

87 I.B. Tabata, pocket diary, entry for 21 April 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925 (my emphasis). What was intended to be a ‘long article’ became a book length study. See I.B. Tabata, Circular letter to selected African leaders, 1 September 1949, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

88 I.B. Tabata to Rev. Z.R. Mahabane, 1 June 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

89 I.B. Tabata to George Padmore, 25 May 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Padmore had contact with the NEUM through Ben Kies and *The Torch*, which in the previous year, had published an article by him on racial abuse in Britain. See *The Torch*, 18 July 1949.

90 I.B. Tabata to Rev. Z.R. Mahabane, 1 June 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

91 Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Jane Gool, 25-28 January 1991.

of the print, but he wanted to ensure that there was as little delay as possible. In that same month, he arranged for the covers to be printed by Victory Press in Johannesburg, and at the end of May 1951, Tabata handed 730 books over for covers to be added. He wanted the cover to 'catch the eye', and although 'colour and strength' were important, a hard cover was out of the question.<sup>92</sup> Soon, copies of the book went on sale, with all moneys returned directly to Tabata.

The circulation of the book was seen as providing a theoretical and historical explanation of the basis of the AAC's federal structure and argument for principled unity. The Cape African Teachers' Association (CATA) expressed its appreciation for 'the first book, in the long history of South Africa, to be written by a Non-European, of the Non-Europeans, from a Non-European liberatory point of view. Tabata went beyond Plaatje's writings in expressing 'not only the sufferings of the people', but also 'the aspirations of a reawakened people'. Whereas Plaatje's work reflected a time when 'Non-European intellectuals were still ideological slaves of the British Empire and of White Liberalism', Tabata's work reflected the 'new age' of 'an entire people ... breaking with the mental slavery of the past in order to throw off their material chains'. The book represented 'completely independent thinking', based 'exclusively on the needs and aspirations of the oppressed peoples', without 'the faintest trace of dependence on the reigning ideas of even the most subtle thinkers of the World Herrenvolk'.<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, Tabata saw this book as a manual of principled resistance methods, complete with historical explanations of the significance of the AAC, outlines of political obstacles and forms of disruption, and discussions of 'new methods of struggle'.<sup>94</sup> In creating this 'manual of struggle', he felt he had 'perhaps exaggeratedly emphasised the consciousness and clarity of the AAC'. His generation, he argued, 'had started at a disadvantage', with 'no body of literature, no set of principles to guide us in our political struggles'. They had 'to start from scratch'. With *The Awakening*, he suggested, it would be possible to fulfil 'one of our most important tasks', namely, to 'save the youth the colossal wastage of the trial and error method'.<sup>95</sup>

It would be fair to argue that *The Awakening* became one of the most discussed and debated political texts during the 1950s. It was keenly read and reviewed in reading groups and discussion clubs associated with the liberation movement. For some it was a guide to the principles and strategies of political organising. Enver Hassim described in 1990 how those around him had met in their study group 'to discuss it, chapter by chapter'. It 'enriched us ... in ways I can never convey'. With Tabata's writing and speeches, Hassim suggested, there was 'a vision of mankind and a comprehension of history that will never be matched'. Tabata was 'a colos-

92 I.B. Tabata, diary entry for 9 December 1950; I.B. Tabata to Seymour Papert, 12 May 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; Interview with Baruch Hirson, 11 September 1991.

93 *Teachers' Vision*, 18 (4), December 1951, 12. A review of Tabata's book was headed 'A historic book by Mr. I.B. Tabata'.

94 I.B. Tabata, *The All African Convention: The Awakening of a People*, Cape Town: All African Convention, 1950, pp 89, 101.

95 I.B. Tabata to Rev. Z.R. Mahabane, 1 June 1950; I.B. Tabata to George Padmore, 25 May, 1950, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

sus of his time' and 'the whole world is richer for his being'<sup>96</sup> The codification of the ideas and political strategies of the movement in the form of a struggle manual now bore the name of a single leader as their author, one who had demonstrated his mettle in the field two years before when he survived arrest and a trial at Mount Ayliff.

The release of *The Awakening* under Tabata's name, intended to be an educational text for the youth, gave Tabata leadership lustre. The book was 'the product of a rich political experience',<sup>97</sup> the *Teachers' Vision* declared.

For every conscious non-European knows the role which Mr. Tabata himself has played throughout the long history of the Convention. Only one who has helped to make this history could describe and analyse it thoroughly, with a grasp of all nuances.<sup>98</sup>

The circulation of the book served to consolidate and extend the pool of young activists who entered Tabata's orbit of influence as disciples, and confirmed Tabata's position as mentor, teacher and theoretician-in-chief.

Elsewhere on the left Tabata's book was subjected to trenchant criticism for its 'amazing preoccupation with the Federal Structure'. The Forum Club, associated with the remnants of the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA), the other Trotskyist faction that had emerged out of the old Lenin Club, provided a record of its lectures and debates in its journal *Discussion*. It was in this forum that former FIOSA member, Arthur Davids, presented a lengthy critique of *The Awakening* for its propagation of a 'federal fetish'. Tabata himself was slammed for failing to turn his back on the Three Pillar Structure, a 'concession to racialism', of which he had been 'the architect', and for failing to understand that the boycott was 'a tactic and not a principle'.<sup>99</sup>

The Forum Club published Davids's lecture as a 'basis for a general discussion' and committed itself to arranging a few meetings to discuss the contents of Davids's review. Tabata's book was 'the first book which seriously [undertook] the study of the problems of our movement', and it was 'of equal significance' that 'a prominent participant in the democratic movement' had written it. Davids's critical review had 'shown young people entering the movement how to deal with such an important book by objective criticism [and] separating the cheese from the chalk'. Everyone was invited to present his or her views on the book and on the critical review to the open meetings of the Forum Club.<sup>100</sup> Both sympathetic and critical

96 Enver Hassim to Jane Gool, c.October 1990, read by Jane Gool as part of my interview with her, 25-28 January 1991.

97 *Teachers' Vision*, 18 (4), December 1951, 17.

98 *Teachers' Vision*, 18 (4), December 1951, 17.

99 Arthur Davids, 'A Critical Analysis of I.B. Tabata' Book: The All African Convention; or, The Awakening of a People', *Discussion*, 1 (2), 1951, 21-38. Tabata and FIOSA activists had disagreed in public before, at the 6th Unity Conference held in Cape Town in 1948, when FIOSA attempted to express its opposition to the federal structure as the organisational basis of unity. While the conference dismissed FIOSA's unitary position, Tabata went further to argue that FIOSA 'performed the same tasks as the Communist Party and other enemies of the Unity Movement – they were disrupters of Unity'. See *Proceedings of the 6th Unity Conference, 28th, 29th and 30th March 1948, Rondebosch Town Hall* (issued by the NEUM), Crowe-Rassool Papers.

100 *Discussion*, 1, (2), 1951, editorial comment, 50-51 (Chairman's comments).

public reviews of the value and merits of the book thus served to confirm Tabata's prominent public profile as author, public intellectual and political leader, whose ideas required serious consideration.

In the underground WPSA, however, the publication of *The Awakening* and the assertion by Tabata of individual authorship in the public domain were seen as an expression of impertinence and individual ambition, and were deemed to be a deviation from centralised party authority and party discipline. Tabata had dared to write a book without consulting Yudel Burlak, who usually provided party positions on key questions. Tabata had 'dared to voice in [the book] his own opinions without consulting the party'.<sup>101</sup> While the WPSA ceased to exist from sometime in 1950 or soon thereafter, it seems that this had been one of the conflicts that precipitated the growing public rift in the Unity Movement through the 1950s.<sup>102</sup> In the meantime, with Dora Taylor's assistance, Tabata began to assert an independent locus of authority from that formerly provided by the party. He also began to shift away from a strategic immersion in a collective leadership and deliberately put himself forward as author of political histories, principles and strategies without the veil of the pseudonym. This marked a new politics of personhood and leadership in which authorship served as the precursor of biography.

### Crossing the threshold

Once the threshold of collective leadership had been crossed and the political practice of named, individuated authorship had been embraced as a deliberate strategy and calculated risk, Tabata could not go back to the era of commitment to policy and collective authority. The 1950s were a time of organisational realignment in the NEUM, with the emergence of SOYA and other formations, such as the Progressive Forum in Johannesburg, and other structures in Durban, which were seen as loyal to Tabata. Between 1952 and 1956, a sequence of formal and informal discussions and meetings occurred in which Tabata was subjected to a political enquiry. Amid the programme of public meetings in 1951-52, which mobilised people to boycott the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival, special meetings of the NEF were convened to discuss Tabata, and in his pocket diary for 1952, Tabata noted that in the NEF, an 'incipient conflict' had reared its head.<sup>103</sup>

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101 Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Jane Gool, 25-28 January 1991.

102 Jane Gool's memory was that the WPSA ceased to exist 'around the time of the Group Areas Act', when a suggestion was made to divide the party into black and white sections, which would meet on separate days. This suggestion resulted in a walkout by some including Tabata and Jane Gool, and seems to have partly been the cause of the party's dissolution (Ciraj Rassool, Interview with Jane Gool, 25-28 January 1991). By then the party had seen a number of escalating internal conflicts and tensions involving a 'ganging up' of Burlak and Ben Kies against Tabata, and attempts within the party to control Tabata's written expression. From 1945 Burlak and Kies 'wanted a hand' in *The Voice*. Tabata, wrote Taylor, 'yielded to their egoism' (I.B Tabata diary entries for 20 February 1944; 2 June 1944; 6 June 1944; annotated comments by Dora Taylor at the back of handwritten version of *The Voice of the AAC*, No 3, April 1945, I.B Tabata Collection, BC 925). During the 1950s, these conflicts manifested themselves publicly in the NEUM and its affiliates.

103 I.B Tabata pocket diary entries, 17 & 21 January 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. The people whom Tabata felt were leading the accusations against him were S.A. Jayiya and Ben Kies. Later, Tabata would also name Hosea Jaffe as one of the protagonists. See I.B Tabata to Dora Taylor, 6 February 1952; 23 July 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Jaffe, of course, led the political critique against Tabata at the time of his banning (see earlier). See also a copy of a letter from Soyan, G.S. Govindasamy (Fort Hare), complaining of 'nonsensical, babyish political backbiting' on the part of Victor Wessels, who had approached him at the TLSA conference in Port Elizabeth in June 1953, and who had tried to 'create in [him] an attitude of mind against Soya' (letter from G.S. Govindasamy, 25 July 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925).

In the midst of internal strife and in the aftermath of the campaign against the Van Riebeeck Festival, Tabata published - again under his own name - a pamphlet on the boycott, one of the most contentious questions that divided different political tendencies. This was a follow-up to *The Awakening* in presenting an explanation of 'the meaning of the boycott weapon, its effectiveness and ... proper use', and the 'positive part ' it played in 'Building the Nation'.<sup>104</sup> Once again, the pamphlet was published under Tabata's name, with the AAC named as the publisher. Constituting a second manual of resistance methods, Tabata considered it necessary to outline the proper terms of the boycott, as the opponents of the NEUM had

sneered at it, pretended to adopt it in order ... to debase it and render it ineffectual, and finally they have misrepresented it to the people with the express purpose of making it appear meaningless and ridiculous.<sup>105</sup>

One of the significant elements of Tabata's 1952 pamphlet was an analysis of the fear of the boycott on the part of intellectuals, who often 'stand guard over the population as policemen in the interests of their masters'. As a 'specific application of the policy of Non-Collaboration', the boycott exposed the 'voluntary acquiescence on the part of the quisling intellectuals', Tabata argued.<sup>106</sup> Three months after the publication of *The Boycott*, Tabata wrote to Seymour Papert about its effects:

In one district, the delegates from the CATA Conference were selling the 'Boycott', for which, by the way, there was a great demand. Some headmen came running to the Commissioner asking if anything could be done to ban such literature that was 'influxing' the district. That gave me to feel that it hits where it is sore.<sup>107</sup>

By using the word 'influx' to describe the headmen's complaints about *The Boycott*, Tabata was, of course, referencing state policies of control over the movement of African people between rural and urban areas. At the same time, this was a reference to his own pamphlet from 1944 which had critiqued these policies. This also represented a suggestion that Tabata had begun to think about his own writings as constituting a corpus, a written body of coherent political thinking.

When Tabata was banned in 1956, among the alleged statements gathered by the agencies of the state and relied on by the Minister of Justice for the decision, were extracts from his writings. As part of the surveillance of his political activities, the state had deemed at least 29 lines from *The Rehabilitation Scheme* and 22 lines from *The Boycott* as evidence of furthering 'the achievement of the objects of Communism', of 'vilifying the majority of the European inhabitants of the Union

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104 I.B. Tabata, *The Boycott as Weapon of Struggle*, published by the All African Convention Committee (W.P.), Cape Town, June 1952.

105 I.B. Tabata, *The Boycott as Weapon of Struggle*, 2.

106 I.B. Tabata, *The Boycott as Weapon of Struggle*, 18-19.

107 I.B. Tabata to Seymour Papert, 19 September 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

as oppressors' or of 'inciting the non-Europeans to resist'.<sup>108</sup> Read together with a compilation of statements allegedly made by Tabata at meetings across the country between 1948 and 1955, this compilation of extracts from Tabata's resistance writing and speeches by the apartheid state represented a malicious, unauthorised anthology of Tabata's political and intellectual labour. As part of a perverse, repressive biography, the state had turned Tabata's words, uttered and written in his own name, on himself by banning him from gatherings, restricting his movements and attempting to isolate him. This had the effect of contributing to the process of Tabata's individuation, and added to the idea that Tabata, as an individual, bore a political authority that the state feared. As we saw earlier, his banning marked a threshold for a biographical imperative when Tabata's political life began to be narrated in protest meetings and conferences.

But Tabata was not entirely isolated. He had moved into a newly rented house with Jane Gool in Milan Street, on the edge of District Six in 1953, after the closure in the previous year of the African section of the Stakesby Lewis Hostels, where Tabata had lived for many years.<sup>109</sup> Representing the first time that Tabata lived together with a partner, Tabata and Jane Gool created a home together, where Tabata lived out his partial isolation between 1956 and 1961, tending to his garden in the shadow of Devil's Peak. It is also there where Tabata (and Gool), who had begun to adopt the position of elders, received visits from young members of the movement - who often came in pairs - such as Zulei Christopher and Enver Has-sim, Elma Carrollisen and Karrim Essack, Neville Alexander and Gwen Wilcox.<sup>110</sup> He also kept in touch with his comrades and protégés, such as Wycliffe Tsotsi, R.S. Canca, Leo Sihlali and Seymour Papert by correspondence.<sup>111</sup> From about October 1957, with fears of surveillance, Tabata's political correspondents were asked to keep in touch with him through Dora Taylor.<sup>112</sup> These letters, which she received on Tabata's behalf, marked a phase when Taylor became his proxy, marking another level of intellectual and political partnership, and a moment of deeper co-mingling of their political labours.

Tabata's communication with his comrades was especially pressing for him when 'a section of the leadership', especially those associated with the NEF and other Fellowships, sought 'to take advantage of [his] disablement', by directing 'a web of fabrications, gossip and slander' against him, and these had begun to filter into other bodies, such as the TLSA. They were also 'most zealous in enforcing the ban', and had also 'instituted an absolute boycott of the banned individual'. Tabata identified Hosea Jaffe as having led this campaign against the AAC committee for having allegedly been 'infiltrated with liberal influences, tribalism, racialism

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108 Acting Secretary of Justice to Lawyer (name erased), 28 May 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

109 I.B. Tabata pocket diary, entries for 10 July 1952 (departure from the Stakesby Lewis Hostel) and 18 May 1953 (move into 8 Milan Street, Cape Town); I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. During the 10 months in between, Tabata travelled extensively, especially in the Eastern Cape and lived with Amina ('Minnie') Gool, Jane Gool's sister, in Balmoral Street in District Six.

110 I.B. Tabata pocket diary, entries for 3, 12 & 14 January 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

111 See for example, I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 18 March 1957; 30 May 1957; to Leo Sihlali, 14 February 1957, to R.S. Canca ('Mlamleli'), 20 March 1957; to Seymour Papert, 29 November 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. These letters were often drafted in Dora Taylor's script and then typed.

112 See for example, Leo Sihlali to Dora Taylor, 4 October 1957; 22 December 1957; 24 August 1958; A.K. Tom to Dora Taylor, 20 January 1958; 4 June 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

and nationalism'. Jaffe had accused the AAC leadership of being 'the Nkrumahs and Nehrus of South Africa, and champions of speculators'. Amid these charges, Tabata was accused of becoming, for some, a 'sage, seer or father-confessor'.<sup>113</sup> It was necessary, the 'Jaffeites' contended, 'to "save" the youth' from Tabata's 'evil' influences and to rescue them from becoming his 'stooges'.<sup>114</sup>

1957 saw the formation of Prometheus Printers and Publishers (P.P.P.) by Tabata's supporters in Durban, a move necessitated by a realisation that the Torch Publishing Company could not be relied upon as a medium of public expression.<sup>115</sup> In addition, in the midst of crumbling NEUM structures, in July 1958 those activists in the AAC grouped around Tabata launched a new newspaper, *Ikhwezi Lomso* (*Morning or Rising Star*), in the absence of a press that they could trust. The newspaper was understood as an essential 'umbrella' and an 'urgent' conduit for organising and mobilisation, and was 'addressed especially to the peasants'.<sup>116</sup> It would also be an organ independent of Ben Kies and the 'Jaffeites', 'capable of publicising and criticising their actions' and making them 'more careful about what they do'.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, some of the details and organisational consequences of these fratricidal accusations and counter-accusations openly entered the pages of *Ikhwezi*, with reports about plots against the AAC by *The Torch* and expulsions from SOYA and the AAC.<sup>118</sup> From October 1959 the printing of the sixth issue of *Ikhwezi* shifted from the Victory Press in Johannesburg to P.P.P. in Durban. From September 1961 P.P.P was designated as the proprietors of a new newspaper, *Ilizwi LeSizwe* (*The Voice of the Nation*), which replaced *Ikhwezi* under escalating conditions of repression, and in the era immediately after the birth of APDUSA.

Under these circumstances - of being banned, and of being attacked politically from within the NEUM - Tabata continued to write political analyses and position papers. Although he could not participate in meetings, some of these analytical interventions took the form of organisational letters analysing the internal

113 I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Members (draft in Dora Taylor's script), September 1956; I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Friends, 26 October 1956; AAC Committee to The President, The Teachers' League of South Africa (written by Tabata), 15 November 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Among the issues that needed Tabata's attention were the perceived attack by Jaffe and his supporters on SOYA (which unlike the NEF, was a 'political body organised on a Union-wide scale'), different interpretations of the "Land Question" (in which Jaffe attacked the AAC's demand for 'the right of people to acquire or buy land anywhere outside ... the Reserves'), Jaffe's 'propagation of the English language' and his reference to African languages as 'dying tribal languages'.

114 Extract from letter from I.B. Tabata to A.C. (Joe) Jordan, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

115 I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 30 May 1957; Leo Sihlali to A.C. Jordan (?), 3 June 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

116 I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 5 March 1958; I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 18 March 1958; Annotation made by Dora Taylor on face of untitled article prepared by I.B. Tabata for *Ikhwezi Lomso*, July 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. From its establishment, *Ikhwezi* was owned and published by a private company, Ikhwezi Lomso (Pty) Ltd, whose directors and proprietors were Nathaniel Honono, Wycliffe Tsotsi and Sihlali. Sihlali was the editor. A substantial amount of reportage on national events was in Xhosa.

117 I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 27 May 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata asked about the due date of delivery of the Sihlalis' baby. His reference to the 'new baby' may also have been a means of secretly asking about the new newspaper venture, and what its publication due date was.

118 *Ikhwezi Lomso*, Vol 2, No 4, February 1959, p 4; Vol 2, No 5, May 1959, pp 3, 4, 6; Vol 3 No 1, February 1960, pp 1-4. It seems that the December 1958 AAC Conference at Edendale was a watershed, with the withdrawal of the 'fraternal delegation' of the National Anti-CAD, after it accused the AAC leadership of 'retreating' from the 10-Point Programme. The Anti-CAD, in turn, largely absented itself from the December 1959 NEUM Conference, also held at Edendale, and was accused, inter alia, of being deserters and as having defected. These tensions also resulted in operational difficulties in other structures such as the Head Unity Committee and the Working Committee. Part of the problem, it seemed, was the refusal of the Anti-CAD leadership to call any conferences for a number of years. In the meantime, an AAC Vigilance Committee was formed in January 1961 around Cadoc Kobus, who had sided with Ben Kies against Tabata in these disputes. See *The Torch*, 1 February 1961.

conflicts that had burst forth, and attempting to find political solutions to the problems of ‘Jaffeism’.<sup>119</sup> By 1959, Tabata was forced to confront the ‘campaign of vilification’ directly, especially in response to the lengthy document authored by ‘the self-styled “foundation members”’, which marked ‘the peak of the campaign’.<sup>120</sup> Tabata had expressed the view that it was no less than ‘the life of the Unity Movement itself that [was] being discussed and undermined’, and indeed that ‘its fate’ hinged ‘on the outcome of present disputes’.<sup>121</sup>

*Ikhwezi* also became a vehicle for Tabata’s continued written analyses, and he wrote a series of articles in the first six issues under the broad title, ‘The national situation: the real problems in the liberatory movement’. The intention was to give readers ‘a general picture of the struggles of the peasants against oppressive measures’, and ‘to show the manner in which the national crisis affects the different groups of political parties’.<sup>122</sup> *Ikhwezi* tended to come out irregularly, and Tabata spent the entire duration of its existence pestering the editor, Leo Sihlali, with letters about the value of its timely publication in building political capital. Tabata concerned himself with the health of the newspaper as the medium of a reconstituted collective will, and with his own polemical writing once again published anonymously.

Tabata’s banning was also an opportunity for more extended analytical writing about the pressing issues of South African society, and in the late 1950s, he began to do some reflection about the system of Bantu education that had emerged as policy in the 1950s.<sup>123</sup> In 1957, Tabata prepared a text on university education that was premised upon an analysis of Bantu education policy of ‘regimentation and indoctrination’ and ‘the debasement of education’. In 1958 Tabata replied under a pseudonym to a letter from UCT’s Professor A.H. Murray, published in *The Observer* in Britain and reprinted in the *Cape Argus* in 1958, which had suggested that Bantu education was acceptable to Africans and ‘indeed that they had begged for it’. In his letter, Tabata challenged Murray by asserting that ‘not a single well-known African organisation of the African people [had] asked for this thing’. He reminded Murray that CATA had submitted a memorandum to the Commission, which had been ‘drawn up by a body of African teachers qualified to speak on matters of education’ had received ‘public acclaim among the African people’.<sup>124</sup>

119 I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Members (Draft in Dora Taylor’s script), September 1956; I.B. Tabata to Chairman and Friends, 26 October 1956; AAC Committee to The President, The Teachers’ League of South Africa (written by Tabata), 15 November 1957, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

120 *The Wreckers of Unity at Work: Who is the National Anti-CAD Committee?*, issued by the Secretary, All-African Convention Committee (WP), n.d (c.1959). Tabata wrote this in reply to *What Has Happened in the Non-European Unity Movement?* (1959), which was authored by R.E. Viljoen, S.A. Jayiya, C.M. Kobus and B.M. Kies, who had styled themselves as ‘foundation members’. *The Wreckers of Unity* was also published in shortened form in *Ikhwezi Lomso*, 3 (1), February 1990.

121 I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 7 May 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

122 *Ikhwezi Lomso*, Vol 1, No 1, July 1958, p 4; Vol 1 No 2, September 1958, p 5.

123 See I.B. Tabata, ‘University Education in South Africa’, text prepared for publication overseas, 23 April 1957; A Jericho (I.B. Tabata) to The Editor, *The Observer*, 23 April 1958, copy in I.B. Tabata Collection, BC. 925. Tabata also informed readers of *The Observer* that Murray achieved notoriety for having given evidence for the Crown at the Treason Trial.

124 The Eiselen Commission Report was published in 1951, its recommendations made into law in 1953, and it was put into full effect from 1955. See Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940-1990* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999), 42.

In CATA in the 1950s, there had been a concerted effort to analyse the political intentions of the emerging education system. In addition to submitting a memorandum to the Eiselen Commission, its 1952 CATA conference devoted a significant amount of time to discussing its implications.<sup>125</sup> Livingstone Mqotsi had devoted substantial attention to researching and analysing the emerging system and had presented a couple of formal addresses, first at the 1953 CATA Conference and at the 1954 AAC Conference, both held in Queenstown.<sup>126</sup> Tabata had participated in these discussions, particularly about how teachers should respond to the new system, and how problematic it may be to advocate a boycott of schooling under the emerging system of Bantu education. In addition, AAC affiliates produced pamphlets and arranged study circles and lectures on the Bantu Education Act.<sup>127</sup>

By the late 1950s, there certainly was a substantial body of research based inside the movement on the political economy of black education policy. Drawing undoubtedly upon these discussions and accumulated organisational knowledge, Tabata completed a manuscript on the system of Bantu education in September 1958, no doubt having been assisted by Dora Taylor once again. In April 1959, he received advanced copies of his booklet, *Education for Barbarism*, by airfreight from the publishers, and the first consignment was delivered in May. In spite of his being banned, the booklet was published under his own name. The terms of his banning did not proscribe open written expression. There was no need to conceal or refrain from a claim on authorship. He was already personally the subject of repressive attention. Tabata, anyway, did think of himself as an author of works, and referred to *Education for Barbarism* as his 'Magnum Opus Minimum'.<sup>128</sup>

### **Authorship and the 'African point of view'**

This time, there was clear evidence of a commercial element in the publication, and a few weeks before its release, Tabata received a cheque for £100.<sup>129</sup> A formal publisher, Prometheus Printers and Publishers, which was a commercial operation in spite of its close connections with the movement, published the booklet.<sup>130</sup> The inclusion of the phrase 'All Rights Reserved' opposite the title page made it clear that private intellectual property rights and copyright were being claimed. Tabata

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125 Programme of the CATA Conference, Cape Town, June 1952, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. The TLSA also submitted a memorandum on African education to the Commission.

126 Livingstone Mqotsi, 'Coloured Education Commission' (an address delivered at the 32nd Annual Conference of the Cape African Teachers' Association, Queenstown, 24-27 June 1953, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925; 'Politics of Eiselen/De Vos Malan schooling', in Minutes of All African Convention Conference, Queenstown, December 1954, Crowe-Rassool Papers.

127 See for example reports from affiliates in Minutes of All African Convention Conference, Queenstown, December 1954. Among the activities reported on were a Progressive Forum pamphlet and lectures by Jane Gool. See also Leo Sihlali, AAC Secretarial Report, 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

128 I.B. Tabata, pocket diary, entry for 5 September 1958, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata's 1957 text on university apartheid was also incorporated.

129 I.B. Tabata, pocket diary, entries for 26 March, 13 April and 2 May 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Tabata was certainly concerned about how he would earn a living during his ban (I.B. Tabata to Wycliffe Tsotsi, 20 March 1956, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925).

130 I.B. Tabata, *Education for Barbarism: Bantu Education in South Africa*, Durban: Prometheus Printers and Publishers, 1959. One of the proprietors of PPP was AAC Assistant Treasurer, Enver Hassim, whose partner, Zulei Christopher, was Jane Gool's niece. In his correspondence, Tabata addressed them jointly as 'Zulenver'.

and Dora Taylor kept in touch with Neville Alexander, who was studying in Germany, about a German translation and edition, and Alexander was also interested in ensuring the booklet's distribution in Britain.<sup>131</sup> There were also indications that the American publishing company, Knopf, may have been interested in an overseas edition. Tabata and Prometheus entered into a formal contract over rights, obligations and mechanisms in the event of any further releases of *Education for Barbarism*. In the meantime, the book was sold through bookshops and mainly through an order form system.<sup>132</sup>

In spite of – and, in some ways, because of – the isolation of his ban, and following on from the processes of individuation set in motion by his other publications in the 1950s, *Education for Barbarism* marked Tabata's unambiguous, commercial entry into the world of authorship and publishing. This time the publication was not *directly* in the service of a collective cause or geared towards building a national movement, as had been the case before. Not only was no political organisation mentioned as having some interest in the publication, but also at no stage in the contents of the book did Tabata advocate a particular programme of political mobilisation, as was the case with other publications. This was Tabata, the author, engaged in social analysis and public scholarship at a level removed from direct party political objectives. No doubt this was partly because of deepening repressive circumstances, and because his ban prevented him from advocating political action. But this was also because Tabata was now free from the controls of collective leadership, and felt able to stake a claim to an authority as a writer and intellectual in his own right.

Indeed, John H MacCallum Scott, a member of the editorial and production office at the Pall Mall Press in Essex in England, which was preparing an edition of *Education for Barbarism* for release in Britain, wrote to Tabata in 1960 that through his writing, it was now possible 'to give the 'feel' of South Africa ... from the point of view of an educated and cultured African'.<sup>133</sup> No sooner had Tabata, the author, emerged in his own individuated name, than his authorship niche was being fashioned in the domain of professional publishing. And as much as he was opening up to individually authored analytical writing, the publishing industry was defining, determining and limiting the potential of his written expression as presenting a 'cultured' African view. Scott reported that the Americans were reluctant to bring out a version of *Education for Barbarism* because of its modest length. Instead they had enquired about whether Tabata would be willing to write 'a real book', in 'the same vein and style' about 'the life of a colored man in South Africa in all its aspects, not just about education'. Scott put this proposal to Tabata, saying that such a book 'should not be too polemical'. Instead it should be 'an objective, straightforward account of conditions, embracing education, opportunity, social

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131 I.B. Tabata to Neville Alexander, 4 December 1958; Neville Alexander to Dora Taylor, 11, 24 & 25 May 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Taylor spent the period April-August 1959 in England.

132 I.B. Tabata to Enver Hassim, 16 March 1959; Zulei Christopher to Dora Taylor (in England), 27 May 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

133 John H. MacCallum Scott, Pall Mall Press Limited (Essex, Britain) to I.B. Tabata, 27 June 1960, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

life, politics, etc., etc.' For this, Tabata was offered £100, 10% royalty on the English published price, 'plus a substantial proportion of what is paid for the American edition'.<sup>134</sup>

Inside the South African edition, Tabata had been named as the author of other works, and a list comprising *The Awakening*, *The Boycott* and *The Rehabilitation Scheme* was given opposite the title page. In May 1959, Zulei Christopher reported to Dora Taylor – who was in England for four months – that a party had been held 'to launch the new book of "the author of many books"'. Speeches had been made by Tabata himself and by 'our people from the country', including one which 'commended Tabata for having once again added to our literature in spite of his ban'. The celebration of the booklet's release was an event that honoured Tabata as someone who 'was able to overcome ... the effects [of the ban] and make yet another contribution to our struggle'.<sup>135</sup> The May 1959 issue of *Ikhwezi* advertised Tabata's booklet for sale and promoted it as 'a penetrating analysis of Bantu Education', and in October 1961 *Ilizwi LeSizwe* announced that a 'limited number' were still available.<sup>136</sup> In June 1959, while still in England, Dora Taylor passed on 'information' about Tabata to an academic whom she had identified as a potential reviewer of the booklet.<sup>137</sup> Authorship was indeed a harbinger of Tabata's biography. In addition, the promotion of Tabata as author in his own name was a prelude to promoting him as a political leader of the movement, and not so much as the 'cultured African' social commentator that Pall Mall Press had hoped for.

As if to demonstrate that his main commitment was to projecting a collective political vision and rebuilding a political movement, Tabata spent two weeks in July and the beginning of August 1960 writing about the politics of the Pan-Africanist Congress 'adventure' that had 'exploded on the South African scene'. He had felt 'teased by the idea' of doing so. He felt that 'so many people' had been 'swept off their feet' by 'recent events' that 'an assessment' was necessary. As a pamphlet, he felt it 'could fulfil the same function' as *The Boycott* and *The Rehabilitation Scheme*. Tabata made an offer that it could be published by the AAC, which had 'the first claim to it'. Tabata did not mind if it was 'published as from an individual and sold to the public'. In any event, he felt that because he was 'isolated', he was 'at a disadvantage', and needed 'comments and recommendations' in case he had missed 'the precise ebb and flow, the accents of the people'. *The Pan-African Congress Adventure in Perspective* was published as a NEUM pamphlet, and was formally issued by its new president, Leo Sihlali, in September 1960.<sup>138</sup>

134 John H. MacCallum Scott, Pall Mall Press Limited (Essex, Britain) to I.B. Tabata, 27 June 1960, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

135 Zulei Christopher to Dora Taylor, 27 May 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

136 *Ikhwezi Lomso*, 2 (5), May 1959; *Ilizwi LeSizwe*, 1 (2), 18 October 1961.

137 Dora Taylor to Professor Tingsten, 10 June 1959, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

138 I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 2 August 1960; *The Pan African Congress Adventure in Perspective*, A Non-European Unity Movement Pamphlet, September 1960 (Issued by the NEUM, 1 September 1960), I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. When this pamphlet was issued, the printers had erred in creating a cover page with an incorrect title, *The Pan African Congress Venture in Retrospect*.

The pamphlet presented a historical understanding and critical analysis of the ‘ad hoc’ politics of the PAC anti-pass campaign and subsequent events. ‘The whole conduct’ of the PAC ‘adventure’ had shown ‘not only reckless irresponsibility’, but also an ‘ignorance’ that had made them ‘pawns’ in the hands of the liberals. The build up of stay-aways, days of mourning and marches had been followed by a ruthless ‘reign of terror’ on the people by the police and the military under a state of emergency. In Cape Town the liberals had persuaded 30 000 Africans to retreat quietly to the locations, where a ‘bitter lesson’ was learnt that a location was ‘nothing less than a concentration camp’. The state violence that had been unleashed was underplayed in the press, and ‘the heroes of yesterday’ were ‘stripped, humiliated and returned to their ignominious anonymity’. In this situation, the liberals, ‘as usual, excelled themselves’ in ‘a veritable orgy of charitable activity’, sweeping the population ‘into a paroxysm of trivial activity’ and creating ‘a paralysis of mental activity’. <sup>139</sup>

The pamphlet ended with an outline of the lessons learnt and the challenges for political organising. These were lessons about the futility of ‘the ad hoc form of struggle’, and the opportunism of ‘using the people to achieve … sectional aims’, and the pointlessness of ‘sporadic, localised, isolated and sectional ventures’. In place of this, the pamphlet emphasised the necessity of ‘pooling the resources of the Nation-wide organisation under the guidance of the unified leadership of the National Movement’. And the leadership needed ‘to stress unceasingly the sustained national aspect of the struggle’. Part of the lessons learnt applied also to ‘the renegades’ who had ‘turned their backs’ on the NEUM, and who had ‘organised campaigns of slander’ and ‘disruptive activities’. After having ‘[flung] swear-words, accusations of “Africanists”, etc. at the core of the Movement’, when ‘the real Pan-Africanists’ came along ‘they did not know what [had] hit them’. They ‘had lost anchorage’ and had become ‘political flotsam and jetsam’, sent ‘into the political wilderness ‘by the new crisis. The people needed to be in a position ‘to weigh and discriminate in choosing their leadership’. The tasks of the leadership were ‘to bring this knowledge to the masses’ and to teach the people ‘the meaning of organisation and all that is involved in belonging to it’. <sup>140</sup>

## **Presidentialism and biographic politics**

As soon as his ban expired in 1961, Tabata began to focus on rebuilding and restructuring the organisation. After ‘all the weaknesses in the Movement were thoroughly probed and reasons for past failures ruthlessly exposed’, a conference called by the NEUM’s executive of the movement’s leadership decided ‘to sponsor the formation of a political organisation on a nation-wide scale’. This finally

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139 *The Pan African Congress Adventure in Perspective*.  
140 *The Pan African Congress Adventure in Perspective*.

took shape as APDUSA, set up to be an organisation that individuals could join directly. APDUSA would not only be ‘a weapon of defence or attack’, but would be ‘a vehicle for ideas that have to be carried to all corners of the country’. I.B. Tabata was elected to the presidency of APDUSA, formed as a nation-wide political organisation which individuals could join directly. This was the first time he held any central officiating position in a national organisation.<sup>141</sup>

In order to execute its plans, the NEUM executive decided to send Tabata to Dar-es-Salaam with Jane Gool and Nathaniel Honono to petition the newly created African Liberation Committee (ALC) of the OAU in Tanzania for recognition.<sup>142</sup> Once recognised as a liberation movement, the NEUM would be eligible for material assistance for its plans for political and armed struggle, and would have a platform to ask for further assistance from newly independent African governments. The upshot of the NEUM’s efforts at achieving recognition from the OAU was that it was rebuffed, because it had dared to argue that ‘the struggle must be conducted in such a way as to save us from neo-colonialism’, and because it was ‘not known by the world’. The response of the NEUM was immediately to ‘plead guilty to these charges’ as ‘the poorest group of organisations in South Africa’. Tabata and his colleagues immediately drafted a response aimed at ‘chang[ing] the mind of the ALC “in the name of an oppressed nation”’.<sup>143</sup> In the process they explained why there might have been lack of knowledge of the NEUM:

We are not known by the outside world because the agencies for publicity are in the hands of the same groups who regard us as enemies for the reason that we have had to expose their machinations in order to keep the movements free from their inimical and dangerous influences.<sup>144</sup>

Faced with the charge that they were not known by the world, Tabata and his colleagues presented a document about their organisations and their plans in order to supplement their original statement with which the NEUM’s application for recognition had been made. To this they appended a list of the federal body with affiliates, names of officials and their regions in South Africa in order to give a sense of a national presence. But the key characteristic of this response was the adoption of biography as the prime method of asserting a real existence in the struggle against apartheid. And the biographic format that was chosen was the biography of victimisation and persecution. A cryptic list of repression experiences of NEUM officials was composed as proof of its existence. The experiences of Honono, Canca, Hassim, Mqotsi, Limbada, Tsotsi and Jane Gool of house arrest, imprisonment without trial, ‘pegging’, reluctant, enforced asylum, and banning

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141 *Ilizwi LeSizwe*, 1(1), September 1961.

142 ‘South Africa: A memorandum submitted to Committee of Nine by the All-African Convention and Non-European Unity Movement’.

143 ‘Statement by the AAC and NEUM justifying their rights to the funds voted by the Liberation Committee of Nine’, December 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

144 ‘Statement by the AAC and NEUM justifying their rights to the funds voted by the Liberation Committee of Nine’, December 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

were catalogued. The biography of persecution of I.B. Tabata, the president of the NEUM affiliate, APDUSA, was accorded special attention. It was he who ‘was the first to be imprisoned by the Verwoerd government’ in 1948, who served a five-year ban, and who ‘narrowly escaped arrest under the 90-Day Detention Act’. ‘All these incidents of arrests and banishments’ had been ‘deliberately suppressed’ because ‘our group of organisations [was] regarded as the direst enemy’.<sup>145</sup>

In the next few years, following on from its response to the OAU rejection, the biography of victimisation and persecution represented one of the main modes through which the Unity Movement depicted itself, its structures and cadres. In December 1964, the Lusaka office of the AAC and the Unity Movement composed a much more extensive list of ‘instances of the victimisation of our people’ that ‘did not hit the headlines of the outside world’. The five-page list presented accounts of the experiences of persecution and state harassment on the part of more than thirty officials of the national and branch structures of the Unity Movement, the AAC and APDUSA. In addition to this biographic catalogue of persecution, it was argued that ‘a whole crop of ordinary members – workers and peasants’ had been arrested and prosecuted or ‘subjected to intimidation’ throughout South Africa. ‘Practically every official’ of the Unity Movement, the AAC and APDUSA had ‘either been put under house-arrest, banned and gagged or simply banned and deported’.<sup>146</sup>

As the Unity Movement struggled for recognition and support from governments and solidarity movements, another biographic element began to take root alongside the life stories of persecution. The Unity Movement’s representation of its institutional structures took on an increasingly presidential character. Not only was its organisational name streamlined and made more specific and identifiable, but I.B. Tabata was also given authorisation to describe himself as the President of the Unity Movement. In 1963 when the application for recognition was made to the OAU, Tabata was the president of APDUSA and the ‘leader of the delegation’,<sup>147</sup> but this did not carry the authority of the presidency of the movement as a whole.

There is an element of ambiguity over how the presidency passed from Leo Sihlali to Tabata in August 1964. Sihlali had been elected NEUM president 1959, replacing Tsotsi who had been acting president.<sup>148</sup> In Dar-es-Salaam and Lusaka difficulties had arisen around the cumbersome and archaic name of the organisation and over the fact that the movement was not represented by its president in the rough-and-tumble of diplomacy and international relations. At a Head Unity Com-

145 ‘Statement by the AAC and NEUM justifying their rights to the funds voted by the Liberation Committee of Nine’, December 1963, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

146 ‘Verwoerd lets loose terror on All-African Convention and Unity Movement of South Africa’, issued by the Lusaka Office of the All-African Convention and the Unity Movement of South Africa, December 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

147 ‘South Africa: A memorandum submitted to Committee of Nine by the All-African Convention and Non-European Unity Movement’.

148 *Ikhwezi Lomso*, 13 (1), February 1960; Wycliffe Tsotsi to I.B. Tabata, 24 & 29 December 1959; I.B. Tabata to Leo Sihlali, 17 February 1960, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. Wycliffe Tsotsi had expressed his dissatisfaction at being unseated as president of the NEUM by what he understood as ‘plotting’ behind his back, and ‘a whispering campaign’. He expressed his relief that ‘the mantle of political organisation, which ha[d] all these years sent me up and down the country at great personal cost, ha[d] fallen on other shoulders’. Tsotsi was made Acting President of the NEUM in 1956 and held on to this position until Sihlali was made NEUM President in December 1959 at the Ninth Unity Conference. Livingstone Mqotsi and Alie Fataar were made Joint Secretaries.

mittee (HUC) meeting in South Africa, the exiled section was given the go-ahead to describe itself as the Unity Movement (UM), which was changed a few months later to UMSA. This decision was made, according to then joint secretary, Alie Fataar, for the sake of ‘convenience’. The argument was also presented that Sihlali’s house arrest and constant police surveillance made the performance of presidential functions difficult. As a result Sihlali ‘relinquished the position’. Fataar’s recollection was that following the request that had come from Lusaka, ‘Tabata was allowed to be regarded as the president outside’. At the time, Sihlali had been ill and banned. Some thought it might not have been the most appropriate thing to “demote” someone in this position.<sup>149</sup>

While Tabata’s presidency may have been regarded as a practical necessity, perhaps even for a limited duration, the effect of this decision - as fuzzy as it may have been - was that Tabata embraced the position, and Sihlali was henceforth described as the former president. The formal stage was now set for the embracing of presidentialism as a means of promoting the objects of the movement. Not only was I.B. Tabata’s biography of repression experiences and political leadership marshalled to foreground descriptions of the movement, its statements and publications, but his writings were also distributed and republished as the work of a president of a liberation movement in the cause of the movement’s promotion. The promotion of Tabata as president became a key focus in the work of establishing the organisation in exile, in continuing to petition for its recognition and in soliciting funds and material support. In order to advance its cause, a viable and credible political movement required a convincing presidential figure. In addition, the presidency gave Tabata more room to manoeuvre. Any influence and authority he may have had in the movement that derived from his seniority now had greater gravitas and formal executive power.

From October 1964, Tabata began to correspond with governments and potential supporters as the president of the Unity Movement, as the organisation re-styled the projection of its leadership. By January 1965, ‘Unity Movement’ had been extended to ‘Unity Movement of South Africa –UMSA’, which made Tabata’s presidency seem more commanding and official in the protocols of international relations. The movement’s liaison with the Zambian government now carried presidential and even proto-governmental, quasi-diplomatic authority.<sup>150</sup> His communication with Kwame Nkrumah - who had promised support for military training – took place on a president-to-president basis, and he asserted presidential authority in his communication with official solidarity bodies in African states.<sup>151</sup>

149 I.B. Tabata to Dora Taylor, 11 August 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925, interview with Alie and Ursula Fataar, 19 July 1991; L. Mqotsi to All Members of the Unity Movement, the All-African Convention, the African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa and other affiliated organisations and bodies, May 1966, Livingstone Mqotsi Papers; Tom Karis, Notes based on taped transcript of interview with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, 19 March 1989 (I am grateful to Tom Karis for forwarding me a copy of these notes). It is interesting that on its letterheads, the movement styled itself as the more overtly nationalist sounding ‘All-African Convention (AAC) & Unity Movement’, with APDUSA and SOYA listed as affiliates, along with ‘other professional, civic and peasant bodies’. See, for example, I.B. Tabata to Berta Green, Corresponding Secretary, ADC, 2 April 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

150 See I.B. Tabata (President, Unity Movement and APDUSA), N Honono (President, AAC), L Mqotsi (Joint Secretary, Unity Movement, General Secretary, APDUSA) and Miss J Gool (Chairman of the Working Committee of the Unity Movement) to The President and the Cabinet of Zambia, Lusaka, 24 October 1964, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. This letter served to ‘salute the President, the Cabinet, the government and the people’ of Zambia on their ‘great day of independence’.

151 I.B. Tabata (President, UMSA) to ‘The President, Republic of Ghana (Kwame Nkrumah), 25 January 1965’; I.B. Tabata to The Director, Bureau of African Affairs, 23 January 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

Tabata also undertook his tour of the United States under the auspices of the Alexander Defense Committee (ADC) in late 1965 as the president of UMSA. And the ADC ensured that Tabata's itinerary would be complemented by certain formalities and protocol arrangements, with someone to meet him at airports, accompany him wherever he went and to be at his 'disposal at all times'. Tour organisers were reminded that 'under no circumstances' was Tabata to be placed 'in the position of having to make a collection speech'.<sup>152</sup>

The promotion of presidentialism also required evidence of leadership and authority, and this was provided in Tabata's speeches and writings. Tabata's 1948 letter to Mandela, which had become a key statement on the historical evolution of political forms and structures at the time, was turned into evidence of the Unity Movement's interactions with other political bodies, as well as of Tabata's communication – 'in the best spirit of brotherliness' - with a 'mentally restless young intellectual who was ... groping for political clarity'. Unlike with its prior circulation in the late 1940s, Mandela was specifically mentioned as the recipient of the re-edited and republished version of the letter, and many would have been familiar with Mandela from the widely publicised Rivonia trial as someone 'now serving life-imprisonment in Robben Island'.<sup>153</sup>

The promotion of Tabata as a liberation movement president made use of the image-building process that had begun around Nelson Mandela. The letter to Mandela was reproduced as evidence of a relationship of political mentorship, as it was 'designed by one who knew Nelson Mandela closely to help him solve his basic dilemma: to make the final choice between the subterfuges of opportunism and the real struggle for liberation'. A new introduction that was added to the redeployed publication hoped that it would 'throw some light on the differences in approach to the problem of organisation' between those structures in the Unity Movement and those outside. Tabata's letter to Mandela's fellow Youth League member, A.P. Mda, was also added in order to demonstrate the Unity Movement's 'consistent and serious' attempts 'to engage in political dialogue with the leaders of the other political groups ... in the hope of bringing about principled unity amongst the oppressed people of South Africa'.<sup>154</sup> Not only did this publication provide evidence against charges that the Unity Movement was peripheral and of little consequence, but it bore out Tabata's position of president by seemingly providing evidence of a long record of political leadership and mentorship, particularly over someone like Mandela, whose political biography was beginning to emerge as a project of anti-apartheid solidarity.<sup>155</sup>

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152 Robert H Langston to friends (circular letter), 23 September 1965; RL & BG (Robert Langston and Berta Green) to friends (circular letter to all chapters and organisers of Tabata tour), 4 November 1965, Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

153 I.B. Tabata, 'Letter to Mandela on The Problem of the Organisational Unity in South Africa', published by the All-African Convention, Unity Movement, Lusaka, March 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925.

154 I.B. Tabata, 'Letter to Mandela on The Problem of the Organisational Unity in South Africa', published by the All-African Convention, Unity Movement, Lusaka, March 1965, I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925. See also I.B. Tabata to The Honourable Minister, Home Affairs, Zambia, 30 June 1964 (I.B. Tabata Collection, BC 925) in which Tabata enclosed a copy of his letter to Mandela, which he had 'discovered in his files', and which 'clearly portrays our relationship from the very beginning of his political career'.

155 See Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa,' Chapter 4.

In late 1965 Tabata's biography that was circulated as part of the arrangements of his ADC tour of the U.S. emphasised his position as an author, and described him as 'the leading political theorist of the South African liberation movement'. By then *Education for Barbarism* was virtually unobtainable, and the ADC purchased 'the entire remainder' so that it could be put to the work of fundraising and education. ADC chapters were advised to 'reserve' some copies 'for circulation among key people' in their areas. In Southern California, 10 copies were sold for \$20,00 each as 'out of print gems', containing Tabata's autograph and 'a message to the buyer'. ADC chapters were also encouraged to consider raffling remaining copies as part of their fundraising endeavours. At the same time meetings or discussions with a range of possible publishers of a new edition were arranged at receptions for Tabata. Among these were ADC sponsor, Paul Sweezy of Monthly Review Press, Harry Braverman of Grove Press and Alex Munsell of Marzani and Munsell publishers who also 'specialise[d] in radical books'.<sup>156</sup>

The Unity Movement's memorandum which was submitted to the OAU's Committee of Nine as part of its unsuccessful application for recognition was turned into a political pamphlet by Tabata and given the name *Unity: The Road to Freedom in South Africa*.<sup>157</sup> Large quantities of copies were circulated by the ADC National Office to all the chapters to be sold at meetings addressed by Tabata. However, perhaps the most striking instance of presidential authorship was the publication by the ADC of Tabata's Presidential Address to the first APDUSA conference in Cape Town in 1962. Tabata's speech was turned into a presidential publication, and was called *The Freedom Struggle in South Africa*.<sup>158</sup> By the time I.B. Tabata embarked upon his fundraising and publicity tour of the United States under the auspices of ADC, the process of individuation that had been set in motion in the 1940s and 1950s by his experiences of repression and his emergence as an author of political tracts and history texts had given way to a politics of presidentialism as one of the key features of promoting the Unity Movement in exile.

### **From selflessness to the cult of presidentialism**

Tabata was not a reluctant president of a liberation movement. Instead this was a politics of individual authority and power that he embraced keenly as ways were sought to place the Unity Movement on the map on the African continent and abroad. Having previously eschewed individual attention in favour of an adherence to political principles, especially that of collective leadership, I.B. Tabata emerged as the most visible leader of the Unity Movement, whose photographic portrait

<sup>156</sup> RL & BG (Robert Langston and Berta Green) to Friends (circular letter to all chapters and organisers of Tabata tour), 4 November 1965; George Davis (for the ADC) to supporters and participants in the I.B. Tabata So. Cal. tour', n.d. (c. November 1965); Robert Langston to friends (circular letter to All ADC Chapters and friends), 21 March 1966; ADC itinerary for New York leg of I.B. Tabata's tour, 10-20 October 1965, Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

<sup>157</sup> *Unity: The Road to Freedom in South Africa*, Unity Movement pamphlet, c.1965, Alexander Defense Committee Records, 1962-1971, SML Microform, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. Dora Taylor wrote an introduction to the pamphlet under her pseudonym, Nosipho Majeke.

<sup>158</sup> I.B. Tabata, *The Freedom Struggle in South Africa* (Presidential Address delivered at The First National Conference of the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa, April 1962, in Cape Town), published by the Alexander Defense Committee, November 1965.

was widely circulated as the embodiment of its leadership. Having previously hidden his authorship within the anonymity of the collective and the pseudonym, Tabata embraced the domain of authorship and publishing in his individual capacity. Later, Tabata's writings came to be considered as the corpus of an eminent author and theoretician, who was also feted as the president of a political movement.

After its structures inside South Africa were virtually decimated by repression in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the movement went into deep decline, and its efforts at mobilisation for military training abroad in large measure came to nought. Almost nothing was left except the 'small contingent' of exiled leaders.<sup>159</sup> An intermittent programme of assembling, publishing and republishing Tabata's writings and conference speeches as a legacy kept up a semblance of organisational activity,<sup>160</sup> and continued to feed a grand illusion of presidentialism and organisational viability as the Unity Movement increasingly became a historical anachronism. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Unity Movement's significance was asserted in the valuable lessons of leadership to be drawn from the political lives of Tabata and his comrades, and the archive, drawn from his and Dora Taylor's political labours, was asserted as the repository of these lessons of history.

This maintenance of presidentialism and the assertion of biography as lesson and legacy were in sharp contrast to the code of principled biographic disavowal of the 1940s. In Tabata's case, authorship was a precursor to the emergence of his biography as central to the projection of the political movement. Furthermore, Tabata's biography, as a linear narrative of resistance leadership and intellectual authority, was projected and disseminated as part of the modernist political project of defining 'the road to freedom' and did not emerge organically. Instead, as this article has shown, it was produced by conscious biographic work by Dora Taylor, particularly from the early 1960s.

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159 Robin Kayser and Mohamed Adhikari, 'Land and Liberty! The African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa during the 1960s', South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, Volume 1 (1960-1970) (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004), 338.

160 See for example I.B. Tabata, *Imperialist Conspiracy in Africa*, Lusaka: Prometheus, 1974; *The Awakening of a People* was republished in Britain by Spokesman Books (Nottingham), 1974. After Dora Taylor's death in 1976, Norman Traub in Britain took up the task of promoting Tabata's writings as a legacy. See the republished *Education for Barbarism: Bantu (Apartheid) Education in South Africa*, London and Lusaka: Unity Movement of South Africa, 1980, and *Apartheid: Cosmetics Exposed*, London: Prometheus Publications for Unity Movement of South Africa, 1985. Norman Traub wrote the 'Foreword' to the latter.