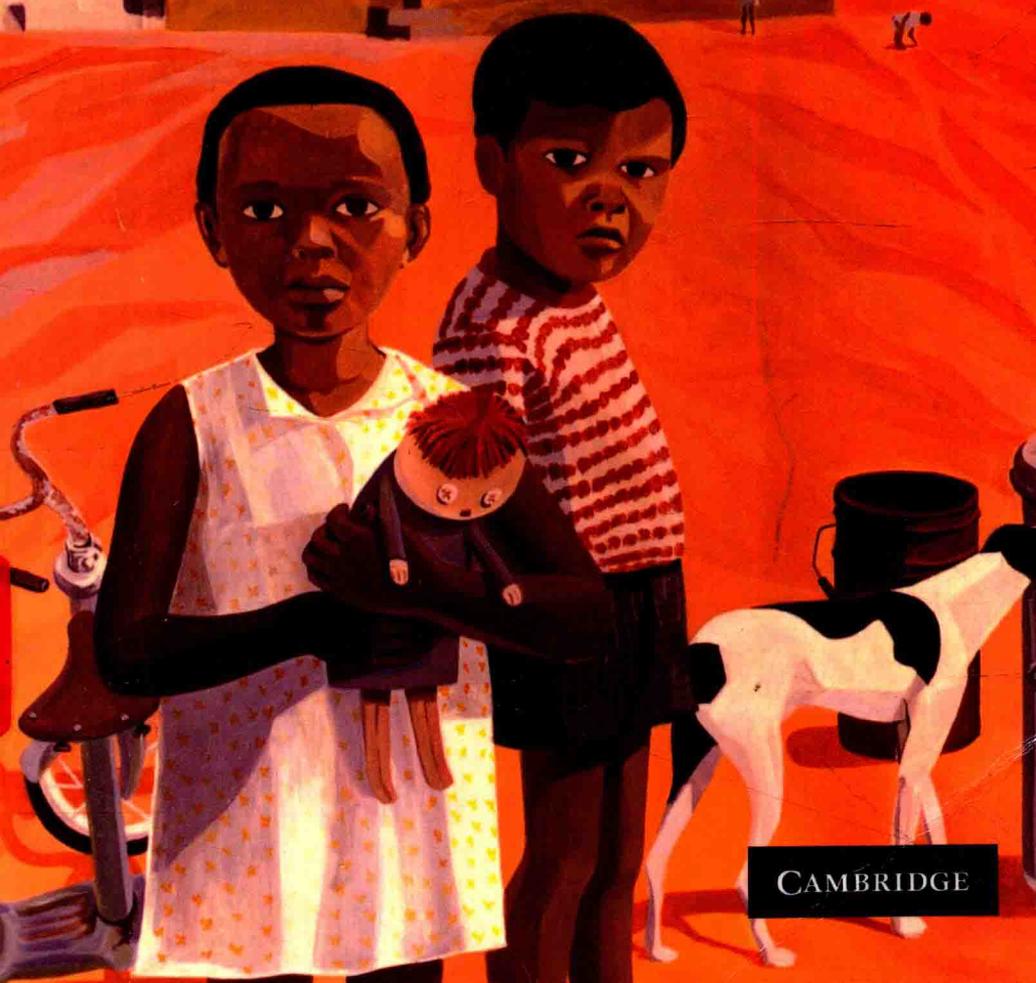


CHRISTOPHER HEYWOOD

A History of South African Literature



CAMBRIDGE

A HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

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A HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

This book is the first critical study of its subject, from colonial and pre-colonial times to the present. Christopher Heywood discusses selected poems, plays, and prose works in five literary traditions: Khoisan, Nguni-Sotho, Afrikaans, English, and Indian. The discussion includes over 100 authors and selected works, including poets from Mqhayi, Marais, and Campbell to Butler, Serote, and Krog, theatre writers from Boniface and Black to Fugard and Mda, and fiction writers from Schreiner and Plaatje to Bessie Head and the Nobel prizewinners Gordimer and Coetzee. The literature is explored in the setting of crises leading to the formation of modern South Africa, notably the rise and fall of Emperor Shaka's Zulu kingdom, the Colenso crisis, industrialisation, the colonial and post-colonial wars of 1899, 1914, and 1939, and the dissolution of apartheid society. In Heywood's magisterial study, South African literature emerges as among the great literatures of the modern world.

Preface

This book reflects the cosmopolitan and international character of my native land. South Africa has one of the world's most extensively creolised* societies: apartheid was a last attempt to fly in the face of that reality. Each of South Africa's four interwoven communities – Khoisan,* Nguni-Sotho,* Anglo-Afrikaner,* and Indian* – has an oral and literary tradition of its own, and each tradition is a strand in a web of literary forms around the world. The subject of this book is their merging through bodily and literary creolisation, from pre-colonial to present times.

While recognising that community tensions survive in South Africa, and offering explanations, this book emphasises the African origin of our species, our civilisation, and our oral and written literature from ancient to modern times. The past three-and-a-half centuries have been a series of rites of passage* (*rites de passage*), marked by violence in each phase, from armed dominance by whites to the achievement of equal esteem and voting power for all South Africans. A prodigious literature reflects that process. Its outlines, and the peculiarities of its texts, have been obscured in the past by segregation into English, Afrikaans,* Coloured,* and black.* In approaching them as a single subject, this book overflies the colonial past. On the further horizon, the exchange between coloniser and colonised has been reciprocal: the violent colonising process has transformed Europe and its literature. Comparable to the nineteenth-century tension between the Slavist versus Europeanist elements in Russian literature, South African literature reflects the tension between Africanist and Europeanist readings of its past.

Part I introduces literary responses to struggles that culminated in the massacre at Sharpeville (1960). Part II outlines literature during the ensuing thirty years' armed struggle and the present settlement. The glossary and map address localities and words.

Words and phrases in the glossary are marked* at their first appearance.

Acknowledgements

For having made this work possible I thank my fellow students and teachers at Stellenbosch and at Oxford. My explorations have been assisted during my years of teaching and research at the University of Birmingham and at the University of Sheffield. My reading of African literature expanded during my two years of work at the University of Ife, Nigeria. While working in Japan at Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo, International Christian University, Tokyo, Okayama University, and Seto College of Kobe Women's University, I have been helped by discussions, study leave, and funding for research.

For innumerable contributions to my understanding of South African literature I warmly thank the students, associates, visiting speakers, and teachers who contributed to the African Literature programme at the University of Sheffield over several years, and who are too numerous to thank individually. For discussions within and beyond the programme, I thank especially Chandramohan Balasubramanyam, Guy Butler, Ronald Dathorne, Annie Gagiano, Colin Gardner, Geoffrey Haresnape, Annemarie Heywood, Brookes and Jeanne Heywood, David Lewis-Williams, Bernth Lindfors, Valerie Marks, Mbulelo Mzamane, Jonathan Paton, 'Bode Sowande, and John Widdowson. For discussions of Afrikaans literature I thank Johan Degenaar, Johan Esterhuizen, Temple Hauptfleisch, Santa Hofmeyr-Joubert, and Gideon Joubert. Latterly I have found generous assistance towards reading ancient Egyptian literature in translation from Professor Leonard Lesko, of Brown University, Professor John Baines, of Oxford University, and Jenny Carrington, of London.

Among libraries too numerous to list in full I thank especially the staff of the following: Nasionale Afrikaanse Letterkundige Navorsings-Museum, Bloemfontein (NALN); the South African National Library at Cape Town; University of Cape Town libraries; the National English Language Museum, Grahamstown (NELM); the British Library and the Newspaper Library at

Colindale, London; the Killie Campbell Library, Durban; the KwaZulu-Natal Archive at Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal; the Bodleian Library and its outlying libraries at Rhodes House and the Taylorian Institution, Oxford; the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University; Sheffield University libraries, and the National Centre for Culture and Tradition at the University of Sheffield (NCCT, formerly CECTAL, the Centre for Cultural Tradition and Language); the Humanities Research Center (HRC), University of Texas at Austin; Witwatersrand University libraries; and Yale University libraries. I gratefully thank the British Academy, the Chairman's Fund, and the Sheffield University Research and Travel Fund for grants enabling me to consult the Bleek collection in the University of Cape Town libraries.

Material and arguments in this book have appeared in papers given at conferences held by the following: the African Literature Association of America (ALA); the Association for the Study of Commonwealth Languages and Literatures (ACLALS); the Association for University English Teachers of South Africa (AEUTSA); the Japan African Studies Association; the Ife Conference on African Literature; the symposium on the Anglo-Boer war at Luton University; the Bessie Head Conference at Singapore University; the Olive Schreiner Conference at the University of Verona; and the Conference on South African Literature at the University of York. Papers given there have appeared as contributions to the following books and periodicals: *D. H. Lawrence Review*; *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences*; *Kobe Women's University Journal of Sciences and Humanities*; *Social Dynamics* (Cape Town); *Commonwealth Literature and the Modern World*, edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek; *Olive Schreiner and After*, edited by Malvern van Wyk Smith and Don Maclennan; *Flawed Diamond*, edited by Itala Vivian; *Perspectives on African Literature*, *Aspects of South African Literature*, and *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Brontë, the last three edited by myself. The organisers and editors are warmly thanked for first considering my contributions, and for permission to reuse material first published by them.

Lastly, I warmly thank Cambridge University Press and its successive literary editors for inviting this work, and for enduring vicissitudes and revisions over several years. It should be needless to add that all the opinions, and any errors and omissions in this book, are my own.

Chronology

<i>date</i>	<i>event</i>
10,000 BCE–500 CE	settlement by hunter-gatherer/pastoralist communities (Khoisan)
500–1500 CE	settlement of iron-using pastoral and agricultural societies (Sotho, * Nguni*)
1652–1806	settlement of VOC (Dutch East India Company) post at Cape Town; British Colony founded 1795–1892; renewed 1806; enlarged 1820 by settlement of British emigrants in Zuurveld (Albany), between Fish and Kei Rivers (Eastern Cape)
1828	death of King Shaka
1835–8	emigration of Afrikaner* farmers from Cape Colony (Great Trek) into Natal and land beyond Orange and Vaal Rivers; battle of Ncome River ('Blood River'), 16 Dec. 1838: first military defeat of Zulu nation
1841/2	Masters and Servants Ordinance
1843	annexation of Natal by British and formation of Diocese of Natal
1848–55	annexation of Orange Free State following Battle of Boomplaats, followed by independence for OFS (1852) and South African Republic (Transvaal) (1854)
1856	Xhosa cattle-killing
1863–9	international crisis over <i>The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined</i> (1862), by Bishop Colenso of Natal

- 1866–70 diamonds found in Griqualand near Orange River; diamond rush of 1870s leading to formation of mining towns and personal fortunes
- 1875–1923 formation of Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners (Association of True Afrikaners); first Taalbeweging (first (Afrikaans) language movement); second Taalbeweging: adoption of Afrikaans as second official language instead of Dutch in 1923
- 1879 defeat of British army by Zulu forces at Isandlwana
- 1879–80 first Anglo-Boer war: British army defeated at Majuba (1880)
- 1883 gold discovered on Witwatersrand; rise of modern cities and seaports; emerging of industrial economy based on migrant labour and pass system
- 1899–1902 second Anglo-Boer war: treaty of Vereeniging, 1902
- 1910 South Africa Act: formation of Union of South Africa; independence for white minority and servile status for black majority
- 1912 formation of African National Congress
- 1913 Land Act
- 1914–18 South African participation in World War I; 1914 Rebellion
- 1922 miners' strike, Johannesburg
- 1923 military aircraft attack civilians at Bulhoek, eastern Cape
- 1929 Hertzog's victory in *swart gevaar* (black peril) election; Statute of Westminster (1930) and Dominion Status for SA; United Party formed out of South African Party and National Party; election victory 1933
- 1938 centenary celebrations of Trek and battle of Ncome River
- 1939–45 South African participation in World War II
- 1948 white electors return apartheid government by narrow majority; race classification; Immorality Act (1949); Suppression of Communism Act

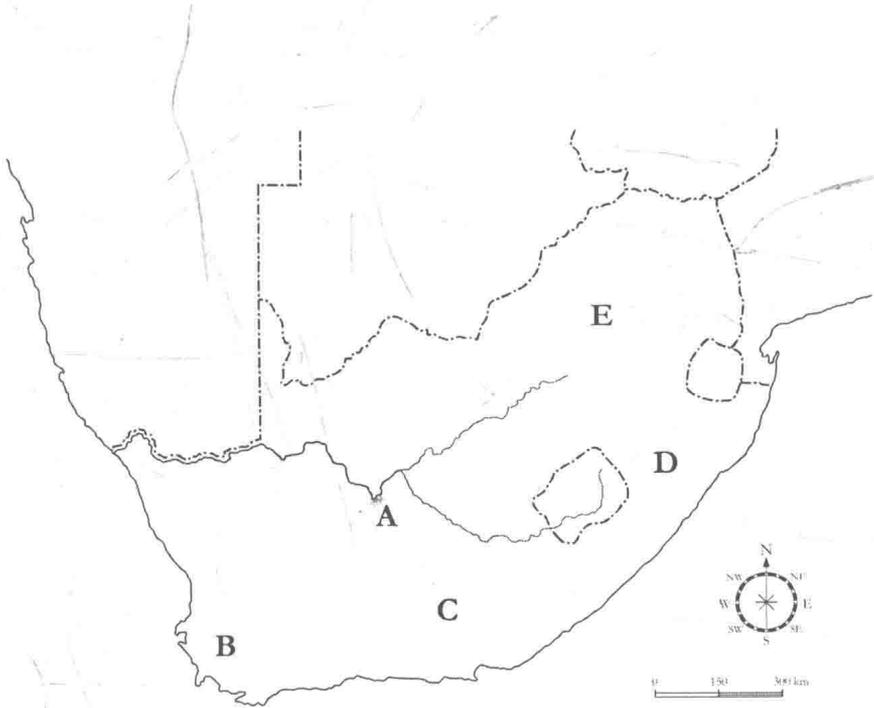
- (1950); 'homelands' defined (1951); Defiance Campaign (1952); Bantu Education Act (1953)
- 1955 forced removal of Sophiatown residents; Kliptown convention: adoption of Freedom Charter
- 1956-61 Treason Trial: acquittal of last accused, 1961; Extension of Universities Act (1957)
- 1960 Sharpeville massacre, 21 March
- 1961 South Africa leaves Commonwealth
- 1962 banning of Brutus, La Guma, Mandela, and others
- 1963 Rivonia arrests and imprisonment on Robben Island for ANC leaders
- 1974 University of Cape Town poetry conference
- 1976 student rising in Soweto (South-West Township, Johannesburg)
- 1983 abortive constitution, with representation for white, Coloured and Indian voters, excluding Nguni-Sotho majority; continuous state of emergency
- 1989-94 abolition of apartheid; unbanning of Ds/Revd Beyers Naudé; release of Nelson Mandela; first democratic election (1994); return to Commonwealth; censorship removed

Abbreviations

- ANC African National Congress
- Archaeology* Thurstan Shaw and others, eds., *The Archaeology of Africa. Food, Metals and Towns*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993
- Bleek W. H. I. Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*. London: W. H. Allen, 1911
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- Century* Michael Chapman, ed., *A Century of South African Poetry*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker, 1987
- Davenport Rodney Davenport and Christopher Saunders, *South Africa. A Modern History*. London: Macmillan, 2000
- Drum* Michael Chapman, ed., *The Drum Decade. Stories from the 1950s*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1989
- Fuze Magema M. Fuze, *The Black People and Whence they Came*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, and Durban: Killie Campbell Library, 1979
- Gérard Albert S. Gérard, *Four African Literatures. Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971
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- Jordan A. C. Jordan, *Towards an African Literature. The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973
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- Lichtheim Miriam Lichtheim, ed., *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973–80
- Mandela Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom. The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. Johannesburg: Macdonald Purnell, 1994
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- New Century* Michael Chapman, ed., *The New Century of South African Poetry*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker, 2002
- Translations* A. P. Grové and C. J. D. Harvey, eds., *Afrikaans Poems with English Translations*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962
- TRC *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*. Cape Town: Juta, 1998
- Verseboek* D. J. Opperman, ed., *Groot Verseboek*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1990

Literary map of South Africa



MAIN REGIONS, WRITERS, LITERARY JOURNALS

- A** *Northern Cape, Great Karoo, Western Free State/Botswana:* Jacobson, Head, Kabbo, van der Post
- B** *South-western Cape, Cape Town:* Breytenbach, Brutus, Clouts, Coetzee, Delius, Krige, La Guma, Leipoldt, Louw, Mathee, Matthews, Rive, Small, Uys, Wicomb; *Contrast, Quartet*
- C** *Eastern Cape, Little Karoo:* Butler, Fugard, Mqhayi, Pringle, Schreiner, Slater, Smith; *New Coin*
- D** *KwaZulu-Natal:* Campbell, Govender, Herbert Dhlomo, Dan Kunene, Mazisi Kunene, Ngcobo, Padayachee, Plomer, Vilakazi; *Voorslag*
- E** *Johannesburg, Witwatersrand:* Lionel Abrahams, Perer Abrahams, Bosman, Brink, Rolfes Dhlomo, Essop, Gordimer, Marais, Mda, Mphahlele, Mtshali, Nkosi, Paton, Sepamla, Serote, Simon; *Classic, Drum, Purple Renoster, Staffrider, S'ketsb*

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: communities and rites of passage

SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNITIES: CONFLICT AND LITERATURE

Amidst confusion, violence, and conflict, South African literature has arisen out of a long tradition of resistance and protest.* In order of their arrival, four main communities have emerged in the course of settlement over the past millennia. These are: (a) the ancient hunter-gatherer and early pastoralist Khoisan (Khoi and San*) and their modern descendants, the Coloured community of the Cape; (b) the pastoralist and agricultural Nguni and Sotho (Nguni-Sotho), arriving from around the eleventh century CE; (c) the maritime, market-oriented and industrialised Anglo-Afrikaner settlers, arriving since the seventeenth century; and (d) the Indian community, arriving in conditions of servitude in the nineteenth century. All these and their sub-communities are interwoven through creolisation, the result of daily contacts varying from genocide to love-making. The result of the interweaving is a creolised society and an abundance of oral and written literatures. Super-communities have been formed by women, gays or male and female homosexuals, and religious and political groups. Distinctive literary movements have grown around all these community divisions.

A literary example from the earliest community relates to the extermination and assimilation of the Khoisan community. Kabbo, a San ('Bushman') performer from South Africa's most ancient community, with an oral literary tradition that goes back many thousand years, narrated his journey to imprisonment in Cape Town after his arrest for stealing sheep:

We went to put our legs into the stocks; another white man laid another piece of wood upon our legs. We slept, while our legs were in the stocks. The day broke, while our legs were in the stocks. We early took out our legs from the stocks, we ate meat; we again put our legs into the stocks; we sat while our legs were in the stocks. We lay down, we slept, while our legs were inside the stocks. We arose, we smoked, while our legs were inside the stocks. (Bleek, p. 297)

Kabbo and his Khoisan family had experienced hardship through the white man's appropriation of his hunting grounds, with its animals and plants. In reply his community appropriated the white man's animals and, through imprisonment or extermination, lost their heritage of innumerable generations. Kabbo's formerly expansive and ancient Khoisan community has been described by Donald Inskip as 'ultra-African', and their cultural modes of survival as 'masterly adaptation to the environment'.¹ Nonetheless, except in outlying districts such as the Kalahari and Namaqualand, as a community the Khoisan have disappeared. The destruction of their corporate communities appears in Shula Marks' article 'Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries'.² That ancient dominance survives as a genetic component of varying visibility amongst all the other South African communities, including descendants of the slave community of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Matching their genetic survival, they provide a community background to the work of a diversity of writers, from Olive Schreiner to Zoë Wicomb. Creative admirers abroad, including D. H. Lawrence and the pioneering film director Sergei Eisenstein, have been attracted by peculiarities in Khoisan oral poetics, notably the use of repetition, exact reporting, and straight-faced, restrained yet powerful protest.

The dwindling of the Khoisan presence began with the arrival of the more powerful, iron-using, and agricultural Nguni-Sotho communities. They contributed to the loss of terrain and corporate existence among the Khoisan, but from their creolising precursors gained their golden complexions, click languages, zest for hunting, powers of endurance, and articles of theology. Their early rise to power culminated in division between the descendants of King Phalo of the Xhosa in the eighteenth century, and the rise and fall of the Shaka kingdom in the first quarter of the nineteenth. Consequences of this power struggle include the *mfecane**/*difigane*,* a fratricidal civil war waged around 1820 by the Zulu nation against neighbouring Nguni and Sotho communities. Massacres exposed the land to armed incursions by white missionaries and farmers after the 1820s. Another cause of loss of power was the Xhosa cattle-killing of the 1850s, a cult movement that resulted in loss of life comparable to the Irish potato famine of the 1840s. A substantial literary heritage has arisen out of these struggles. Notable among these are the Colenso crisis in the Anglican church of the 1860s and its satirical echoes in novels by Olive Schreiner and Douglas Blackburn, the emergence of authentic South African history through the oral performances and memories of poets, theatre writers, and performers such as Krune Mqhayi, Sol T. Plaatje, Thomas Mofolo, Herbert Dhlomo, and

many others. Through abundant literary creativity in recent decades, Zakes Mda and others have brought this dominant community to the summit of South African literature.

Early competition for hunting and grazing grounds among hunter-gatherer, pastoral, and agricultural communities was intensified through the arrival of settlers from Holland, England, France, and Germany, in the seventeenth to twentieth centuries. Horses, wheeled vehicles, and firearms ensured early military triumphs. Strife between the colonising communities led first to the Trek of 1835 from the eastern Cape into KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng (Transvaal), and the Free State, and later to the fratricidal conflict between Afrikaners and English imperialism in the wars of 1879–80 and 1899–1902. The industrial process of the later nineteenth century resulted in a twentieth-century struggle for the suppressed black majority to achieve recognition and democratic representation. Struggles persist to the present. Survival is not easy in a landscape beset by droughts, viruses, economic hardship, and a society infected with criminality and the legacy of segregation and apartheid. The white community's experience and perspective has appeared over the past century among numerous writers, from Olive Schreiner and Eugène Marais to André Brink and J. M. Coetzee. In fragmentary and largely unpublished form, C. Louis Leipoldt offered an early and searching analysis of colonisation and the wars leading to the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. He dramatised the early colonial period in his play *Die laaste aand* (1930), an attack on segregation in early Cape society. The situation leading to the war of 1899–1902, and the war itself, appear in his novels *Chameleon on the Gallows* and *Stormwrack*. As writers trapped in the creolisation process, writers such as Peter Abrahams, Bessie Head, Alex La Guma, Lauretta Ngcobo, and Zakes Mda have exposed the white community to searching interpretations.

The Indian community arrived in KwaZulu-Natal as part of a nineteenth-century labour recruitment drive that amounted to slavery. Though scantily assimilated through creolisation into other communities, the writing repertoire of this community includes Mohandas K. Gandhi, Ronnie Govender, Deena Padayachee, Ahmed Essop, and Agnes Sam. These have contributed substantially to modern political awareness, theatre work, and prose writing. Together with all the others, this community's leadership contributed materially to the peaceful outcome of the 1994 election. In practice, a vast and eventually successful majority resulted from the apartheid era's classification of South Africans into voting whites and voteless non-whites. It became a question of time for the majority to assert its independence.