

**“Bantu women on the move”:
Black women and the politics of mobility in *The Bantu World***

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Abstract

For the most part, the inter-war years in South Africa have been researched as the time when African nationalism and resistance developed. Many such studies analyse the work of African intellectuals (mostly men) in this period while the role of women has become a serious consideration since the 1980s. In her book, *A World of their Own: A History of South African Women's Education* (2013), Meghan Healy-Clancy examines the role of education for black women from the 1800s as a way to study their experiences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her book raises questions about the less public nature of black women's lives, such as family, marriage and education. This paper aims to enter this conversation by examining the mobility of black women through a selection of articles which appeared in *The Bantu World* during 1935. Mobility is understood as an intensely political expression of movement which is also part of the quotidian. The analysis of these articles argues for a more complex understanding of the lives of black women, one beyond the narrative of subjugated women who did not have access to mobility, freedom and agency.

Keywords: African modernity; black women; mobility; colonial education.

Opsomming

Die jare tussen die twee wereldoorloë in Suid-Afrika word meestal bestudeer as die tydperk waartydens Afrikanasionalisme en -weerstand ontwikkel het. Studies van hierdie tydperk het tot nou toe meestal gefokus op die werk van prominente (meerendeels manlike) intellektuele Afrikane; die rol wat vroue gespeel het, word sedert die 1980's 'n ernstiger fokusarea. In haar boek, *A World of their Own: A History of South African Women's Education* (2013) ondersoek Meghan Healy-Clancy die rol wat opvoeding vanaf die 1800's vir swart vroue gespeel het, om swart vrouens van die laat-negentiende en vroeë twintigste eeue te bestudeer. Haar boek opper vrae omtrent die minder openbare aard van swart vroue se lewens, soos familie, die huwelik en opvoeding. Hierdie artikel bestudeer swart vroue se mobiliteit na

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aanleiding van artikels uit *The Bantu World* van 1935. Beweeglikheid word hier verstaan as 'n hoogs politieke uitdrukking van beweging, wat ook deel is van die alledaagse. Die analise van hierdie artikels pleit vir 'n meer ingewikkelde begrip van swart vroue se lewens, wat verder gaan as die narratief van onderworpe vroue sonder toegang tot mobiliteit, vryheid en mag.

Sleutelwoorde: Afrika-moderniteit; beweeglikheid; swart vroue; koloniale opvoedkunde.

Introduction

This paper analyses the representation of black women's mobility in the 1935 edition of the newspaper *The Bantu World*. I am particularly interested in the articles which appeared in the women's pages which was an important section of the newspaper. *The Bantu World* was established in 1932 with one women's page and by 1935 there were four pages dedicated to women.¹ The women's pages bring into question the representation of black women at the time of print but also issues about black womanhood as espoused at the time which had implications for how we understand the historiography of black women's lives. This paper aims to analyse the "alternative discourses" which Switzer writes about when he explains: "Cultural texts are necessarily ambiguous sites in the struggle to confer power over lived experiences ... A newspaper, for example, may provide a mirror image of a ruling culture, but it will also frame alternative discourses".² This speaks to the complex presence of black women from the educated class among black people, in articles which announced their education, careers and travels.

This article is also interested in the newspaper as a cultural text which raises questions about the politics of archives; where archives can be understood to mean "traces of the past collected either intentionally or haphazardly as evidence".³ Newspapers are often seen as primary texts which are evidence of history as it was happening. In his book *Towards an African Literature* (1973), Jordan shows the importance of early newspapers in the 1800s in South Africa and how they influenced the growth of literature among the educated African elite, who began owning and producing their own newspapers. John Tengo Jabavu, is a prominent example; he was the first newspaper pioneer who owned *Imvo Zabantsundu*⁴ (*Native Opinion*). Together with the missionary influence and the use of the Bible, newspapers became an important source of knowledge production and the "most common piece of literature".⁵ Opland takes this further by collecting the works of early Xhosa writers

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1. L. Switzer, "Bantu World and the Origins of a Captive African Commercial Press in South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14, 3 (1988), pp 351–370.
 2. Switzer, "Bantu World and the Origins of a Captive African Commercial Press", pp 351.
 3. A. Burton (ed.), *Archive Stories: Facts, Fiction and the writing of History* (Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2005), p 3.
 4. M. Ndletyana, "John Tengo Jabavu", in M. Ndletyana (ed.), *African Intellectuals in 19th and Early 20th Century South Africa* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2008), p 35.
 5. Ndletyana, *African Intellectuals*, p 2.

to preserve their literary contribution.⁶ This is an indication of the significance of newspapers as cultural texts and as archival material.

The politics of the archive has been contested for years and the question of memory and collective memory arise when looking at the archive.⁷ Copies of *The Bantu World* are available in the Historical Papers division in the Africana Library at the University of the Witwatersrand and can be accessed by researchers in digital format. The question about how researchers approach this archive and what they see in it (or what they do not see) brings to the fore the presence of history in the present and poses questions about our memory of the past, especially in an emerging democracy like South Africa, where historical narratives are still being contested. Brown and Davies-Brown illustrate this tension by posing that “archives are the manufacturers of memory and not merely the guardians of it”.⁸ Thus my perspective as a black woman informs not only what I see and find in the archives but also how I make meaning of a cultural text such as a newspaper.

My selection of a few articles about black women’s lives in the 1930s is not an attempt to tell the truth about history – as is the usual argument for going back to the archives – but rather it is to raise questions about what is in the history books about African women’s lives and ask the questions: What has been included? What has been excluded? The answer to these questions helps us understand the importance of making visible the identities of those who have been made invisible by the version of history which has been selected to make sense of our present.

Black women’s lives in the 1930s

The period between World War I and World War II is characterised by a rise in African nationalism and an increased migration into the cities as a result of the industrialisation of South Africa.⁹ It is also important to note that this was the time of the Great Depression which had a global impact. In Katie Makanya’s¹⁰ biography, McCord begins chapter 19, “Durban: 1930–1939”, by describing the 1930s as a time of economic destitution and unemployment because “[no] one was asking for a rise now. Stores were shut up. Factories closed down. Even the rich whites were losing their jobs and could not pay their servants or even give them food. The people were

6. The works of Nontsizi Mgwetho, S.E.K. Mqhayi and William Gqoba are among the most significant collections that have been preserved, published and translated into English.

7. R.H. Brown and B. Davis-Brown, “The Making of Memory: The Politics of Archives, Libraries, and Museums in the Construction of National Consciousness”, *History of the Human Sciences*, 11, 4 (1998), p 18.

8. Brown and Davis-Brown, “The Making of Memory”, p 22.

9. D. Gaitskell, “Housewives, Maids or Mothers: Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Women in Johannesburg”, 1903–1939. *The Journal of African History*, 24, 2 (1983), pp 241–256.

10. She was Charlotte Manye Maxeke’s younger sister, who travelled with Maxeke to Britain in the 1800s as part of the Native African Choir

starving”.¹¹

Makanya’s life as a nurse aid in Durban during this period sheds light on women’s political involvement as well as the lived experience of black women in the cities. Makanya lived without her children while she worked in Durban and was accommodated in the Native Women’s Hostel with other women such as Bertha Mkhize. Makanya describes Mkhize as being an avid reader of popular newspapers of the time – *Natal Mercury*, *Ilanga lase Natal* and the African National Congress paper *Abantu-Batho* – and discussing the political comment written in the paper alongside issues of international politics which dealt with black people’s lives as far afield as the United States of America in the form of Marcus Garvey’s politics.¹²

Mkhize later became a prominent ANC activist who took part in the pass protests in 1931 and 1936. Against the background of early political developments at the time Limb explains:

It is unclear how she [Mkize] first encountered the ANC, but she was active in the Daughters of Africa, founded in 1937 by Lil[ian] Tshabalala of Driefontein and the Durban Bantu Women’s Society with the support of Angeline Dube to promote female economic uplifting.¹³

I include these references to Mkhize and Makanya deliberately to highlight the varied nature of black women’s lives in the 1930s within the challenging political and economic context. Makanya’s biography is a crucial text which is not only a life narrative but also a detailed account of a black woman’s life from the 1800s until the 1950s (she dies in 1955). Makanya’s life sheds light on the political and economic context of South Africa through the lens of an urban black woman’s life. This is significant given the erasure or invisibility of black women’s lives in the South African historiography.¹⁴

It is within the context of the political, social and economic flux of the 1930s that *The Bantu World* began to recognise that black women were becoming a core audience of their newspaper, however, “the normative framework featured women as decorative objects and homeworkers submissive to their husbands”.¹⁵ It is not random that *The Bantu World* would choose to focus on “women’s activities” because there was a very clear missionary influence during this period which concerned itself with the lives of black women as wives and mothers in urban contexts.¹⁶ The influence of missionaries in the 1800s changed African societies tremendously. The great impact for black women was the direct intervention by missionaries into the

11. M. McCord, *The Calling of Katie Makhanya* (David Philip, Cape Town, 2000), p 228.

12. McCord, *The Calling of Katie Makhanya*, p 228.

13. Limb, *The ANC’s Early Years*, 367-368.

14. P. Hetherington, “Women in South Africa: The Historiography in English”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 26, 2 (1993), pp 241–269.

15. Switzer, “*Bantu World* and the Origins of a Captive African Commercial Press in South Africa”, p 358.

16. Gaitskell, “Housewives, Maids or Mothers”, pp 241–256.

affairs of black families, the education of black people and the socialisation of black women. As Gaitskell explains:

For urban black females in early industrial South Africa, Christianity was as much about a specific family form, of which [women] were the linchpin, as about a new faith in Christ. There was a domestic basis to the entire range of activities in which female missionaries were involved. Their instruction of African girls, their religious co-operation with adult women, the social welfare projects they initiated, were all imbued with this particular view of the family, while the word “home” itself took on a powerful appeal in missionary vocabulary. By the interwar period, black women prominent in church and community work were joining in the voicing of domestic ideology.¹⁷

The 1930s was a period of intense domesticity among black women in urban settings and it was a volatile political time. African women had begun organising protests against pass laws in towns such as Bloemfontein and Potchefstroom as early as 1913.¹⁸ Women’s organisations like the Bantu Women’s League, were established by Charlotte Maxeke in 1918, and the National Council of African Women was founded in 1933. These were important spaces for black women to become involved in social and political activities outside the home.¹⁹ These groups together with *manyano*²⁰ groups set up by various churches became the spaces within which women gathered to talk about what seemed pertinent to their lives during this period.

This research into the lives of black women aims to challenge the erasure of their role in South Africa’s history.²¹ During the 1960s, as Hetherington puts it, feminist historians

... were inevitably writing “compensatory” history because there were such gaps in the historical record that they tended to be interdisciplinary in their approach, with a penchant for asking new questions and for widening the boundaries of history; and they brought a certain passion or commitment to the task of making women visible.²²

It is worth including Gasa’s quote at length here to elaborate further on the importance of researching black women’s lives. Gasa highlights the need to re-examine the historical documents, to ask more questions about women’s lives and to

17. Gaitskell, “Housewives, Maids or Mothers”, p 242.

18. N. Gasa, “Let them Build More Gaols”, in N. Gasa (ed.), *Women in South African History* (Human Sciences Research Council, Cape Town, 2007), pp 129–152.

19. Gasa, “Let them Build More Gaols”, pp 129–152.

20. *Manyano* groups were created in various church denominations as groups solely for women to meet and pray. They are mostly associated with the Methodist Church in Southern Africa.

21. Work by Deborah Gaitskell, Shula Marks, Cheryl Walker, Jacklyn Cock, Julia Wells, Anne McClintock, Catherine Burns, Meghan Healy-Clancy and Nomboniso Gasa’s edited book in 2007, to name but a few prominent researchers in this field.

22. Hetherington, “Women in South Africa”, p 242.

make women more visible rather than accepting the same narrative about their “absence/presence, silence/speech”. As she puts it:

Sometimes significance lies not in the absence/presence, silence/speech, but in the actual ways in which we read the historical documents, listen to the meta-narratives and pay attention to the details of history, including those which do not fit snugly into those long used, tried and apparently tested boxes that are our analytical tools. Most importantly, the question is how we read, reconstruct the archives and the texts, listen to the narratives and develop the analytical tools and framework we find of greatest analytical power.²³

Locating myself within “Bantu women on the move”

Reading Ellen Khuzwayo’s autobiography *Call Me Woman* (1985); Peter Rule’s *Nokukhanya: Mother of Light* (1993) – Nokukhanya Luthuli’s biography; Noni Jabavu’s memoir *Drawn in Colour* (1960); and her *A Life’s Mosaic: The Autobiography of Phyllis Ntantala* (2009), made me realise the depth of mis-education and misrepresentation of black women’s historiography. Wider reading of the life stories by and about black women; of the poetry by Nontsizi Mgwetho, and the works of fiction by Lauretta Ngcobo, Miriam Tlali, and others such as Boitumelo Mofokeng (who contributed to the *Staffrider*) made me very aware of the need to discover more about black women’s experiences in South Africa’s history. These authors contradicted the perception that women were simply “keeping house” at home while men were out and about, fighting in the struggle. These texts have contributed significantly to the historiography of black women because fictional work has provided an understanding of black women’s subjectivity.²⁴

It was while searching for clues about Noni Jabavu’s life that I stumbled upon the pages of the 1935 edition of *The Bantu World* and became intrigued by the representation of black women in this newspaper. I discovered that there were indeed prominent African women who had not only contributed politically, but had also written for public platforms such as *The Bantu World*. This realisation was sharpened when I came across Healy-Clancy’s book, *In a World of their Own: A History of South African Women’s Education* (2013), which uses the history of Inanda Seminary to look at the history of black women’s education and their careers in the early twentieth century. Interestingly, Bertha Mkhize, mentioned above, is an Inanda Seminary alumnus.

The absence of women (particularly black women) in South Africa’s history became an issue of contention in the 1970s. South African was trailing far behind in comparison to the rest of the continent which had started having this conversation and engaging with the proliferation of independence movements from as early as the 1960s.²⁵ Hetherington’s paper focuses on the work done by white women in

23. Gasa, “Let them Build More Gaols”, p. 132.

24. B. Boswell, “Black South African Writers: Narrating the Self, Narrating the Nation”, PhD thesis, University of Maryland, 2010.

25. Hetherington, “Women in South Africa”, pp 241–269.

academia in the 1970s and 1980s rather than black women's research about the lives of African women. This trend has since shifted with the work by scholars such as Gqola's *What's Slavery to Me?* (2010); *Women Writing Africa* (2003) (edited by a group of women from various institutions); and Zine Magubane's *Bringing the Empire Home* (2004) and *Hear Our Voices: Gender, and the Status of Black South African Women in the Academy* (2004), edited with Reitumeitse Obakeng Mabokela.

***The Bantu World* and black womanhood**

The most comprehensive description and analysis of *The Bantu World* is by Switzer, who discusses the nature of the newspaper and places it within the context of other black newspapers in the early twentieth century.²⁶ In addition to Switzer's study, a research group styling itself the Modern Girl around the World group, offers another comprehensive analysis which looks at the rise of the "modern girl" and race respectability in the 1930s in South Africa,²⁷ with a particular focus on *The Bantu World*.

Switzer describes the context of a reading culture in the 1930s by stating that "literate Africans constituted about 12.4 per cent of the adult African population by 1931 ... and the number of registered African newspapers alone was nineteen in 1930 – the highest in the history of South Africa's black press".²⁸ This brings into question the readers of the newspapers who are described as the "emerging black middle class" who were

... the vanguard of an African middle-class culture in a white-dominated, racially-stratified society. The petty bourgeoisie were the principal communicators and consumers of news, opinion and entertainment in the African press for more than two generations after the first fledgling, independent African journals were launched in the 1880s and 1890s. They were the members and office bearers of a proliferating number of independent African political, cultural and economic organisations that sought to generate the accoutrements of a middle-class lifestyle.²⁹

This description of the readership highlights the complex world of the inter-war years for black South Africans, especially women. Switzer's research does not consider the extent to which women contributed as writers in *The Bantu World* even though there is evidence in the papers of women contributing through letters, articles and stories alongside those by African men. The editor of *The Bantu World* was R.R.R. Dhlomo.

26. Switzer, "*Bantu World* and the Origins of a Captive African Commercial Press".

27. A group of researchers from various parts of the world combined their efforts to produce a book *The Modern Girl around the World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalisation* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2008).

28. Switzer, "*Bantu World* and the Origins of a Captive African Commercial Press, p 351.

29. Switzer, "*Bantu World* and the Origins of a Captive African Commercial Press, p 351.

Exploring popular representations about black women is also part of the work of understanding their lived experiences and how they are seen throughout South Africa's literary history. *The Bantu World* gives us more evidence in terms of understanding black women in the inter-war years and how they were inadvertently written into history. Looking at *The Bantu World* also brings into question the narrative that women have been erased and silenced because the newspaper offers evidence about the representation of black women during a very critical time in South Africa's history.

According to Thomas, the Modern Girl around the World research group has also contributed to this discussion through an analysis of newspapers from various cities across the world. In South Africa, it looked at *The Bantu World*, employing the heuristic of rethinking the history and historiography of the inter-war period.³⁰ This research group provided answers on many gender issues such as masculinity and femininity in the 1930s and also raised other pertinent questions. Furthermore, Thomas's research looks at the debates in *The Bantu World* which centre around the beauty of young African women during this period with a particular focus on articles and adverts about the use of make-up and participation in beauty competitions.³¹

The most revealing aspect about this research is the issue of race respectability and how women's bodies and livelihoods were used to advance the conversation about racial upliftment. However, this was not without its own conflicts. Thomas explains that although young African women's "schooling, professional careers or cosmopolitan appearances" were seen as contributing to uplift their social status,

... others accused the modern African girl of "prostituting" her sex and race by imitating white, coloured or Indian women, and by avoiding marriage, dressing provocatively or engaging in extra-marital and inter-racial sex. Use of cosmetics was one of the most contentious issues surrounding the black modern girl because it drew attention to the phenotypic dimensions of racial distinctions.³²

While Thomas's research focuses on the conversations around feminine beauty, the use of make-up, beauty products and how they influence our understandings about gender struggles, Healy-Clancy looks at the conversations about marriage and family; the politics of how "mission-educated men and women broadcast marital narratives as political discourses of race-making and nation-building".³³ Healy-Clancy extends the work of race respectability by looking at discourses around the "New African" as espoused in the papers of *The Bantu World*. She challenges the perception that the readers of the women's pages were the African elite, as claimed by Switzer. Instead she points out that "we should be careful not to caricature this audience as

30. See L. Thomas, "The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability in the 1930s in South Africa", *The Journal of African History*, 47, 3 (2006), pp 461–490.

31. Thomas, "The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability", pp 461–490.

32. Thomas, "The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability", p 464.

33. M. Healy-Clancy, "The Politics of New African Marriage in Segregationist South Africa", *African Studies Review*, 57, 2 (2014), p 8.

particularly elite. Readers lacked significant economic, political, or cultural power – as the very ownership structure of the press in this period reflects”.³⁴

Both the writers and the readers of *The Bantu World* occupied complicated class positions. Healy-Clancy’s work raises questions about ‘New African’ identities without necessarily critiquing the idea of the ‘New African’ as something that was part of the narrative of colonialism and missionary education. The reluctance to critique the idea could stem from the complexity described by De Kock:

The process of what is sometimes called the “Westernisation” of black South Africans is extremely complex, and I have emphasised the element of warfare for the sake of perspective. The colonisation of people in what only later became known as an entity (“South Africa”) was achieved by ink as well as blood, in the irruption of a powerful new order of representation which ran parallel with outbreaks of war.³⁵

By tracing the history of *The Bantu World* as well as the rich contributions that have been made in the analysis of this newspaper, I hope to look even more closely at the women’s pages because there are other discussions to be considered. Submissions under the section “Bantu women on the move” inspired the title of my present article and encouraged me to examine the narratives in the newspaper which have not been the focus of previous analysis.

The theme of travelling is part of the nexus of class and education because the narratives and letters in *The Bantu World* feature educated women whose careers and work enabled them to travel around South Africa and beyond the country’s borders, as was the case for Mrs Z.K. Matthews and Mrs William Dube. These narratives are particularly interesting because they are featured in the women’s pages but furthermore they highlight the “micropolitics of everyday life”,³⁶ because travelling is largely a practical part of life. However, in the context of the 1930s it was a political activity because of the restrictions placed upon black people at the time, particularly black women.

In her work “Virgin Territory? Travel and Migration by African Women in Twentieth-Century Southern Africa”, Barnes poses the following questions about the mobility of black women: “How did African women come to be in the colonial-era towns of southern Africa and how did they get there if they did not travel in roughly the same manner as men?”³⁷ Her questions point to the ways in which black women

34. Healy-Clancy, “The Politics of New African Marriage”, p 15.

35. L. de Kock, *Civilising the Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1996), p 30.

36. L.S. Barkty, “Agency: What's the Problem?”, in J. Kegan Gardiner (ed.), *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice* (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1995) p 190.

37. T. Barnes, “Virgin Territory? Travel and Migration by African Women in Twentieth-Century Southern Africa”, in S. Geiger, N. Musisi and J.M. Allman (eds), *Women in*

are often eclipsed by a historical narrative of men's migration and travel. While Barnes looks at gendered labour migration in South Africa and Zimbabwe, this paper extends the debate to an examination of black women's mobility.

The politics of mobility

An understanding of mobility is borrowed from geopolitical discourse and a metaphorical sense usually understood as "social mobility", both of which are inherently political. The idea of mobility and black women in South Africa in the 1930s is pertinent given the pass laws and pass protests of the early 1900s. As Hyndman explains:

The two key pillars of segregation in South Africa were the 1913 Land Act and the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923. The former made it illegal for Africans to purchase or lease land from Europeans anywhere outside the reserves set aside for them. The latter established the principle of residential segregation in urban areas, giving Africans no permanent rights to live in towns and no justification for being there unless needed by whites as labor.³⁸

Both these laws speak to the restrictions and control over black people's movement and freedom and more importantly the interplay of time and space. Cresswell considers mobility "as progress, as freedom, as opportunity, and as modernity" and sees the converse, the lack of mobility, as "shiftlessness, as deviance and as [a core reason for] resistance".³⁹

A geopolitical understanding of mobility allows for a discussion about a gendered geography and questions the extent to which men and women access the world in different ways. The idea that black women were travelling around South Africa and abroad during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has not been given enough attention. Ironically, this is despite the evidence available in archives such as the one explored in this present article.

The kind of travelling undertaken by black people can in the first place be examined through an understanding of migrancy. After the discovery of diamonds in the Kimberley area and gold on the Witwatersrand, many black men moved from the rural areas into the burgeoning cities in search of work. Barnes elaborates on this idea by pointing out that this left "no room ... for the mobility of African women", and remarks that there is a "differential manner in which black and white travellers are described" in that migrants and explorers are seen differently.⁴⁰ This blind spot or

African Colonial Histories: An Introduction (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2002) p 165.

38. J. Hyndman, "The (Geo)Politics of Gendered Mobility", in L. Staeheli, E. Kofman and L. Peake (eds), *Mapping Women, Making Politics: Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography* (Routledge, New York, 2004), p 181.

39. T. Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (Routledge, London and New York, 2006), p 2.

40. Barnes, "Virgin Territory?" p 164.

more specifically, black women's varied experiences not being made visible, speaks to Gasas's concern about "the actual ways in which we read the historical documents".⁴¹

By exploring the archives of *The Bantu World*, black women's multiple identities begin to emerge, providing an answer to the question: "Where are black women, their multiple voices and multiple forms of self-representation, which are often far from the 'heroic' subject and more along the lines of fighting for survival and struggling for dignity and self-expression?"⁴² If black women's mobility is not taken into account they are assigned to "mass immobility...barred from centre stage and frozen in perpetual economic childhood".⁴³

An analysis: "Bantu women on the move"

The profiles of the achievements and travels of black women, their role in marriage and their careers, appear in competing conversations within the pages of *The Bantu World*. These articles were not written in isolation but were part of a broader project which wanted a representation of black womanhood that was positive, inspirational and aspirational. The profiles raise themes such as the role of education, the significance of the family – particularly the father and the husband – and questions about the politics of mobility as geographical movement and social upliftment. I shall analyse four articles that appeared under the title "Bantu women on the move", those on Miss E.P. Ngozwana, Mrs William Dube, Gloria Molefe and Mrs Hilda Godlo⁴⁴ – as well as a letter by Mrs Frieda Matthews which appears in the women's pages and speaks to the same themes that are featured under the heading of "Bantu women on the move".

When reading these profiles, it becomes clear that their careers are in line with those of other respectable black women in the twentieth century. Miss E.P. Ngozwana was a teacher, Gloria Molefe was a nurse and Mrs Frieda Matthews was a teacher. Mrs Godlo qualified as a teacher but chose to make a career as a social worker and an agent of *The Bantu World*. There is very little information available on Mrs William Dube's life and career.

On 5 January 1935 an article about Miss Ellen Pumla Ngozwana appeared in *The Bantu World* under the section "Bantu women in the home". The article reads like a résumé: it begins by connecting Miss Ngozwana to her lineage by mentioning her parents. She was "the eldest daughter of Rev. and Mrs Ngozwana of the Methodist Church, Kokstad".⁴⁵ Her achievements are attributed to her father's enthusiasm about his daughter's education. This focus on her father is significant since Miss Ngozwana was not married at the time of publication. It is also important to note that the

41. Gasas, "Let them Build More Gaols", p 131.

42. Gasas, "Let them Build More Gaols", p 131.

43. Barnes, "Virgin Territory?", p 165.

44. I have used their names as they appear in the newspaper.

45. *The Bantu World*, 5 January 1935, p 10.

influence of her mother is not discussed at all, although she is mentioned briefly in the introduction of the article.

In contrast, information about Mrs William Dube is scant; very little is known about her and her article does not share much biographical information. An article about her travels was published on 9 February 1935 under the section “Page of interest to women of the race”. This contrast could be because Miss E.P. Ngozwana came from a prominent family and it was important for the readers to know about her in relation to her father. The same can be said of Mrs Hilda Godlo’s article which, published in April 1935, follows the structure of the article about Miss Ngozwana. The introduction locates Mrs Godlo within her city and her family. She was from East London and her father’s name and profession are mentioned – again there is no mention of her mother. This is followed by details of her education. She was educated at the Lamplough Institute of Transkei and later taught at Mgwakwebe. Information about her husband, Mr R.H. Godlo, is also included as part of Mrs Godlo’s success, because marriage was part of black women’s mobility.

Mrs Frieda Matthew’s article has no information about who she was but her marriage to prominent educator and intellectual, Z.K. Matthews, suggests that she needed no other introduction to the readers of *The Bantu World*. Born Frieda Bokwe, Mrs F. Matthews was an interesting figure to feature in the pages of the newspaper. Her article is published under “Bantu women in the home” (instead of the expected “Page of interest to women of the race”). Her letter is the dominant feature on the page which is headlined “Mrs F.Z. Matthews’ London letter” (apart from the letter, the page is dominated by two adverts and a column by E.J G.⁴⁶).

Frieda Bokwe married Zachariah Keodirelang (Z.K.) Matthews after a courtship which was sparked while they were students at Lovedale. She was the daughter of a prominent clergyman, Rev John Knox Bokwe. Frieda’s life mirrored those who were seen as part of “the educated and cultured elite in the Eastern Province”.⁴⁷ Without spending too much time writing about the prominent men in her life, it is significant that Ellen Khuzwayo, in her autobiography, *Call Me Woman* (1985), Ellen Khuzwayo writes the following about Mrs Matthews:

Several women teachers made a lasting impression on me while I was at Adams. First there was Sis Frieda – as we called her ... She was a very good-looking woman, kind but firm, and very outspoken on the subject of courtship. Her approach was more on what girls should do than on what they should not. She was the first woman in my life to talk openly about sex. Perhaps I valued this informal education because I had lost confidence in the person of my mother. Frieda provided a model of married life and motherhood for all of us.”⁴⁸

46. The full name of this writer is unknown. It was common practice for writers to be identified by their initials instead of full details.

47. H. Hudson, “Review of Frieda Matthews, *Remembrances* (Mayibuye and Literature Series, 1995), in *Botswana Notes and Records*, 27 (1995), p 340.

48. E. Kuzwayo, *Call me Woman* (The Women’s Press Limited, London, 1985), p 87.

This description by Kuzwayo provides clues about the kind of woman Frieda Matthews was beyond the narrative of the supportive wife of the prominent politician and educator. Furthermore, it mirrors what Z.K. Matthews writes in his memoir, where he describes Frieda as:

... not shy or awkward. She spoke easily with her acquaintances, she was free and open, full of zest and confidence in herself. Her surroundings were hardly strange to her. She had grown up at Lovedale and, although she lived in the girls' dormitory at the College, her home was a short distance away.⁴⁹

The question of family is also seen in Miss Molefe's profile, published in March 1935, but unlike the case in Miss E.P. Ngozwana's article, Miss Molefe's family is not mentioned at all. Her success is not attributed to her family, which suggests that perhaps Miss Molefe is the first person in her family to be educated and was therefore able to "escape the tribe" and "backwardness" of her family in order to be a role model for those she had left behind.

Thus education can be seen as the central impetus for the social and geographical location of these women. Miss Ngozwana's article foregrounds her education at the leading Christian, missionary schools at the time: Shawbury Girls School, Healdtown, a B.A. at Fort Hare and finally, teacher training at Amanzimtoti Institute. The litany of the institutions where she received her education is foregrounded by a mention that her achievements should serve as encouragement for parents who are reluctant to educate their daughters.⁵⁰ In her autobiography Ellen Kuzwayo describes Miss Ngozwana more extensively than *The Bantu World* article and tells us what the article does not reveal about her:

I have in mind particularly Ellen Ngozwane⁵¹ who was popular and very much loved by all the students. She was also a great friend of Professor Matthews' family. She was a charming and attractive woman, dark in complexion, and well-built, but certainly not stout. She had an excellent taste in clothes and always looked very elegant ... Every time we assessed Miss Ngozwane, we always found she had no match among the male staff – in our estimation, she was high above all the bachelor teachers. Our convictions were confirmed later when we learnt that she was married to an eminent Ugandan named Kisosonkole (the father of the Kabaka, king of Buganda).⁵²

It is evident that *The Bantu World's* description pales in comparison to Kuzwayo's rich text about her teacher. However, although the newspaper account seems a rudimentary description of an educated African woman, it ends with an interesting twist: Miss Ngozwana is also a writer who contributes to the pages of *The*

49. Z.K. Matthews, (1983). *Freedom for My People: The Autobiography of Z.K. Matthews, Southern Africa 1901 to 1968*. Cape Town: (David Philip, Cape Town, 1983), p 68.

50. *The Bantu World*, 5 January 1935, p 10.

51. Kuzwayo's spelling of Ngozwana's surname is different to the one that appears in the newspaper. However, the description supports that she is referring to Miss E.P. Ngozwana.

52. Kuzwayo, *Call me Woman*, p 89.

Bantu World under the pseudonym “Pat”. We learn that: “Her recent moving article on ‘Is Life Worth Living?’ proved of great help to many readers. She is an imaginative writer with a theme of poetic justice”.⁵³ It is thus hardly surprising that on 18 May 1935 the newspaper published a speech by Miss Ngozwana which was delivered at Inanda Seminary earlier that month titled: “The Emancipation of Women”. This information is crucial for the representation of black women whose identities were predominantly those of daughter, wife and mother. Ngozwana’s article questions this stereotype about women as she declares that women have “revolted” against such stereotypes.⁵⁴ The article warrants its own analysis because Miss Ngozwana makes many claims which suggest that she is writing about women in her class, who also have the same level of education and social mobility.

The role of education and social mobility can also be seen in Miss Molefe’s profile although this narrative is not as extensive as Miss Ngozwana’s in terms of detail on educational institutions. Miss Molefe was from Bethanie, near Rustenburg and the extent of her traveling was to study in Potchefstroom and secure a post in Zululand where she was based at the time of publication. Miss Molefe’s rural background is seen as a limitation and her success after moving to Zululand is an example of a positive move of social mobility. It seems that the purpose of profiling Miss Molefe is to make an argument for educating black women because:

Coming as she does from Bethanie, among a tribe supposed to be one of the most backward in all modern spheres of Western civilisation, it is to be hoped that the romantic and adventurous spirit of this girl will stir a new inspiration among many of her home girls to some nobler things and thus become not only an asset to their tribe but to the African race as a whole.⁵⁵

This commentary about the tribe, Western civilisation and “nobler things” raises questions about the kind of mobility that is expected for people who come from rural backgrounds. The paternalistic tone reflects the author’s views – and perhaps the readers as well – about mobility as a journey that leads one closer to Western civilisation, where questionably, Western civilisation equates to success.

This discourse of upward social mobility is still very relevant in contemporary South Africa where questions about inequality and the divide between rural and urban settings create a paternalistic attitude towards people who were socialised into what it means to be educated and modern. Miss Molefe’s narrative is about the mobility that comes with modernity – a sense of moving between spaces, locations and ways of being; in this case from rural to urban.

Mrs Godlo’s profile reveals the interplay between racial respectability and social mobility. The emphasis on her family speaks to the concerns about coming from a “good” family which Healy-Clancy refers to as the “New African family”.⁵⁶ Mrs

53. *The Bantu World*, 5 January 1935.

54. *The Bantu World*, 18 May, 1935.

55. *The Bantu World*, 30 March 1935, p 11.

56. Healy-Clancy, “Women and the Problem of Family”, pp 450–471.

Godlo's achievements as a social worker and "agent of *The Bantu World*" in East London connect to racial respectability which "refers to people's desires and efforts to claim positive recognition in contexts powerfully structured by racism, contexts in which respectability was framed through racial categories and appearances were of the gravest importance".⁵⁷ The portrait of Mrs Godlo highlights the importance of appearances as it is a close head-to-shoulders image of a woman with a modest smile, dressed elegantly.

Mrs Godlo is the ideal woman that the newspaper wants readers to be inspired by. The article ends with an expression of enthusiasm for Mrs Godlo's future success:

It is interesting to see in this versatile and active woman such interest for the welfare of our race. *The Bantu World* is fortunate to number her amongst its great team of helpers. Mrs Godlo is only 38 years old. Her future still lies promisingly before her.⁵⁸

The words "versatile" and "active" raise questions about the kind of womanhood espoused by the author as well as the positioning of Mrs Godlo as someone who has agency because she has made meaningful strides in her life that other women should strive to emulate. The mention of her age is also significant because the other articles do not mention the age of the women under discussion. There is a sense that there is still more that Mrs Godlo could achieve to advance black people in general and black women in particular.

Mrs William Dube's article is especially interesting because of the extensive list of the places she has visited within and outside the borders of South Africa. These include Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Portuguese East Africa, Mafeking, Plumtree, Bulawayo, Ballaballa, Victoria Falls, Livingstone, Mbembesi, Salisbury, Matoko, Tete, Chileka, Blantyre, Limbi, Zomba, Fort Johnstone, Chindiwo, Chindi, Beira, Masikesa, Umtali and Johannesburg.⁵⁹ The list reveals that Mrs William Dube travelled extensively throughout Africa.

The following explanation of the uniqueness of her travels is included in *The Bantu World* of 9 February 1935:

Mrs Dube's experience is unique in that very few Bantu women ever undertake such long tours in the country purely on holiday bent. Owing to economic reasons chiefly and to a narrow outlook, Bantu women hardly travel a lot. When they do get an opportunity to do so they only visit those places they know. They never visit unknown places determined to widen their outlook or get in touch with different people's ideas. Mrs Dube's venture, therefore, is worthy of note because of this.⁶⁰

57. Thomas, "The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability", p 98.

58. *The Bantu World*, 6 April 1935, p 10.

59. The names of these places may have changed. I have listed them as they appear in the article.

60. *The Bantu World*, 9 February 1935, p 10.

The article goes on to point out that many black women's travel plans were restricted at the time and Mrs Dube's travels make her an exception. Her cosmopolitanism is also highlighted because her "outlook" is expanded. This is a value judgement that travelling and mobility imply, as suggested above, "progress, freedom, opportunity" and that conversely, an enforced lack of mobility leads to "shiftlessness, deviance and resistance".⁶¹ Mrs Dube has done something unusual for her time. One should bear in mind that many of the people who travelled extensively at this time were missionaries and the list suggests that possibly Mrs Dube may have been connected to one of the mission stations that were established in southern Africa. However, this is conjecture, especially because the author makes a note of Mrs Dube's travels as being for purposes of a "holiday". It is also interesting to note that apart from Mrs Dube's name, there is no mention of her husband travelling with her. Perhaps this was assumed by the readers because she is a married woman. The illusiveness of the figure of her husband in the article makes Mrs Dube something of a mysterious figure.

Her cosmopolitan identity is further emphasised at the end of the article where a reception is mentioned and Mrs Dube is being welcomed back after her travels where one of the speakers is a prominent chief of Swaziland. Mrs Dube speaks in Chinyanja,⁶² to thank her guests for the reception. Language is significant here because not only has Mrs Dube travelled further than is the norm; she has also come back with the ability to display what she has learnt while she was away.

There is enough insight in the article to consider further questions such as: Why would she travel to these places? More importantly, what means did she have which allowed her to travel extensively for such long periods of time? The list of places also brings into question notions of Pan-Africanism. What was the relationship that black women (in particular) were developing with the rest of the continent, both physically and in the cultural imagination? There is no sense that Mrs Dube has done anything out of the ordinary in travelling to nearby African countries and cities. Indeed, in its 1935 editions, *The Bantu World* covered news on the wider African stage such as the political resistance in Abyssinia with the encroachment by Italy's Mussolini. This coverage would have been an inspiration to the black readers in other African countries and in South Africa, where British and Dutch colonisation had encroached upon the livelihoods of indigenous people, leading to war and displacement. Mrs Dube's venture to other African countries embraced the Pan-African ideal and outlook that was being presented to the readers.

Similar concerns are seen in Mrs Matthews's letter, published in *The Bantu World* of 9 March 1935, about her trip to London while her husband was a student at the London School of Economics.⁶³ The newspaper does not provide any further reasons for the trip nor the purpose of the article other than what is suggested in the

61. Cresswell, *On the Move*, p 2.

62. Also known as Nyanja and prominent in Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

63. Website accessed 15 May 2017, see <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/professor-zachariah-keodirelang-matthews>

subtitle: “Mrs F. Matthews writes on her thrilling experiences in London”. The article is accompanied by a picture of Mrs Matthews standing with Miss E.P. Ngozwana at Amanzimtoti, Natal. This is significant given that it refers to a previous article published in January 1935 about Miss Ngozwana. These were the educated black women of the world who had links to education and mobility.

The article is framed as the impressions on London by an African woman and reads as a letter to a friend about the general reflections of her trip, including remarks about the weather; the “expanse” of London; the people she encounters and the new perspectives the trip has inspired. It is interesting to note that there is a paragraph dedicated to the women students she meets. She mentions a student from Sierra Leone, for example, a “young lady who has recently completed her LLB and is going back home sometime this year to practise as the first lady barrister in the whole of Africa, I believe”.⁶⁴ She then describes another student studying at Oxford and visiting London while on holiday. The reference to other African women who travel and live abroad raises questions about the mobility of women across the continent. While praising the achievements of these African women she encounters, Mrs Matthews speculates on the reasons behind their mobility:

In the Northern parts of Africa, they do not have all the facilities for higher education and other avenues of training that we have in South Africa and so it is quite a common thing for parents who can afford it to send their children to England.⁶⁵

This comment appears to undermine the success of the African students she encounters because their mobility is not simply about freedom and agency but also as a result of the constraints and limitations in their home countries. However, this tension highlights that these women still possess economic freedom and agency because of their privileged class position. Mrs Matthews implies that as a South African she is more privileged than the other African students because she has had access to the kind of education which allowed her to stay in South Africa. It seems ironic that she is implicitly praising South Africa’s education system of the 1930s despite the limitations it presented – at the time it was an education system which created a minority elite amongst black people.

She also describes meeting with Noni Jabavu who “is at a boarding school in Oxford”. It seems the judgments she makes about the other African students are not applied to Noni Jabavu because she does not speculate on the reasons she is being educated in England as someone from an elite family and has access to elite institutions. There is a level of awe at the meeting of Noni in London rather than the ambiguity she demonstrates for the other students she encounters.

Mrs Matthew’s article ends in a tone suggestive of a sense of pride in being able to travel and write about her insights for an aspirational audience. The Pan-African

64. *The Bantu World*, 9 March 1935, p 11.

65. *The Bantu World*, 9 March 1935, p 11.

sentiment which is implied in Mrs Dube's article is seen again in this article by Frieda Matthews. She concludes the letter by making reference to her wider vision and outlook because of her encounter with other Africans abroad:

We have thus come in contact with Africans from the East, West, Central and South of Africa in this short space of time. It has broadened our outlook and has made us feel what bond of unity exists between us all in spite of the great distance that separates us ...⁶⁶

Conclusion

One could simply dismiss these narratives as a crude ploy by the editor of *The Bantu World*⁶⁷ who published these articles with the purpose of simply pushing an agenda in the newspaper about the successes of colonial subjects and the power of colonial education. However, this would be to miss the point these narratives reveal about the political, economic and geographical structures facing these women (and those like them) and how they navigated their identities in such a complex context. The women profiled in these articles are not directly involved in politics but their very existence is political because it raises questions about negotiating structures and power relations while being able to access mobility, which is expressed differently for each woman.

The articles reveal that the question of mobility is political, economic and racial in character. In the everyday experience of being educated and being in a particular family these women were navigating modernity, particularly African modernity, which was a complex process of navigating various identities and places. The articles highlight the need for further research about black women's womanhood in a context where there are competing and alternative narratives about African women who are experiencing mobility in different ways. "Bantu women on the move" can be seen as a socialisation tool for women readers, a means of participation in an active womanhood. Perhaps this is an example of early conversations about women "having it all" which is still being written about in women's magazines today.

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66. *The Bantu World*, 9 March 1935, p 11.

67. R.R.R. Dhlomo was the so-called "editress" for the section of particular interest to women.

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