

---

# Countering stereotypes: The representation of Africans<sup>1</sup> in Communist Party of South Africa Cartoons 1930-1936<sup>2</sup>

Deirdre Pretorius

---

The construction of racial difference<sup>3</sup> as a strategy to legitimise colonialism and imperialism in Africa found expression in a visual tradition of racist representations of Africans. Numerous studies have been conducted into this visual tradition, especially with regard to popular cultural forms such as 'ethnic' shows (Shephard 1986), exhibitions (Hodeir 2002), advertising (McClintock 1995; Burke 2002), comics (Hunt 2002), photography and film (Richards 1986; Mirzoeff 1998; Landau 2002) and in popular culture in general (Pieterse 1992; Grinker & Steiner 1999). These studies make it clear that significant energy and resources were invested in the wide distribution to large audiences of colonialist and imperialist propaganda and associated racist imagery.<sup>4</sup>

The large-scale colonial and empire exhibitions which were held during the 1920s and 1930s contributed greatly to the broad dissemination of derogatory images of Africans. These exhibitions included the International Colonial Exhibitions in Wembley (1924-1925), Antwerp (1930) and Paris (1931), the Universal Exhibition in Brussels (1935) and the South African Empire Exhibition held between September 1936 and January 1937 in Johannesburg (Hodeir 2002:248).

The South African Empire Exhibition employed familiar racist representational strategies such as evolutionary narratives and hierarchising exhibits,<sup>5</sup> juxtaposition of the traditional and the modern and the relegation of traditional cultural practices to a 'timeless existence in the past'<sup>6</sup> (Robinson 2003:762). Jennifer Robinson (2003: 769) asserts that South African exhibition-goers 'brought with them practices of looking at difference which were often racist and demeaning'. It can be assumed that such 'practices of looking' were shaped by a European racist representational tradition which had developed over the course of centuries of colonialism. Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1992: 102-103) confirms that from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries southern Africa was one of the parts of Africa best known in Europe and that the 'familiar European clichés about black Africa first circulated at the Cape'.

Pieterse (1992:23) refers to the 'set of iconographic codes recurring in the depiction of slavery, missions, colonialism, and up to contemporary advertising' as an 'architecture of power'. However, as Adam Ashforth (1990:12) notes 'no power exists without resistance', and resistance to stereotypical visual depictions of Africans appeared in America

as early as the 1890s due to the emergence of a new consciousness driven by the thinking of WEB DuBois and Marcus Garvey (Washington 2001:267):

black intelligentsia, literati, and artists ... sought a realistic portrayal of black life to replace the exaggerated and derogatory images of black-faced minstrel singers and other coon-like popular figures. Characters then used to promote products in the commercial market – the Gold Dust Twins, Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben – drew on iconography of servitude and slavery, domesticating images of the black savage and the beast.

Resistance to such stereotypes increased and by 1925 Alain Locke (2003:49) wrote in his essay *The New Negro* that 'the Old Negro had long become more of a myth than a man ... he has been a stock figure perpetuated as a historical fiction'. Such stock figures or stereotypes are reflected on by Franz Fanon (1993:112) in his influential book *Black skin, white masks*, first published in 1952:

I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism [sic], racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: Sho' good eatin'.

Pieterse (1992:11) explains that stereotypes can be negative or positive and although they are usually not based in reality, they are convincing in their social consequences, especially with regard to role allocation, and therefore 'emancipatory movements are concerned not just with changing social realities but also changing representations'. The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA)<sup>7</sup> was a singular example of a South African political party which, during the first half of the twentieth century, was open to all races and which focused on moving the country to a non-racial socialist democracy. Such ideals positioned the party in direct opposition to the then hegemonic imperialist, segregationist and capitalist ideologies in South Africa. It is assumed that as an emancipatory movement the party would have countered racist stereotypes of Africans and this article examines a sample of the printed propaganda of the CPSA to determine how this was done. The sample for examination consists of the linocut cartoons<sup>8</sup> printed in the official newspaper *Umsebenzi* (the Worker) from 1930-1936.

As a starting point for the examination Pieterse's (1992) account of a number of stereotypes of Africans in his book *White on Black, images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* is drawn on. The book finds its origins and draws its material from an exhibition of the 'Negrophilia' collection held at the Tropical Museum in Amsterdam between 1989 and 1990. This collection documents 'popular representations of Africa and Blacks in the West from the eighteenth century to the present' (Pieterse 1992:15) and contains a variety of visual material including 'prints, drawings, illustrated magazines, books, comic books, posters, advertising material, packaging, decorative objects, statues, figurines, toys and other items'. By concentrating on popular culture, the collection highlights the importance of everyday images in the reproduction of stereotypes (Pieterse 1992:15).

Pieterse (1992) employs an iconographic analysis to identify and describe the stereotypical depictions of Africans in Western popular culture. He tracks the historical development of these stereotypes, indicates their longevity and offers a critique of the damaging racism that they perpetuate. The book asks questions on the manner in which

... relations of dominance [are] constructed and reproduced in popular culture, how are they normalized and routinized in word and image? By what means are they [sic] marginalized and subjected identified, labelled, kept in their place? How do caricature and stereotype, humour and parody function as markers of social boundaries and devices of domination? (Pieterse 1992:12).

The decision to focus on the time period from 1930 to 1936 is informed by two factors. The first revolves around the CPSA and its move towards recruiting African workers from the mid 1920s onwards, and the second is determined by the fact that the newspaper existed under the name *Umsebenzi* from 1930-1936 and during this time the linocut cartoons were created by one individual, thereby providing a relatively consistent sample for analysis. In the following section a brief description is provided of these two factors preceded by an outline of South African history of the 1920s and 1930s, largely drawn from Davenport and Saunders (2000:292-343), in order to contextualise the cartoons before proceeding with their examination.

## The context of the *Umsebenzi* linocut cartoons

The main political parties in South Africa in the 1920s were the South African Party (SAP), the South African Labour Party (SALP) and the Nationalist Party. By the early 1920s the popularity of the ruling SAP under the leadership of General Jan Smuts had declined following a series of repressions, one of which was the bloody suppression of the Rand miner's strike in 1922, a strike which was supported by the opposition Labour and Nationalist Parties. The growing unpopularity of the SAP resulted in the Party's defeat in the 1924 national elections by the Nationalist and Labour Party Pact (the Pact dissolved in 1931) and General JBM Hertzog became prime minister (Davenport & Saunders 2000:292-313).

Hertzog's government was a 'South Africa First' and 'Afrikaner nationalist' government committed to segregation (Davenport & Saunders 2000:300), and in the 1929 general election the issues of 'native policy were placed before voters as never before' (Davenport & Saunders 2000:311). The Nationalist Party won the election and Hertzog's government was soon confronted with dealing with the Great Depression of 1931-1932 which followed the collapse of Wall Street in 1929. South African exports fell and the wool industry was hit especially hard. The economic situation was worsened by the government's decision not to devalue the South African currency, as Australia and Great Britain had done, despite calls from the opposition to do so. On 16 December 1932 Tielman Roos, who had been replaced by Oswald Pirow in the Department of Justice in the Hertzog cabinet, started a campaign for devaluation which succeeded by the end of December. Following devaluation, the economy recovered and manufacturing exploded in a number of fields. By calling for devaluation Roos had set a series of events in motion which resulted in Smuts and Hertzog forming a coalition government in March 1933 (Davenport & Saunders 2000:311-319). The coalition was formed on the basis of the following seven points: the maintenance of South African autonomy as defined in the Statute of Westminster; acceptance of the national flag; equal rights for Afrikaans- and English- speakers; the safeguarding of a 'sound rural population'; acceptance of a 'white labour' policy; the solution of the 'native question', through

the maintenance of 'white civilisation' and political separation and the protection of South Africa's currency and economic assets (Davenport & Saunders 2000:320).

In December 1934 the Nationalist Party fused with the SAP to form the United South African Nationalist Party (United Party). In response, opponents of fusion broke away to form the Gesuiwerde (Purified) Nasionale Party under DF Malan which grew into a 'monolithic, increasingly totalitarian movement by the middle of the twentieth century' (Davenport & Saunders 2000:333). In 1936 a ten-year campaign by Hertzog to pass the 'Hertzog Bills' succeeded, despite strong opposition by African political organisations and the Communist Party. In essence the bills proposed that more land be allocated to African reserves, but that in return African voters would be removed from the common roll in the Cape (Davenport & Saunders 2000:308, 324-332).

The passing of the bills was considered as an attempt to solve the 'native question' (Davenport & Saunders 2000: 308, 326) which was a central issue of state and society formation in South Africa during the first half of the twentieth century (Ashforth 1990:1). Ashforth (1990:1) describes the 'native question' as the 'intellectual domain in which the knowledge, strategies, policies and justifications necessary to the maintenance of domination were fashioned' and he (Ashforth 1990:3) identifies a 'Grand Tradition' of inquiries into the 'native question' which took the form of commissions of inquiry, the 'father' of which was the South African Native Affairs Commission (SANAC) of 1903-1905. The SANAC report of 1905 described the population of the South African colonies as consisting of 'Natives' and 'Europeans'. The Europeans were 'organized as citizens in a liberal democratic political community', while for the 'Natives' a 'system of authoritarian domination through a reconstruction of "tribalism" was devised' (Ashforth 1990:247). In the late 1920s and early 1930s a 'new "scientific" understanding of the difference between "Natives" and "Europeans" was developed ... based upon principles of economics and anthropology' (Ashforth 1990:248).

Dubow (1989:4) explains the increased focus on the 'native question' during this time as a sign of the 'definite association of race with colour', as before the mid 1920s the term 'race' had mostly referred to the association

between English and Afrikaans speaking South Africans. Writings by 'experts' on race proliferated in the 1920s and 1930s and university departments were found that taught 'Bantu studies' and social anthropology (Dubow 1989:4). In addition ideas of Social Darwinism and eugenics which underpinned a concern with 'racial purity' influenced social commentators (Dubow 1989:7). Such thinking contributed to segregation becoming the 'consensus ideology amongst white South Africans during the inter-war years' (Dubow 1989:5). Dubow (1989: vii) describes segregation as apartheid's precursor and defines it as a 'complex amalgam of political, ideological and administrative strategies designed to maintain and entrench white supremacy' (Dubow 1989:1).

In contrast with the ideology of segregation, the CPSA's founding document proclaimed the Party to be non-racial<sup>9</sup> (Bunting 1981:62). However, in the early 1920s the Party was divided into two factions: one was in favour of an 'active pro-Native' policy, and the other merely wanted to focus on organising white workers (Roux & Roux 1972:49). The 'pro-Native' faction secured a majority at the National Party conference held in December 1924, moving the Party to a 'definite commitment to recruiting Africans as a major part of its activities' (Roux & Roux 1972:49-50). Eddie Roux concedes that 'the task of making the C.P. [sic] predominantly African in character and composition was found in practice to be no easy one and that years of hard work lay ahead before this object could be achieved' (Roux & Roux 1972:51).<sup>10</sup>

By the late 1920s the move towards recruiting African workers proved effective and whereas in 1927 the Party had only 200 members, by 1928 membership stood at 1 750, 1 600 of whom were Africans (Bunting 1981:80). At the end of 1928 the CPSA, after much debate and under instruction from the Comintern,<sup>11</sup> adopted a strategy and slogan for 'an independent South African Native Republic as a stage toward the Workers and Peasants Republic, guaranteeing protection and complete equality to all national minorities' (Drew 2002:94-103).

The shift towards attracting African membership was reflected in the name change of the Party newspaper in 1926 from *The International to South African Worker* (Ceiriog Jones 1997:331-336) and to *Umsebenzi* in 1930; the change of the language of the newspaper from solely

English to a newspaper which by 1929 had over half of its articles written in 'Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Tswana'; (Roux & Roux 1972:79) and the predominance of images of Africans as protagonists in the cartoons which appeared in the newspaper throughout the 1930s. During the first half of the 1930s *Umsebenzi* was characterised by linocut cartoons<sup>12</sup> created by Communist Party member Eddie Roux (Roux & Roux 1972:95).

Roux became involved in the Young Communist League (YCL) in 1921 and became a member of the CPSA in 1923 (Roux & Roux 1972). During the early 1920s, as Roux's awareness of the 'native question' grew, he started meeting with Africans, often visited the office of the African National Congress (ANC) newspaper *Abantu-Batho*, and invited Africans to attend YCL meetings, finding it 'thrilling to see for the first time two black faces among the many white ones' (Roux & Roux 1972: 46). He also started addressing meetings of Africans and on one occasion stated that he 'was a Communist, that the Communist Party believed in the union of all workers irrespective of race or colour' (Roux & Roux 1972:47). Roux graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1925 with a BSc Honours in botany and zoology, left for Cambridge on a scholarship in September 1926 and returned in 1929 on graduating with a doctorate in botany (Roux & Roux 1972).

In April 1930 Roux took over the production and distribution of the Party newspaper, renamed it *Umsebenzi* and turned it into a weekly paper. He was involved in every aspect of the production and distribution of the newspaper: he raised funds to buy type, typeset the paper, created the cartoons, oversaw printing and dispatching, and sold the newspaper on Saturdays at the Cape Town station (Roux & Roux 1972). Roux acknowledges that during the early thirties he was consciously trying to

hasten the Africanisation of the social revolutionary movement in South Africa ... the problem was to give voice to the aims and aspirations of the oppressed African masses and to link these with the more general aims of the world revolutionary movement, or in other words to express Communism in the Bantu idiom (Roux & Roux 1972:99).

Roux provides some insight into how he attempted to give verbal expression to this aim in *Umsebenzi* when he states that he translated Marxist terms into indigenous languages and tried to express 'political ideas in words which would be familiar to African readers' (Roux & Roux 1972:189). Unfortunately, Roux offers no comments on how he approached the creation of imagery for *Umsebenzi*. What is clear from the cartoons is that Roux drew inspiration from a variety of visual sources, a fact that he himself acknowledges through captions such as 'this picture is copied from the Negro Worker' which appears in the caption to the cartoon in Figure 5.

## The *Umsebenzi* linocut cartoons<sup>13</sup> from 18 April 1930 to 13 June 1936

The examination of the cartoons proceeds from the stereotypes discussed by Pieterse (1992:13) in the first section of *White on Black* which considers the representations of Africans as, inter alia, subjected, savages, slaves, witchdoctors, cannibals, warriors and soldiers. These stereotypes embody Europe's conception of the African other, a view which was based on a relationship described by Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:690) as one of complementary opposition and inequality in which Europe stands to Africa as 'civilization to nature, saviour to victim, actor to subject'. Pieterse (1992:234) concludes that the 'most important feature of representations of otherness is the role they play in establishing and maintaining social inequality'. Hallam and Street (2000:5) note the necessity of examining how 'others' have in turn 'incorporated, resisted and reinvented' dominant representations.

Pieterse (1992:89-90) identifies 'scenes of subjection' such as 'native dignitaries throwing themselves down in the dust before the representatives of European authority', as characteristic of colonialist scenes. He further states that colonial social hierarchy is founded in the 'colour bar' and on differences between Europeans and Africans, such as differences in clothing. Although scenes of subjection do appear, for example in Figures 10 and 20, where Africans bow down before elevated white figures, on the whole the cartoons in *Umsebenzi* subvert the stereo-

typical scenes of subjection and social hierarchy in a number of ways.

Firstly, instead of Africans being subjected to whites, whites are subjected to Africans. This is most obvious in the many images where looming Africans act threateningly or violently towards white enemies (Figure 17) or where Africans chase their enemies, weapon in hand, as in Figure 11. Images which show equality between Africans and whites subvert the 'colour bar' and destroy the social hierarchy. This is apparent in cartoons showing a mixed crowd opposing enemies (Figure 18), white and African workers shaking hands (Figure 2), images of Africans and whites standing together (Figure 3) or even being subjected together (Figure 19). The colonial social hierarchy is also subverted in the cartoons in which whites and Africans are dressed similarly in simple pants and shirts.<sup>14</sup> By eradicating differences in clothing between whites and Africans such cartoons construct a new stereotype, that of the male South African worker who is equal to other workers regardless of colour. The cartoons which represent whites and Africans as equals, or those which show whites as subjected to Africans, counter the stereotype of Africans as submissive and subjected to whites.

Another characteristic of colonialist scenes of subjection considered by Pieterse (1992:90) is that of 'personal service' by Africans to whites. Pieterse (1992:90) considers images of Europeans 'being carried by natives' as reflective of 'the symbolism as well as the reality of European hegemony'. Figure 20 shows King George of England seated on a platform named 'British Empire' being held aloft by three figures personifying Kenya, Egypt and India. The platform is approached from the right by Kadalie, Champion and Abdurahman<sup>15</sup> who are labelled 'good boys' in the caption to the cartoon. Kadalie and Champion are bowing to the King and Kadalie has removed his hat in respect.

The term 'good boy' was a derogatory term used by the Communists to refer to teachers, religious ministers, officials and traders (Roux & Roux 1972:147) and is a sarcastic appropriation by the Communists of the insulting term 'boy' which was commonly used by whites during this time period to address adult male Africans. By using the term 'boy' the cartoon scornfully brands Kadalie, Champion and Abdurahman<sup>15</sup> as subservient to whites and

therefore enemies of the Communists. The 'good boy' is a new stereotype created by the Communists and he appears again in Figure 10 which depicts a 'good boy' kneeling on the left before the white Nationalist government, contrasted with a warrior on the right who confronts the government.

The appropriation of racist terminology is repeated in Figure 1, which is captioned 'Help! Help! The savages are attacking us'. By using the term 'savage' the cartoon unveils the Western practice of labelling indigenous people protecting their land against invaders as 'savages' in a bid to justify such invasions (Pieterse 1992:80). The 'savage' stereotype is further unmasked as an imaginative construction, not a reality, through the use of a cartoon character. The cartoon depicts the typical Western caricature of the 'savage', complete with spear, large lips, bulging eyes and exotic attire. The absurdity of the situation is highlighted by the reaction of the heavily armed soldiers seated in a tank, since the 'savage' is clearly no match for the well-equipped soldiers.

This is the only time that the word 'savage' is used to describe an African in an *Umsebenzi* cartoon and it is clearly used ironically. The various labels used by the state and the CPSA to name Africans are telling of the manner in which each side constructed the African other and African self respectively. The SANAC report offers an inventory of labels attached to Africans throughout the twentieth century by the state. The main subjects of the report are identified as the 'Natives', followed by 'Kafirs', 'Bantu' and 'Savages' with 'Xhosa' and 'Zulu' also mentioned in the report (Ashforth 1990:31-32).

Such 'official' labels were not uncritically accepted by the Communists and in the 10 March 1934 edition of *Umsebenzi* the paper poses the question 'Native' 'Bantu' 'African'? What shall we call ourselves?' concluding that 'for the present *Umsebenzi* will continue to use three words Native, African and Bantu until such time as agreement is reached by the advanced section of blacks themselves'. The *Umsebenzi's* from the 1930s employ a range of terms to describe the subjects of the cartoons, showing a preference for the use of 'Native', 'Worker' and 'Slave', followed by 'Bantu',



Figure 1: Roux, E 1935. Linocut cartoon. *Umsebenzi* 805, 5 October page 1.



Figure 2: Roux, E 1931. Linocut cartoon. *Umsebenzi* 655, 29 May page 1.



Figure 3: Roux, E 1932. Linocut cartoon. *Umsebenzi* 680, 13 May page 1.



Figure 4: Roux, E 1930. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 628, 22 August page 1.



Figure 5: Roux, E 1933. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 697, 24 February page 1.



Figure 6: Roux, E 1931. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 658, 10 July page 1.



Figure 7: Roux, E 1930. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 613, 9 May page 4.



Figure 8: Roux, E 1930. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 619, 20 June page 3.



Figure 9: Roux, E 1931. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 656, 12 June page 1.



Figure 10: Roux, E 1930. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 612, 2 May page 3.



Figure 11: Roux, E 1930. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 618, 13 June page 3.



Figure 12: Roux, E 1931. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 646, 9 January page 1.



Figure 13: Roux, E 1935. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 806, 12 October page 1.



Figure 16: Roux, E 1930. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 641, 21 November page 1.



Figure 14: Roux, E 1931. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 660, 7 August page 1.



Figure 17: Roux, E 1930. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 626, 8 August page 1.



Figure 15: Roux, E 1931. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 669, 11 December page 1.



Figure 18: Roux, E 1932. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 679, 29 April page 1.

'Black' and 'African'. The terms 'Nigger' and 'Savage' as well as 'tribal' names are used very rarely, and the extremely derogatory term 'Kafir' never appears.

The term 'Native' is commonly used and the existence of the 'Native republic' slogan underscores that the term 'Native' was not viewed as derogatory. The term 'Worker' appears with or without adjectives such as 'African', 'Native', 'Black' and 'White' while 'Bantu' is used in vernacular sentences or when referring to proper nouns such as 'Bantu Press'. The use of the terms 'Worker', 'Black' and 'African' in *Umsebenzi* cartoons resists the terminology employed by the SANAC report and widely used in South Africa at the time. In addition the terms 'slave' and 'slavery' appear frequently as captions to, or as part of the cartoons and a number of cartoons may be interpreted as drawing on the slave stereotype. Shown in a submissive position or shackled, as in Figure 6, the slaves are at the mercy of their oppressors who frequently wield whips with which to keep slaves in submission. Images of Africans breaking chains (Figure 7) can be viewed as subverting the submissive slave stereotype. Figure 5 may be read as a parody of the stereotypes created by the abolitionist movement in a bid to humanise Africans and popularise the image of Africans as victims (Pieterse 1992:58-60). Pieterse (1992: 58) describes abolitionist images as follows:

The typical iconography of abolitionism displays the movement's Christian pathos: the recurring image is that of blacks kneeling with hands folded and eyes cast upward ... the oppressed black slave became the emblem of a spirit of rebelliousness, symbolizing more than slavery alone.

Figure 5 draws on the typical abolitionist iconography by depicting an African in a praying position. However, instead of voluntarily taking this position, he is strangled into submission by a colonialist while an opulently dressed priest piously stands by preaching to him. The caption to the image which reads 'IMPERIALIST: "Father, tell this Native what the Bible says." Missionary: "Slaves must honour, obey and work for their masters," (Picture is copied from the Negro worker, which is now banned by the Union authorities)' reveals the link between church and state.

Pieterse (1992:68-70) explains the close connection between the church and the colonial state, noting the important position that missions occupied within the colonial structure and the pacifying role that the missions played. Within this context the 'romantic image of the missionary as hero' was constructed, and contrasted with the image of the evil witchdoctor. Figure 5 reverses the stereotype of the religious figure as hero, turning him into a villain and accomplice of the colonialist. Simultaneously the cartoon succinctly reveals the connection between church and state. The complicity of church and state is made further apparent in Figure 8 in which an African is forced into submission at bayonet point, while a priest looks on passively holding out a cross and 'Bible dope' to him. The cartoon is accompanied by Marx's famous quote which equates religion to opium, juxtaposed against the harsh words 'Pray, you damn nigger, pray!' Although religion is denigrated in these cartoons, Roux observes that the CPSA 'found that attacks upon religion did not go down well with Africans ... reluctantly, for the Communists greatly relished anti-religious propaganda, we abandoned these attacks' (Roux & Roux 1972:147).

In certain instances religious iconography is employed to elicit sympathy for Africans, for example the particularly powerful image of the black Jesus<sup>16</sup> (Figure 9) which appears a number of times in *Umsebenzi*. In this cartoon Black Africa, represented by Jesus, is flanked by the grotesque embodiments of Boer and British imperialism, the ideologies responsible for the powerless position of Africans. The reversal of traditional Christian iconography is repeated in Figure 10 which depicts the devil as white. Typical of the *Umsebenzi* cartoons is the depictions of white enemies as hideous and evil. Another strategy for depicting enemies, both African and White, is to represent them as animals. Figure 4 shows a dog named 'Thaele' being set on a crowd of Communists by Pirow.<sup>17</sup> Roux (1948:244) identifies James Thaele, the president of the Western Cape branch of the ANC, as an opponent of the Communists and explains that this cartoon was created in retaliation following an attack on a Communist Party meeting by Thaele's followers. A similar image recurs in which a dog named 'Mac' appears. 'Mac' was the 'Native sergeant of police in the location' who led attacks on Communist meetings (Roux 1948:272).



Figure 19: Roux, E 1934. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 754, 6 October page 1.



Figure 20: Roux, E 1931. Linocut cartoon.  
*Umsebenzi* 647, 16 January page 1.

A number of cartoons depict white politicians as a dog, pig, wolf and octopus and as vultures and insects, while other enemies are represented as pigs.

The depiction of white enemies as inhuman is further evident in Figure 16 in which a capitalist<sup>18</sup> is shown scooping African babies into his mouth in a grotesque reversal of the stereotype of the African as cannibal. Pieterse (1992:114) considers 'cannibal humour' to be 'the most worn-out cliché about non-western peoples' stating that 'the white explorer or missionary in the cooking pot is a constant image from 1870 to 1970'. Cartoons which draw on the African as cannibal include Figure 14 which depicts 'Mrs. Nsundu' dangling a small Pirow over a pot, and Figure 15 which shows Pirow being burned in a pile of flaming passes.<sup>19</sup>

Nancy Rose Hunt (2002:91) has commented that the 'cannibal humour' embodied in the caricatures depicted in advertisements for 'tropical products' influenced the representations in the *Tintin* comic book series from the 1930s. Figure 11 strongly resembles the pygmy warriors in *Tintin in the Congo* (Hergé 2006:49) published in book form in 1931 (Lonsdale-Cooper & Turner 2006) and indicates the incorporation of the stereotype of the African as warrior in the *Umsebenzi* cartoons. The warrior stereotype is described by Pieterse (1992:79) as 'a virtually naked native, ferocious, equipped with archaic arms, shown more often as an individual than in a group (but if a group is shown it is a disorganized group)'. The warrior stereotype, typically dressed in a loin cloth and wielding a shield and a spear, is repeatedly depicted either individually (Figure 11) or as part of a group (Figure 12) in the cartoons.

Pieterse (1992:79) explains the differences between the warrior (the colonial enemy) and the soldier (the colonial self-image) as a contrast between savagery and civilisation. The colonial soldier is depicted as heroic, uniformed, disciplined and part of an army; the warrior is nude, cruel, beastly, and uncontrollable. The depiction of soldiers in *Umsebenzi* completely negates this colonial self-image and soldiers are portrayed as monstrous, as epitomised in Figure 9. A few cartoons directly challenge the construction of the soldier as symbol of 'civilisation'. For example, a cartoon published on 14 March 1936 is captioned 'Fascism means hunger, slavery and war' and shows a white soldier planting the flag of 'civilisation'

into a mound of human skulls, and another cartoon of an Ethiopian soldier being approached by four white soldiers and one skeleton from the left is sarcastically captioned 'Bringing Mussolini's civilisation to Ethiopia'.

In addition to subverting the image of the European soldier as the bearer of civilisation, the stereotype of the 'Native' recruited into the colonial army, dressed in European uniform and serving the interests of European colonisers is negated by the images of Ethiopians in traditional dress fighting against white attackers. Following the invasion of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) by Mussolini in the mid 1930s *Umsebenzi* carried a number of cartoons showing Ethiopians carrying arms fighting the invasion (Figure 13). According to Roux the invasion created high levels of political awareness among Africans as knowledge grew of the existence of an independent African country where Africans were ruled by their own king and defended their land against white aggressors (Roux & Roux 1972:157). Circulation of *Umsebenzi* climbed to over 7 000 as news of the conflict was eagerly consumed and Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia, became a hero whose picture was pinned up in homes (Roux & Roux 1972:157).

## Conclusion

The *Umsebenzi* cartoons from the 1930s draw on a number of the stereotypes identified by Pieterse (1992); Africans are depicted as slaves and warriors and as subjected to whites. However, the warrior is the only stereotype which is repeated without an opposite, a counter stereotype. In the case of the slave the submissive slave is countered by the slave emancipating himself by breaking free from his shackles; the subjected African is outweighed by the African subjecting his white adversaries or being on an equal footing with white workers; the allusion to the cannibal is mirrored by the white cannibal. The stereotypes of the white missionary as hero and soldier as the bearer of civilisation are completely overturned and the missionary is vilified and soldiers are depicted as uncivilised.

It is clear that *Umsebenzi* cartoons drew some inspiration from the stereotypes created in imperialist and colonialist popular culture. However, these stereotypes are not appropriated uncritically and are instead used ironically or projected on to the other thereby creating new stereo-

types such as the evil missionary, uncivilised and cruel soldier and demonic politician. In addition a number of new stereotypes emerge such as the negative stereotype of the 'good boy', and the positive stereotypes of the worker and the marching crowd with banners. In creating the image of the South African worker, Roux pre-dates the image of Africans as workers popularised by Congress of South African Trade Unions from the 1970s onwards (Pieterse 1992:106), while the marching crowd with banners appears frequently in the protest posters of the 1980s.

Ultimately the key strategy used in the cartoons to subvert the colonialist stereotypes of Africans is the reversal of the superior white self against its other, the submissive African. The *Umsebenzi* cartoons of the 1930s constructed new stereotypes of Africans, some positive and some negative, thereby creating a counter discourse to the racist, stereotypical images created to serve imperialist and colonialist interests.<sup>20</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Seeking and Nattrass (2006:ix) rightly note that racial terminology in South Africa is a complex matter. This article follows their use of the term 'African' to refer to people classified by the apartheid state as 'native', 'bantú' or 'black' and people classified as European, and later as White, are referred to as 'white'
- 2 This article follows on an article published in *Image & Text* (Pretorius 2007) which examines the construction of class, race and gender identities in the anti-pass laws cartoons published in the official Communist Party of South Africa newspaper *Umsebenzi* between 1933 and 1936.
- 3 Theorists are largely in agreement around the broad outlines of the origins and development of race theory; namely, that the concept 'race' was invented in the modern period (Alcoff 2003:5), that it is a cultural, political, scientific and social construction (Young, 1995), and that the development of racial theory is inextricably linked to British and European colonial expansion in the nineteenth century (Young 1995:92).
- 4 For example, Jeffrey Richards (1986:141-162) comments that by the 1930s the 'image of empire' was

- well established and he describes the thirties as Hollywood's 'imperial decade' due to the numerous racist American and British imperialist films which were 'box office successes seen and enjoyed by millions'. Richards (1986:146) identifies the 'Korda trilogy': *Sanders of the river* (1935), *The drum* (1938) and *The four feathers* (1939) as well as the 'Balcon trilogy': *Rhodes of Africa* (1936), *The Great Barrier* (1936) and *King Solomon's mines* (1937) as the 'key' British imperial films of the time.
- 5 Evolutionary narratives and hierarchising exhibits found their origin in the concept of 'the great chain of being'. Young (1995:94) explains that 'race was defined through the criterion of civilization, with the cultivated white Western European male at the top and everyone else on a hierarchical scale either in a chain of being, from mollusc to God, or in the later model on an evolutionary scale of development from a feminized state of childhood (savagery) up to full (European) manly adulthood'. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:694) add that 'non-Europeans filled out the lower reaches of the scale of being, providing the contrast against which cultivated man might distinguish himself ... the African was assigned a particularly base position: he marked the point at which humanity gave way to animality'. This enduring racist idea is visible in a South African postcard from the 1920s shown in Pieterse (1992:43), which captions a depiction of an adult African man as 'Luke – The Baboon Boy'.
  - 6 Landau (2002:151-154) notes how the bulk of widely circulated colonial photographs depicted Africans as deindividualised and nameless, and strove to capture the 'authentic' African 'remote' from Western experience.
  - 7 The CPSA was founded in 1921, disbanded in 1950 due to the Suppression of Communism Act and re-grouped in 1953 as an underground party under the name South African Communist Party (SACP) which was unbanned in 1990.
  - 8 The cartoons are reproduced with the consent of the South African Communist Party and the permission of the NLSA in Cape Town.
  - 9 The first challenge to the official Party line, and an indication of the reality of early twentieth-century South African race relations, came in 1922 during the white mine workers' strike when white workers carried a notorious banner stating 'Workers of the World fight and Unite for a white South Africa' (Roux 1948:156).
  - 10 The historiography of the CPSA maintains that the Party was non-racial, but does acknowledge that race relations were complicated. However Roth (1999, 2000) has challenged this view arguing that racism was rife in the CPSA from all sides. Undoubtedly given the historical timeframe the Party was confronted with severe challenges to its ideal of establishing a non-racial Party.
  - 11 The Communist International (Comintern) functioned from Moscow from 1919 until 1943 and was a worldwide organisation of Communist parties (Davidson, Filatova, Gorodnov, & Johns 2003:1
  - 12 Roux (1948:240, Roux & Roux 1972:95) admits to using linocut because it was a cheap way to print images, that it added to the 'attractiveness' of the newspaper and took up space that would have required hours of typesetting to fill. Furthermore linocut is a relatively easy medium to master and the blocks could be re-printed in different editions of the newspaper.
  - 13 The *Umsebenzi's* examined are from the National Library of South Africa in Pretoria and Cape Town. All the available copies of *Umsebenzi* were examined from issue 610 of 18 April 1930 to issue 838 of 13 June 1936. Between April 1930 and June 1936 linocut cartoons predominate with most issues displaying at least one cartoon on the front page. A total of 210 linocut cartoons were examined, photographs and cartoons deviating from Roux's style were excluded.
  - 14 Pretorius (2007:12) points out that the representation of workers in white open-necked shirts and black pants are based on the real appearance of some South African workers of the time, as is evident in a photograph of workers which appeared in the *Umsebenzi* of 23 March 1935.
  - 15 Clements Kadalie and AWG Champion had both been leaders in the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) the first Union for Africans in South Africa which was established by Kadalie in 1919. Initially the Communists were very involved with the ICU, but after relations soured the Communists were expelled and banned from the ICU by Kadalie (Roux 1948). Abdullah Abdurahman was the leader of the African Political (later People's) Organisation (APO), a political organisation founded

by 'members of the coloured elite' in 1902 in Cape Town (Worden 2007:93). During the twenties and thirties the APO offered ineffectual protest against discrimination, especially the proposed Hertzog Bills, as initially one of the bills proposed that coloured voting rights in the Cape be extended throughout South Africa (Worden 2007:93).

- 16 Beinhart (2001:105) notes the use of the image of a black Jesus by the Independent ICU in the late 1920s.
- 17 Many of the cartoons single Pirow out as the antagonist. Oswald Pirow was the Minister of Justice in the Hertzog cabinet who earned the contempt of the Communists due to his dictatorial use of power to suppress Communist activities (Roux 1948: 200). Davenport and Saunders (2000:321) describes Pirow as a 'white supremacist' and Roux (1948:237) reports that on 10 November 1929 at the end of a meeting in Johannesburg an effigy of Pirow labelled 'Umbulali' (tyrant) was set alight. Following fusion Pirow moved from Justice to Defence (Davenport & Saunders 2000:321).
- 18 The capitalist stereotype originated in socialist imagery (Hobsbawm 1978:122) and appeared in the South African press at the beginning of the twentieth century in the form of 'Hoggenheimer', a cartoon created for the South African News in 1903 by the South African cartoonist Daniel Cornelis Boonzaaier (Vernon 2000:27).
- 19 The pass system was 'a complex of legislation and machinery designed to exercise control over the movement, employment and settlement of population' (Hindson 1987:11) with the aim of ensuring a supply of 'servile and forced labour' (Hindson 1987:x). Central to the implementation of these laws was the use of passes, which have been described as 'identity documents' (Terreblanche 2002:317).
- 20 This article is based on work supported financially by the National Research Foundation. Any opinion, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and therefore the NRF does not accept any liability in regard thereto.

## References

- Alcoff, L. 2003. Introduction: identities: modern and postmodern, in *Identities; race, class, gender and nationality*, edited by L Alcoff & E Mendieta. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ashforth, A. 1990. *The politics of official discourse in twentieth-century South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beinhart, W. 2001. *Twentieth-century South Africa*. Second edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bunting, B. (ed). 1981. *South African Communists speak; documents from the history of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980*. London: Inkululeko.
- Burke, T. 2002. "Our mosquitoes are not so big": images and modernity in Zimbabwe, in *Images and empires; visuality in colonial and postcolonial Africa*, edited by P Landau & D Kaspin. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ceiriog Jones, E. 1997. Inkululeko; organ of the Communist Party of South Africa, in *South Africa's alternative press; voices of protest and resistance 1880s-1960s*, edited by L Switzer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 331-372.
- Comaroff, J & Comaroff, J. 1999. Africa observed; discourses of the imperial imagination, in *Perspectives on Africa; a reader in culture, history and representation*, edited by R Grinker & C Steiner. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Davenport, TRH & Saunders, C. 2000. *South Africa; a modern history*. Fifth edition. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan.
- Davidson, A, Filatova, I, Gorodnov, V & Johns, S (eds). 2003. *South Africa and the Communist International: a documentary history. Volume 1: Socialist pilgrims to Bolshevik footsoldiers 1919-1930*. London: Frank Cass.
- Drew, A. 2002. *Discordant comrades; identities and loyalties on the South African Left*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Dubow, S. 1989. *Racial segregation and the origins of apartheid in South Africa, 1919-36*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan.
- Dubow, S. 1995. *Illicit union: scientific racism in modern South Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

- Fanon, F. 1993. *Black skin, white masks*. London: Pluto Press.
- Grinker, R & Steiner, C (eds). 1999. *Perspectives on Africa; a reader in culture, history and representation*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hallam, E & Street, B. 2000. Introduction,. in *Cultural encounters; representing 'otherness'*, edited by E Hallam & B Street. London: Routledge.
- Heller, S & Balance, G (eds). 2001. *Graphic design history*. New York: Allworth.
- Hergé. 2006. *The adventures of Tintin; Tintin in the Congo*. London: Egmont.
- Hindson, D. 1987. *Pass controls and the urban African proletariat*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Hobsbawm, E. 1978. Man and woman in Socialist iconography. *History Workshop* 6(1):121-138.
- Hodeir, C. 2002. Decentering the gaze at French colonial exhibitions, in *Images and empires; visibility in colonial and postcolonial Africa*, edited by P Landau & D Kaspin. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hunt, N. 2002. Tintin and the interruption of Congolese comics, in *Images and empires; visibility in colonial and postcolonial Africa*, edited by P Landau & D Kaspin. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Landau, P. 2002. Empires of the visual: photography and colonial administration in Africa, in *Images and empires; visibility in colonial and postcolonial Africa*, edited by P Landau & D Kaspin. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Locke, A. 2003. The New Negro, in *Identities; race, class, gender and nationality*, edited by L Alcoff & E Mendieta. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lonsdale-Cooper, L & Turner, M. 2006. Foreword, in *The adventures of Tintin; Tintin in the Congo*. London: Egmont.
- McClintock, A. 1995. *Imperial leather; race, gender and sexuality in colonial conquest*. London: Routledge.
- Mirzoeff, N. 1998. Photography at the heart of darkness; *Herbert Lang's Congo photographs (1909-1915)*, in *Colonialism and the object; empire, material culture and the museum*, edited by T Barringer & T Flynn. London: Routledge.
- Pieterse, JN. 1992. *White on Black; images of Africa and Blacks in western popular culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Pretorius, D. 2007. Amapasi Asiwafuni! To hell with pass laws! Class, race and gender identities in the anti-pass laws cartoons published in Umsebenzi/South African Worker, 1933-1936. *Image & Text* 13:4-19.
- Richards, J. 1986. Boy's Own empire: feature films and imperialism in the 1930s, in *Imperialism and popular culture*, edited by J MacKenzie. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Robinson, J. 2003. Johannesburg's 1936 Empire Exhibition: interaction, segregation and modernity in a South African city. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29(3):759-789.
- Roth, M. 1999. *Racism in the Communist Party of South Africa, 1921-1950*. Paper presented at the South African Historical Society Biennial Conference.
- Roth, M. 2000. Eddie, Brian, Jack and let's phone Rusty: is this the history of the Communist Party of South Africa (1921-1950)? *South African Historical Journal* 105(42):191-209.
- Roux, E & Roux, W. 1972. *Rebel pity: the life of Eddie Roux*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Roux, E. 1948. *Time longer than rope; a history of the black man's struggle for freedom in South Africa*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- Seekings, J & Natrass, N. 2006. *Class, race and inequality in South Africa*. Scottsville: Kwazulu-Natal Press.
- Shephard, B. 1986. Showbiz imperialism; the case of Peter Lobengula, in *Imperialism and popular culture*, edited by J MacKenzie. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Terreblanche, SJ. 2002. *A history of inequality in South Africa, 1652-2002*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Vernon, K. 2000. *Penpricks; the drawing of South Africa's political battlelines*. Claremont: Spearhead Press.
- Washington, MY. 2001. Souls on fire, in *Graphic design history*, edited by S Heller & G Balance. New York: Allworth.
- Worden, N. 2007. *The making of modern South Africa; conquest, apartheid, democracy*. Fourth edition. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Young, R. 1995. *Colonial desire; hybridity in theory, culture and race*. London: Routledge.

## PRIMARY SOURCE

*Umsebenzi* 1930-1936, No 610-838, the National Library of South Africa, Pretoria and Cape Town.