

Vryheid-KwaBhanya (since round about 1884):

In his publication, "To bind the Nation", the historian Nicholas Cope writes:

... since the turn of the century, a small but confident Zulu middle class had grown rapidly. This was substantially because in Northern Natal, immediately following the Anglo-Boer War and the incorporation of the territory into Natal, Zulu had been able to buy small properties. By 1905, for example, there was a growing settlement of Zulu landowners three miles to the east of Vryheid, all of whom held their land on an individual title-deed basis. A syndicate had been formed to raise sufficient capital to buy property, which was subsequently divided up as individual allotments. Most of the residents of Vryheid East Township were employed in the town of Vryheid, though some were cash-crop cultivators.

The fact of individual land ownership was in itself a significant indication of Zulu social change.

Speaking about the kholwa community at Vryheid amongst others, the 1910 NAD report for Northern Natal recorded that 'this class has adopted European clothing, and they live in square houses, divided into rooms and suitably furnished ... they have separated themselves as much as possible from the raw native.' In the same year, 12 per cent of all Zulu marriages in the Vryheid district were Christian marriages. The relationship between Christianity, land ownership and westernisation was very evident in Vryheid East Township (= "emanxiwani"/"KwaBhanya"). William Washington Ndhlovu, an 'exempted' Zulu (i.e. exempted from the 'Natal Code' of African customary law, and assimilated into Natal colonial law), gave an illuminating description of the settlement in 1915:

I think it is a good thing for the native people to have such a place in which we can make our homes. We have planted trees and put up respectable houses to live in, and we have tried to improve our holdings in every possible way ... We have one Lutheran Church, which was erected some two years ago. The Wesleyan Methodist Church are also putting up a small church ... The majority are Christians and hardly without exception they are Zulus.

It was Ndhlovu's belief that the system of 'individual tenure' was essential if the 'progressive native' were to reap all the benefits that education had made due to him.

African land purchase was, however, strongly opposed by white commercial farming interests in Natal - as elsewhere in the Union. Land purchase was a means by which Africans could free themselves from both labour and rental obligations to white landlords; and moreover, African cash-crop cultivators, who mainly used family labour rather than hired labour, were able to produce for the market at a price with which white farmers found difficulty in competing.

For rural whites, however, the fact that Africans could successfully compete in the open markets for land and agricultural produce seemed to be not simply an economic threat. There seemed also to be a deeper, more emotional, element to colonist insecurity in the face of African competition, as was obliquely expressed in a statement made by a contemporary Natal farmer. Before the 1913 Act, he said, he had been so much in 'fear of being forced off his land by powerful Native Syndicates who were committed to buying up as much land as possible' that he had considered 'yielding' and leaving the country. Xenophobic sentiments such as these were also to be found in Northern Natal, among the Boer settlers.

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