INFANTILISATION OF THE MISSIONISED[1]

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Abstract

The hegemony of European ideology and worldview epitomised in this case by the infantilisation of the missionised permeated both the secular and religious sphere. Infantilisation, as both a system and existence underlined the European Baptists' attitude to mission among the natives. As a system, the Europeans' attitude to the natives was to think and treat natives as infants perpetually in need of European guidance. Infantilisation as existence meant that the native and his or her environment were childish (backward and undeveloped). Europeans' zeal for mission coupled with such perception of the native strengthened the belief that the infant state of the native was by divine providence as it is the same providence that affirmed the role of the European in his or her encounter with the native.

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper it is to look at the concept of infantilisation. This analysis is done however, with particular reference to those who were the receipients of mission (the missionised) – the natives. Since mission was carried out by different denominations, in order to do justice to an analysis of the concept 'infantilisation', particular reference is given to the Baptist Church of South Africa. In the Baptist Church, a number of ideologies throughout colonial history served to entrench the perception of natives as infants.

Some of these ideologies are: firstly, the Romantic view which portrayed the native as a child of nature with nothing to do except hunt. Secondly, it is the Rash Philanthropy view which portrayed the native as an unsophisticated child of nature. In the light of the argument that the native has nothing else to do, another view was constructed: the importance of wage labour for the native. From a missionary perspective, the missionaries gave labour a unique meaning, that is, for the missionised, by submitting to wage labour, there is high probability they might submit to the will of God. Be that as it may, whether one considers all views, or just one or two, the natives lacked the qualities that

1 It is editorial policy not to use racist language in articles. However, in this article the author prefers to retain culturo-historical designations of blacks, such as 'native' and 'kaffir' to emphasise that infantilisation has also taken place through name giving – Editor.

characterised an ideal adult person. In playing the one off against the other, these discourses imprinted the infant nature of the native upon European consciousness.

2 THE HEATHENISM OF KAFFIR CULTURE

2.1 From German Baptists to English Baptists: Perception of native culture

German Baptists working at Tshabo Mission station equated Kaffir clothing and its culture with heathenism;[1] as a result, they had to request for old clothes from Germany to clothe the natives and their children. They even passed a resolution that natives were not to attend church services in their raw heathenish costumes. With the advent of the 1878 'Kaffir' war, the mission station was closed. This however, resulted in no records of European Baptist work from 1878, a year after the founding of the Baptist Union (BU), to 1888, by either the German or English Baptists, among the natives, from which evidence regarding their attitude to native culture can be drawn. But in 1889, unlike previous years, BU assemblies started constructing the European Baptists' perception of the native and his culture. This construction was done as an attempt to understand the native and his surroundings better with the intent of justifying why Europeans related to natives the way they did. It started when Rev G W Cross devoted his presidential address entitled *The good fight: A reconnoitre and a review*[2] to dealing with heathenism, moral indifference, the ritualistic tendency of the present day and how to combat all these.

Cross started his address by clarifying that: "Our Church is no hierarchy, we have no wealth to bestow nor do we crown one king within our spiritual city; we are a band of brothers, equals; our [Baptist] Union is a concord of sister churches; and it is the Presidential honour to be leader for the time being in the council and labours of this community without state and without emolument."[3] He further mentioned that "the President's duty [is] to be the leading of the brethren in counsel and in labour".[4] Therefore: "Before building we must survey; before marching we must find the *lie* of the land; before fighting we must reconnoitre."[5] Of interest to this paper, is the part starting with the exclamation: "Ah! This is the figure I prefer. We are builders, we are pioneers, but chiefly we are warriors – soldiers of Jesus Christ – a corps of the Army of the living God. Not that the destructive aspect of our work is before me only. The Christian warrior's work is destructive merely that it may be constructive."[6] Continuing his address he asked: "But how goes THE GOOD FIGHT in this part of the world's broad field; WHAT FOES ARE OPPOSED TO US, AND WHAT FORCES CAN WE BRING TO BEAR AGAINST THEM?"[7]

Cross, in explaining what forces these are, stated that the assembly's meeting venue conjures up this point. That is: "We are meeting this year in the capital of Kaffraria. The very word marshals me the way that I was going."[8] That is, "North of us and south, west and east are Kafirs [sic], and the vast majority of them are heathen. Heathenism is the foe right before us, and with which

perforce we must cope."[9] To expound on this, Cross contrasted two points of view on heathenism.

2.2 The Romantic and Rash Philanthropic views of heathenism

On the one hand, there is

> … the *Romantic View*: it is taken from an eminence very far off and through glasses that play strange freaks with proportion, shape, and colour. It discerns Heathendom to be the true poetic Arcadia. There are larger constellations burning, mellow moons and happy skies, breadths of tropic shade and palms in clusters, knots, of Paradise. The heathen within it is the happy child of nature: iron-jointed, supple-sinewed, with nothing to do but to hunt, and dance, and hurl his lances in the sun, while his passions have ample scope and breathing space.[10]

Cross's description of the Romantic view is as ambivalent as Wesley's writing about the imagery of the savage as described by the Comaroffs who argued that the rising evangelical movement was somewhat ambivalent about such imagery. Ignorance of salvation clearly tainted the primitive paradise. But the critique of European worldliness appealed to Puritan sensibilities, and missionaries were hopeful that the savage wilderness might be made to yield a new Christian Arcadia.[11] Travel accounts[12] played a role in this discourse, in which craftsmen of imagery built the savage world as a stage on which to rehearse their largely domestic concerns, often making explicit the fact that their Eden was an illusory device. But it was from the same travel and exploratory literature that English romantic writers painted a picture of a non-European Eden, a picture that challenged those for whom enlightened Europe was the yardstick of perfection.[13] With time, the savage of English *belles lettres* became a syncretism, a careless composite of non-European colours and customs, hence for example, the confusion of Indian and African features. This sort of primitivist pastiche was an important source of popular images of Africa – a fabricated synthetic savagery drawn from a standardised myth. As the abolitionist campaign became more and more audible, this savage most often had a black face and an African identity, but he remained an impressionistic blend of circumstantial ethnographic detail. And, with predictable irony, his noblest features have a distinctively European shape.[14]

The Romantic view, according to Cross, has "often turned of late on heathen South Africa, and very strange to us are the [Arcadian] sights they have described."[15] On the other hand there is,

> … a *Rash Philanthropy*. It also is taken through spectacles through which the heathen appears as an unsophisticated child of nature, everywhere outwitted and oppressed by the white man. His territory is taken, and one by one his liberties are filched from him, and he is as a sheep dumb before his shearers, a victim led as a lamb to the slaughter.[16]

Cross quickly repudiated this latter view: though it is "taken by many good, well-meaning people … it is absurdly wrong at almost every point".[17] Rather: "The heathen as we know him is not unsophisticated; he is anything but a dumb sufferer; and the rule of any civilised Government, or the service of almost any European master, confers more security and liberty on the native than he ever enjoyed under a chief of his own colour, and laws and customs of his own people."[18] Underlying both views is the infantilisation of Africans.

3 INFANTILISATION OF THE NATIVES: AN UNDERLYING VIEW

African men are portrayed as childlike. The natural 'other' was afflicted by an absence of the qualities that characterised the adult white male ideal of European civilisation. The adult black males were the 'boys' whom the civilising mission hoped to one day usher into moral manhood. And boys they would remain well into the age of apartheid, whether or not they actually became Christian. Even at their most subtle and well meaning, the various discourses on the nature of the savage impressed his (savage) immaturity upon European consciousness.[19]

Accompanying native infantilisation was the colonists' campaign against 'native idleness'. The campaign against native idleness had pervaded the daily lives of Nonconformist missionaries from the outset. On their stations they took every opportunity to convey the meaning of wage labour – not least, of domestic toil. The Moffats, Presbyterian missionaries, for example, hired three maidservants early on.[20] Later the regular household staff grew to at least five. Their efforts were not always successful however: "If they are put to more work than what may be considered play, [the servants] immediately abandoned us, even though nothing but starvation stares them in the face."[21] Labour, therefore, to the missionaries was the ultimate commodity in the moral economy of modern Protestantism. By its grace, physical production, long the source of righteousness worth for Christians, were enhanced through value added by the market. Diligent wage work had become a model for, and of, the believer's relation to God: it epitomised the voluntary contract and the just reward. It is hardly surprising, then, that the Nonconformists, for example, were quick to celebrate the readiness of some Southern Tswana to enter employment in the diamond fields.[22] Wookey wrote for example, that the Africans both "enrich[ed] their white neighbours and better[ed] their condition".[23] Therefore, the missionaries hoped that if Africans could be made to submit to wage labour, they might submit to the will of God.

4 THE DARK CONTINENT: A METAPHYSICAL STAGE FOR MORAL POSTURES

These discourses and their constructs about the native each had its own institutional context and expressive forms. But each played off the others – often in productive discord – and this was conducive to an increasingly rationalised debate about the nature of civilisation, the civilisation of nature. And together, by virtue of both their format and their content, "they established the dark continent as a metaphysical stage on which various white crusaders

struck moral postures".[24] The symbolic terrain of a rarely-seen Africa, then was being shaped by a cascade of narratives that strung together remotely 'scientific facts' and poetic images – facts and images surveyed by an ever more revolving European eye. A new relationship between Europe and the dark continent developed. It was one of complementarity, opposition and inequality, in which the former stood to the latter as civilisation to nature, saviour to victim, actor to subject. It was a relationship whose very creation implied a historical imperative, a process of intervention through which the wild would be cultivated, the suffering saved. Life would imitate the masterful gestures of art and science. The native would be brought into the European world, but as the recipient of a gift he could never return – except by acknowledging, gratefully, his own subordination. And in this colonising project the Christian missionary would play a special role as agent, scribe, and moral alibi.[25] Among other things this missionary would perform was to produce a moral geography which animated missionary consciousness.[26]

Miller, in his work: *Blank darkness*, further provides an insightful discussion of the native and his context. Firstly, in his analysis of the word 'Africa', he states that the object "does not pre-exist itself"[27] but is constituted by every utterance of the word. Miller argues that there are two identities Europe conceived in its encounter with the non-European world. These are: perpetual identity and thought identity. Perpetual identity occurs when "a physical impulse … seeks to re-cathect the mnemonic image of the perception and to revoke the perception of itself, that is to say, to re-establish the situation of the original satisfaction".[28] And thought identity "is nothing but a substitute for a hallucinatory wish".[29] That is, it has "abandoned its intention [of coinciding perpetually with a prior experience of satisfaction] and has taken on another in its place – the establishment of a thought identity [with that experience]".[30] According to Miller, it is the thought identity "[which is] what Europe attributes to itself in relation to the African's 'null' mode: Christianity with its symbols, opposed to idolatry with its fetishes".[31] Europe conceives of Africa as the direct, immanent, unself-conscious annulment of its (Europe's) own binary modes of thought.[32]

Why are the African and his context (Africa) a replica of Europe's binary modes of thought? Miller answers this question in his discussion on 'Writing on the void'.[33] The Europeans' encounter with Africa and its inhabitants resembles darkness, and darkness provokes fright, fear and anguish. Further, the Europeans encounter with darkness is in itself, "the project [which] is a condemnation to futility, a mockery perpetrated by God". Therefore, "'To paint on the darkness' here means to be forced by the total authority of God to do something that is totally impossible."[34] Miller continues: "Without a single ray of light, the light-dependent project of painting is impossible; … self-destructive … and self-nourishing … activity of painting in the dark. It both consumes and creates; yet its creation is empty. Darkness here is not a virgin surface but the void of space on which nothing can be imprinted, where any painting or writing would be reduced to an empty gesture."[35] For the subject (the European), is caught, according to Miller, in a "double bind [which] is perfect".[36] That is, he is "condemned and forced to consume himself in a task that cannot be performed."[37] Given this double bind, darkness, according to Miller, "would seem to have associated itself with an Other, transcendental light".[38] That is,

the Other, in this case, is the subject, the European. Darkness, therefore, "is recuperated as blank canvas, no longer the all-consuming void of space but the possibility of creation on a virgin surface".[39]

As darkness (the native and his context) is associated with the Other (the European), there is projection onto darkness and "the transformation of darkness into a canvas".[40] Darkness becomes the Other, and the European retains his status as the subject. In other words, what takes place "is the work of subjectivity rather than intersubjectivity. The 'living beings' are the projected facets of the self, creatures of its desire and therefore familiar".[41] Further, the Other (the native) is reduced "to a pure figment of the self; [since] the subject alone produces the world he [the native] perceives, understanding rather than hearing any figures that he likes".[42] This, in addition, according to Miller, "[leads to] the gradual withering-away of intersubjectivity".[43]

> If the Other is thus effaced, it is not in favour of a fully constituted self coinciding with itself. We have seen that the eye and its counterpart, darkness, do not produce between them any specular exchange; they mimic the specular mode while confounding appearance and disappearance, life and death, darkness and the blank (white) canvas. So when the mode shifts to 'pure' projection, projection is revealed to be a primal perception where there is nothing to perceive, and the subject that engages in it, having no other subject but itself, creates itself in the void.[44]

5 THE EUROPEAN MASTER: CONFERRER OF LIBERTY AND SECURITY

Returning to Cross: in order to substantiate that the natives, or rather, the heathen natives enjoy more security and liberty under a European master or civil government, he contrasted in his presidential address the state of these natives to that of the poor English people in Britain. Firstly, "the heathen about us is infinitely better off than the poor of the vast cities at home".[45] Secondly, he has "ample scope and room enough".[46] This vastness of this unconquered terrain, in the Comaroff's view, overwhelmed the small-scale tidiness, the nice demarcations of the British ideal of spatial order.[47] Thirdly: "His wages more than suffice for his simple needs. He may build his house as large as he pleased, with materials close at hand, and it will cost little but labour."[48] Fourthly: "He can accumulate cattle, and if he has been a steady servant, the approach of old age finds him a wealthy man."[49] Lastly: "If he has left rural life for service in our cities; and so entering more to the centre of civilisation finds his needs multiplied, his wages are increased, and in any case they more than suffice for his wants."[50] Cross again reiterated to the assembly to: "Contrast this with the state of the very poor at home."[51] Vividly, Cross imprinted on the minds of the delegates:

> Think of the sweater's dens; where girls and women toil for 16 hours out of the 24, in rooms reeking with dirt and pestilence. Think of the Poor-house at the end of labour. Think of land-grabbers and jerry-builders, who have filched away every breathing space and

> green thing from the poor, and thrown up their sheds which they name in mockery 'gardens'. God's green beneath and blue above are wiped out, and between the gutter and the smoke: 'City children soak and blacken soul and sense in city slime. There among the glooming alleys progress halts on palsified feet; crime and hunger cast our maidens by the thousand on the street. There the master scrimps the haggard seamstress of her daily bread; there a single sordid attic holds the living and the dead; there the smouldering fire of fever creeps across the rotted floor, and the crowded couch of incest, in the warrens of the poor.' When we hear these things from home it is no wonder that we resent the interference from England of many so-called philanthropists with the indignant rejoinder 'Cease to oppress the poor at your gates and to drive to heathenism the children who by heritage are Christ's'.[52]

Against the backdrop of these two views, that is, the Romantic and the Philanthropic, and the secured and free lifestyle the natives enjoy, made possible by Europeans, compared to the poor whites in Britain, Cross like Davies,[53] another leading Baptist figure,[54] exclaimed with disdain: "When we hear these things from home … we resent the interference from England … 'Cease to oppress the poor at your own gates and to drive to heathenism the children who by heritage are Christ's'."[55]

6 THE THIRD VIEW OF THE NATIVE

To counteract the Romantic and Rash Philanthropic views, and 'outside' interference in native settler relations in the Colony, Cross provided the third view of the heathen "taken by some near at hand, that more than justifies the interference from any part of the world, of men who seek to be true and righteous".[56] This is because: "The spirit that enslaved the black man is not wholly dead among us [white people]."[57] Cross explains the nature of this spirit by quoting the story of Robert Moffat, the elder, who was once conducting family worship in the house of a rich colonial farmer. Looking round at the assembled family he asked: "Where are the servants?"[58] His host replied "Oh! If that's what you want I'll whistle in the dogs and go to the krantz and get the baboons."[59] This, according to Cross, "is the spirit that expressed itself in the murder of Pelser, four years ago, and in the horrible murder of Jonas in this very district [of Kaffraria] a few month back. The blood of both victims still cries out for justice, and God hears, and will avenge. This is the spirit that made members of our Legislative Council pray – to whom? – against an Excise Bill, and it underlies the whole abominable drink traffic with the natives. Its voice is sometimes lifted up in our Parliament still, but "it is waxing weak, thank God! It is becoming feebler every year".[60]

Commencing his alternative view, that is, the third view of the heathen, Cross starts with a question: Who is this native? He then answers: "Neither an Arcadian nor an ape; not a fleeced lamb nor a dog, is the Native. He is a man and a brother. At the worst he is a man, at the best a heathen; or rather we should say at the worst a heathen, at the best a man, and noble traits of manhood make themselves apparent in spite of Heathenism."[61] Cross

therefore, unlike most Romantic writers as indicated before, does not categorise the native in an infant stage. However, Cross's 'noble traits of manhood' should not allow us to misconstrue the fact that, in Cross's view, the native is not solely an independent and complete man on his own. He needs the European to affirm his identity. Cross's argument is similar to James Stewart's, principal of Lovedale Institution, who for example, sarcastically reminded Jabavu, editor of *Imvo* newspaper, that Africans "were not yet good enough to write for themselves".[62] Later, in 1880, developing an argument during a meeting of the Lovedale Literary Society that the press was a precondition for the creation of a civil society among Africans, Stewart also argued:

> Before the educated portion of any people is qualified for the public position, there is generally a previous period of preparation, by the spread of intelligence and information; and one of the agencies for that purpose is the Newspaper. And so far as I am able to judge, that period of preparation has barely begun, and is being carried on ... it is chiefly by white men; ... the educated native young men of this country with one or two exceptions, have not thrown themselves into the preliminary work of diffusing information, or of qualifying themselves for higher positions, or preparing their less educated countrymen for exercising a right, and of obtaining a privilege they may reasonably one day enjoy.[63]

Ingrained in the language of Stewart and Cross was the characteristic political ethos of the settler public. That is, acceptance into manhood was through gradualism – an eventual arrival at adulthood by attaining a civilised status.[64]

7 CONCLUSION

To recapitulate, there are two views, according to Cross, which explain the nature of these heathenish forces. These are the Romantic and the Rash Philanthropic views. These views, the imagery of which was made possible by the travel literature, provided a discourse to build the savage world as a stage on which to rehearse Europeans' domestic concerns.[65] Interestingly, it is from the same travel and exploratory literature that English romantic writers painted a picture of a non-European Eden, a picture that challenged those for whom enlightened Europe was the yardstick of perfection.[66]

Underlying the playfulness of the native, as described in the Romantic view and the native as an unsophisticated child of nature, described in the Rash Philanthropic view, underlying them is the infantilisation of the African. That is, African adults were seen as, the childlike and natural Other, and were afflicted by an absence of the qualities that characterised the adult white male ideal of European civilisation. These discourses therefore, in addition to various others on the nature of the heathen, or savage, impressed his immaturity upon European consciousness.[67]

Underlying Cross's views regarding the heathenish state of the natives, was his assumption, if our reading is correct, that Kaffir culture, heathenish as it

was, was also barbaric, while European culture, synonymous with civilisation, transferred with it spiritual religion. In other words, Europeans, by 'virtue' of being European, were inherently religious and spiritual, while Kaffirs, though Cross never said if they had a religion or not, were the opposite. Noting Cross's substantive argument that heathenism was earthly, with neither ideals nor sense of tomorrow, concluding that Kaffirs were non-spiritual and non-religious, is therefore an accurate pointer to Cross's biased references to the natives. According to Cross, given that European culture is civilisation and that the native one is barbarism and that "the heathen conquers where he is not conquered … Civilization and Barbarism cannot live side by side, nor can spiritual religion and heathen morals. [Therefore:] One must kill the other".[68]

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ENDNOTES

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2 An address delivered at the 12th Annual Assembly of the Union of the Baptist Church of South Africa, in King Williamstown, June 10th, 1889, by the President, Rev G W Cross.

3 Minutes of 1889 BU Assembly, in BU Handbook for 1889-1890, 8.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid, 9.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid. Similarities to Cross's analysis are also found in Rousseau's discussion of the origin of inequality. In particular, his discussion of the differences between the savage man and the domesticated man. See Rousseau, J J 1992. *Discourse on the origin of inequality*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 11-44.
11 Comaroff, J & Comaroff, J 1991. Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism, and consciousness in South Africa Vol 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 112.
12 See Chapter 2 in Mogashoa, MH 2005. South African Baptists and finance matters (1820-1948). Unisa: Pretoria. [Unpublished PhD Thesis].
13 Comaroff, J & Comaroff, J 1991. Vol. 1. *Op cit*, 110.
14 Ibid, 114.
15 Minutes of 1889 BU Assembly, in BU Handbook for 1889-1890, 9.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Comaroff, J & Comaroff, J 1991. Vol 1. *Op cit*, 117.
20 See also Cock, J 1990. Domestic service and education for domesticity: The incorporation of Xhosa women into colonial society, in Walker, C, *Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. Cape Town: David Philip, 76-96. In her analysis, Cock wrote: "Even in the best servant-employer relationships – those containing most concern and kindness, as in the Phillips family – the African servant was implicitly viewed as a child. The child analogy involves a fundamental denial of equality, and is often a component of racist, sexist and classist ideologies. There is a clear analogy between settler attitudes towards Africans on the Eastern Cape frontier and upper and middle-class attitudes towards the lower classes in contemporary Britain: qualities of irresponsibility, immaturity, excitability and emotionalism were attributed to both subordinate groups." (Ibid 82.).
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22 Ibid.
23 Wookey, A J. *Chronicle of the London Missionary Society*, 1884, 304, quoted in Comaroff, J & J 1991. Vol 2. *Op cit*, 197.
24 Achebe, C. An Image of Africa, in *Research in African Literatures*, 9, quoted in Comaroff, J & J 1991. Vol 1. *Op cit*, 87.
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26 Ibid, 89. See also Park, M 1816. Travels into the interior districts of Africa: Performed in the years 1795, 1796, and 1797. With an account of a subsequent mission to the country in 1805. London: John Murray, xxix, quoted in Comaroff, J & Cpmaroff, J 1991. Vol 1. Op cit, 89.
27 Miller, C1985. *Blank darkness: Africanist discourse in French*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 61.
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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid, 63-64.
32 Ibid, 64.
33 Ibid, 82.
34 Ibid, 83.
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36 Ibid, 84.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid, 85.
43 Ibid.

44 Ibid, 87.
45 Minutes of 1889 BU Assembly, in BU Handbook for 1889-1890, 9.
46 Ibid.
47 Comaroff, J & Comaroff, J 1991. Vol 1. *Op cit*, 174.
48 Minutes of 1889 BU Assembly, in BU Handbook for 1889-1890, 10.
49 Ibid.
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55 Minutes of 1889 BU Assembly, in BU Handbook for 1889-1890, 10.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
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61 Ibid, 11.
62 De Kock, L 1996. Civilizing the barbarians: Missionary narrative and African textual response in nineteenth-century South Africa. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 109.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid, 112-113.
65 Comaroff, J & Comaroff, J 1991. Vol 1. *Op cit*, 110.
66 Ibid.
67 Comaroff, J & Comaroff, J 1991. Vol 1. *Op cit*, 57.
68 Minutes of 1889 BU Assembly, in BU Handbook for 1889-1890, 18.