

Ikhwezi:

*The voice of liberalism in peri-urban
Natal*

by Marc Epprecht

Ikhwezi (*Comet*) was a monthly newsletter published by an arm of the Natal Provincial Administration (NPA) from 1950 to 1955.¹ This was a period when liberal-minded South Africans still had confidence that racist ideologies could be defeated through fair-minded political discourse, goodwill and pro-poor development. Such were the stated intentions of the Local Health Commission (LHC), a novel form of local authority administering areas that had become urbanised outside the boundaries of Natal's towns and cities. Four of these public health areas (PHAs) were in existence in 1950: Edendale, Clermont, Howick West and Waschbank (today Wasbank). These were racially mixed and culturally diverse communi-

ties including property-owning African Christians (*amakholwa*), Africans of various ethnic backgrounds who rented or squatted and scratched out a living however they could, Muslim and Hindu Indians from business to peasant class, mixed-race people of diverse descent, and white farmers.²

Ikhwezi announced itself in its first issue as 'your child and ours' and 'the voice of Ordinary Talk between us.'³ 'Us' meant the LHC, on the one hand, and 'all non-European' PHA residents on the other. The LHC, the editor proclaimed, already had two voices in the community. These were the stern voice of rules and regulations, plus the (supposedly) dulcet tones that promoted health and wellness, fresh pure water,

life-saving inoculations, pensions, cheap clean food, and many other free services for the common good. The third voice now being introduced through the newsletter was to be conversational, driven by a combination of elucidations of policy and principles by officials plus questions, requests, social news and opinions from residents. *Ikhwezi* was almost fully bilingual (English and Zulu) but some translation into Tamil, Hindi and Afrikaans aimed to reach its diverse readership in the hope of promoting mutual understanding and co-operation in urban living.

The LHC was supported by some of the most prominent liberal politicians, public servants and church leaders in the province; and, indeed, it gained readership among reform-minded colonial officials as far afield as Kenya. The founder of the Liberal Party of South Africa (LPSA) in 1953 began his career as an employee there (Peter Brown was also a co-editor and regular contributor to *Ikhwezi*). *Ikhwezi* meanwhile counted cultural and intellectual luminaries like H. Selby Msimang, R.R.R. Dhlomo and Alan Paton among its featured authors. Their idealism about the LHC experiment was, however, fairly quickly dashed over this period. Indeed, liberals in South Africa manifestly failed to achieve their political objectives in the late 1950s, let alone sustain *Ikhwezi*. The LHC itself eventually collaborated with its neighbouring jurisdictions to plan and effect the Group Areas Act (GAA), and then to manage the consequent injustices. Liberalism has as a result not fared well in the historiography of the national liberation struggle.⁴

Judgements of liberalism's failures, hypocrisies, betrayals and 'unctuousness' (to paraphrase Bill Freund) have tended to be made with principal refer-

ence to whites. Yet liberalism had a strong following among blacks in Natal and the LPSA had two active branches in Edendale and district. *Ikhwezi* was largely addressed to, and had significant contributions by, members of that audience. Yet somehow copies did not make it to the libraries or archives where such things would normally be preserved. Thus, while passing references to its existence appears in internal LHC documents, no historians to this point had located surviving copies to use as a source that might shed light on the history of peri-urban Natal. The complete run was only recently recovered from the collection of the South African Institute of Race Relations held in the Historical Papers Research Archive at the University of Witwatersrand, which digitised and published them in 2017.⁵

This article is the first of two to analyse *Ikhwezi* as an overlooked body of evidence that could enrich our understanding of the meaning of liberalism in socially, culturally and politically liminal spaces like Edendale and Clermont. Here I consider *Ikhwezi*'s content, contributors and style in the context of the times; that is, heightening political repression and economic malaise. The goal is to assess the key elements of liberal philosophy as articulated by and to predominantly black but significantly multiracial communities. But first, let me sketch the historical context leading to *Ikhwezi*'s launch and the general form it took.

kwaPoyinandi

The LHC (literally iBandla leMpilo in Zulu, but colloquially kwaPoyinandi) was an experimental form of local authority created by the NPA in 1941. Its mandate was to provide health, housing, environmental and other services to

areas of the province that lay outside the jurisdiction of either the Native Affairs Department (in tribal areas like Vulindlela and Table Mountain), rural health boards, or town and city councils. Lacking effective local authority, those pockets of privately owned land had deteriorated from sometimes prosperous farms to overcrowded and highly polluted slum areas. People living in or adjacent to such areas could make a request to the provincial administration that they be declared a PHA, and if conditions qualified them, the machinery of LHC administration would be put in place. The LHC was equipped with the powers and budget to remove informal dwellings, cull excess animals, build new homes, water supply, roads, bridges and erosion control works, provide streetlights, and administer health clinics among many other activities. In effect, PHAs held powers equivalent to other local authorities, differing mostly by having an appointed rather than elected executive.⁶

Edendale and District was the first, biggest in area and most populous PHA. It included the historic Edendale farm and its constituent villages (like Georgetown and Siyamu) plus settlements like Macibise and Plessislaer that straddled the road into Pietermaritzburg. The Edendale and District PHA was followed chronologically by Clermont (Durban), then Waschbank (near Dundee), Howick West (Howick), Hollingwood and Ockert's Kraal (Pietermaritzburg), uMhlathuzana (Durban) and eventually about twenty others scattered around the province ranging in population from tens of thousands to mere hundreds. The LHC lasted until 1974 when it was shut down in anticipation of the transfer of these areas to the

KwaZulu Territorial Authority or some other apartheid jurisdiction.

The philosophy behind the LHC at the time of its founding and through to the mid-1950s was relatively progressive for the times, and the model received provisional support from within the ANC and later, enthusiastically, the LPSA. For example, the LHC in Edendale enabled residents of all races to sit together on its advisory board, and promised 'evolution' towards multi-racial, democratic self-governance. In practice, this progressive stance was often undermined by a brusquely technocratic, and sometimes gratingly paternalistic, approach to community relations. Its activities thus generated considerable suspicion and opposition. People accustomed to living with basically no government regulations over such things as where they could build, how they disposed of waste, how many animals they could keep and so forth, did not take kindly to the sudden imposition of rules with fines to enforce them. There was suspicion as well of the LHC approach to social medicine, which sometimes involved asking intrusive questions about health that upset propriety. And, of course, there was the matter of paying for services. Although the LHC was heavily subsidised by the province and the city of Pietermaritzburg, it also required property owners to pay rates, which they had never done before. Through to the early 1950s there were boycotts, protests and even acts of violence against the LHC, its employees and members of the advisory boards.

One of the most common complaints against the LHC in this early period was that it imposed regulations without proper explanation or consultation with the community. Finally, in early 1950, it addressed this complaint by launching

a monthly newsletter that would allow it to explain its policies, along with the science or broader legislation that required these policies. *Ikhwezi* was also intended to be a place where news from and about the community could be reported (weddings, sport, births and deaths, holidays, musical and other cultural events), and where residents could express themselves through letters and creative writing. In these ways it would not only be informative, but would help to offset the LHC's authoritarian reputation and hence build a sense of community and belonging. The commissioner, former mayor of Durban, Thomas Wadley, expressed the LHC vision for *Ikhwezi* this way:

The Local Health Commission seeks, and needs, the understanding and co-operation of the people in its Areas. It desires to improve the conditions under which people are living and to bring greater safety, health and happiness to your homes. For this – like any other local authority – it must make rules, and you, perhaps, are among those who dislike them. Yet whenever people gather to live together in communities, such rules are necessary. Without them, the ill-behaviour of some endangers the good of all. The work of this Commission, however, is designed to bring other things than rules into your Area. We hope indeed that your co-operation, united with our authority, will lead your community far along the path of enlightenment, prosperity and content.

Ikhwezi was published in Pietermaritzburg, beginning with a run of 300 copies of up to 25 pages each. Most of these went to Edendale, but they were also distributed free of charge through civic associations such as ratepayers, cattle owners and women's clubs, and popular venues like shops throughout

the other PHAs. It quickly proved popular, winning praise even from ardent opponents of the LHC. By the time it ceased publication in 1955, the print run had grown to 800, with each copy estimated to be read by at least eight or nine people. Its popularity was such that readers often offered to pay for it, and demanded better quality, quantity and distribution. Indeed, one Mrs K. Atwara of Plessislaer (a predominantly Indian part of Edendale) called for a print run of 'at least 3,000' and that it be distributed to all schools, while Mrs J. Gumede of Umhlathuzana alludes intriguingly to an *Ikhwezi* reading club.⁷ As late as March 1955, the LHC discussed an advisory board request that the paper be converted to a public utility company for vastly expanded and improved production.⁸

The LHC demurred on that request but acknowledged popular demand and promised to extend the paper's scope. Yet just months later the LHC ceased publication without ceremony and declined advisory board appeals to resuscitate it.⁹ The official reason was that there were insufficient funds. Key retirements and high turnover among LHC staff may also have contributed to growing demoralisation there in the face of intensifying pressures from Pietermaritzburg and Pretoria to curtail the LHC experiment.

Despite its short lifespan, *Ikhwezi* was remarkable in many ways. Was there any other community newsletter or newspaper in South Africa that had articles in five different languages? The first managing editor was a white woman, but there were four associate editors, one for each of the racial categories of the times, all contributing on a strictly volunteer basis. To be sure, *Ikhwezi* was produced in the cheapest possible way,

cyclostyled on flimsy newsprint with amateurish hand-drawn illustrations. It nonetheless facilitated a fairly vibrant exchange of opinion on diverse topics, and today reveals forgotten moments, personalities and feelings in the social history of some key, albeit marginalised, communities. What follows is a brief overview of core themes.

The promise of self-government and other politics

H. Selby Msimang had been hired by the Edendale Vigilance Committee (Isolomuzi) in 1941 to negotiate with the province on a new form of administration for the community. According to him, the first PHA was created only after the province accepted Isolomuzi's demand for an explicit commitment to transition PHAs into self-governing jurisdictions.¹⁰ This promise was given, but never written into the enabling legislation. Indeed, the LHC was not even legally required to establish advisory boards, let alone listen to them. That glaring omission was an ongoing bone of contention that left the door open for the province's eventual (inevitable?) betrayal. Yet throughout the *Ikhwezi* era the promise of eventual self-government was repeatedly affirmed. Virtually every issue of the paper has some allusion to it, commonly embedded in discussions of pragmatic development issues or explanations of the principles of modern urban governance. What were the best strategies for Africans to acquire the skills needed, in the words of R.R.R. Dhlomo, to speed progress toward 'self-independence' and 'running their own institutions'?¹¹ This would not be by obstructing the work of the LHC, but rather by improving housing, paying rates, voting, and cultivating other forms of urban discipline. The emphasis was

on calm, reasoned debate to persuade the LHC to hasten 'the independence we all seek' in Msimang's words.¹²

LHC or other government officials and *Ikhwezi*'s occasional invited guests also regularly weighed in to explain the long-term vision of self-governance for the PHAs, the mechanisms and learning that needed to happen to realise that vision, and how strikes, threatening speech or violence of any sort would sabotage the process. The latter warning was often insinuated into articles on specific development strategies. For example, S.R. Dent's explanation of the government's ostensibly balanced approach to expanding education for Africans (in part as a strategy to win whites' support for Africans as 'citizens in our common country') included the proviso that education would only work if Africans eschewed strikes and obeyed the law.¹³ There were also direct appeals to political moderation and patience:

Voice your grievances and stand determinedly by your rights, but cast hatred aside and arm yourself with knowledge and the courage that lives with the farseeing. The resolute strength of a people who know where they are going and what they want will win the way forward far, far quicker than all the brash heroics of a few blind leaders.¹⁴

A key proviso in all of this was that Africans had first to demonstrate a level of civic participation and sophistication to warrant the phasing in of self-rule. Msimang himself warned against moving too quickly; first, on the grounds that self-government implied a not-yet-remotely feasible financial independence.¹⁵ In a later, rather cantankerous rebuttal to an opponent of the advisory boards, he intimated that the PHAs were not ready for independence since the

most vocal proponents evidently did not understand democratic principles.¹⁶ Commissioner Wadley saw it more as a matter of competence:

we regard ourselves as trustees, with the duty and obligation of bringing these people to the stage where the assumption of their own local government responsibilities is a practical measure. But it will not suffice to simply throw the responsibility on to the African. The withdrawal of the assistance and guidance which he has needed in the past should be a gradual process, attaining full measure as his confidence and ability to adequately discharge the task grows to maturity.¹⁷

The LHC did not itself possess the power to make the decision about when the required maturity had been attained. As it explained, it was ‘only governing their Area until such time as the higher authorities judge that residents are themselves competent to assume local government.’¹⁸ For their part, *Ikhwezi*’s editors and contributions by LHC officials regularly chastised Africans for failing to step up to the plate. Their apathy towards public service – including not voting let alone running for office – and commonplace non-cooperation with building, sanitation and health regulations, comprised the main evidence of lack of preparedness for self-governance.

Ikhwezi was not only a cheerleader for the LHC model. It did allow sometimes quite fierce critics of the model space to vent their perspectives. In its July 1952 issue, for example, it ran a long letter from Mr I.M. Mabaso of Clermont in which he elaborated why the LHC ‘is not at all satisfactory’, indeed ‘evil’; the advisory board was a ‘mere figurehead’ that should be abolished; and the authors of *Ikhwezi* were one and the same as the

LHC and engaged in the suppression of critical opinion. In this and other such cases of criticism, the editors always gave themselves the right of rebuttal, sometimes additionally airing an African voice to defend the integrity of liberalism.¹⁹

Noticeably absent in these explanations and exhortations was any discussion of the future of the nominal ‘traditional authority’ that existed for Africans in the PHAs. In Edendale, the chieftaincy had in fact been a creation of the colonial government in the late 19th century, and by all accounts was non-functioning by the early 1950s beyond certain public rituals. While the advisory board made numerous representations to the LHC to abolish the institution, to *Ikhwezi* its anachronism was seemingly so obvious that no discussion was needed.²⁰

News of policy initiatives and development achievements for Africans elsewhere in the country and regionally was a regular feature (Germiston and Bulawayo came up most frequently, presumably because they were following a similar path influenced by liberal ideas). Political commentary, however, was studiously avoided or only hinted at in indirect language. Notably, *Ikhwezi* never explained LHC opinion on the GAA and only allowed letters that fretted about it in order to advise that it was out of LHC control; so just ‘go quietly on’.²¹ As another example, it blandly characterised the launch of the first new tribal authorities (bantustans) as ‘the first step toward local self-government.’²² More remarkable yet is a long report on ‘Africans in Africa’ by joint editor Mr Aldworth. In this, he describes his impressions from travelling overland from Tangier to Pietermaritzburg, a journey of six

months that took him through countries on the verge of gaining independence, in the throes of anti-colonial violence, or moving toward experiments in multiracial federation. Somehow not a word was spent on these momentous events. The main points Aldworth drew from the whole experience were that South African Africans had 'progressed further towards emancipation' than Africans elsewhere and that 'We are all brothers, it would seem, under the skin'.²³

A striking exception, discussed more fully below, was a letter summarising a speech given by ANC president Albert Luthuli to a large public gathering in Clermont in 1951. Correspondent H.S. Mtetwa managed to slip in two points about the importance of nationalism over tribalism; and of the imperative of 'political consciousness' for Africans (somewhat) buried under generic appeals for self-help, education and Christian love. The editors evidently found this sufficiently banal, but did not publish any responses.²⁴ How long would it have taken to make the call to grant self-government had Pretoria not effectively foreclosed that option? LHC officials were scrupulously careful not to express an opinion, but *Ikhwezi* may have let a discreet consensus view out of the bag when it speculated: '100 years', could be more, could be less, depending on how well 'the Bantu' understands and absorbs the brilliance of Western civilisation and doesn't give in to frustration at some whites' inability to practise it themselves.²⁵

Non-racialism

The population of the PHAs was mostly African, with varying mixes of Indian and coloured minorities and a smattering of white missionaries or shopkeepers. Edendale, by contrast, was among

the most racially diverse communities in the entire country. The first census found Africans constituting 86% of the population, Indians 10% and whites and coloureds around 2% each. The non-African minorities all continued to grow until 1957 when a steady exodus began in anticipation of GAA enforcement.²⁶ The multiracial composition of the community was acknowledged in 1942 by the creation of a multiracial advisory board, and the African majority recognised through the election or nomination of African leadership on the board and its standing committees.

When *Ikhwezi* first invited community contributions the only stated limitation was that submissions be not more than 300 words. The paper then kicked off its substantive content with a column that alerted its readers to the fact that pass laws were going to be more strictly applied. Africans should thus not give up employment in town 'without good reason'. It went on to promote a booklet published by the Institute of Race Relations that, among other things, advised 'Never go about without a pass ... Do not BUY a pass ... Never LEND your pass ... Always keep ONE NAME'.²⁷

In issue number two, the editor claimed to have received many letters and messages of congratulation and appreciation. It only published two, however, both from officials who had been early patrons of the LHC – the Administrator of Natal, Denis Gem Shepstone, and Senator Edgar H. Brookes. Its naïvete was exposed soon after and drew this response in issue number three:

It is a matter of regret to us that we must now refer to another sort of communication which has reached us ... even the best Conversation can be spoilt and made useless by personal

discour [*sic*] or ill-natured remarks which can only wound the other taking part. Particularly is this the case when remarks deal with matters of RACE ... We have not thought to say – because we never dreamed it would be necessary – that such comments as may stimulate inter-racial ill-feeling will not be published in its pages. Although this warning has not previously been given, we have felt obliged to suppress certain matter today for this sort of reason; and we give notice now that nothing which we think likely to arouse ill-will between our various Races and nothing which constitutes personal abuse will be published.

What precise racial ill-will was contained in the letters received is unknown, although coming so soon after the anti-Indian riots of 1949, and in the light of strongly anti-Indian rhetoric by some of the leading African opponents of the LHC, *Ikhwezi* was probably being prudent in imposing this rule. The possibility of racist provocations by whites – a commonplace occurrence in letters to the editor in the mainstream liberal press such as the *Natal Witness* – is also alluded to or explicitly addressed in a number of subsequent articles. Edgar Brookes, notably, had a long article condemning whites who humiliated Africans not just by overt racism but by ‘uncritical acceptance of the racial situation as a man finds, from insensitiveness, ignorance or lack of imagination’ (micro-aggressions in today’s terms).²⁸ Alan Paton weighed in the following year to warn whites against a common paternalist, self-serving and resentful ‘generosity’ to Africans. Of course this raises a question since such whites would not normally be readers of *Ikhwezi*; or was Paton addressing an emotionally parsimonious streak that could sometimes be heard among

white LHC employees and supporters?²⁹

Unreported in all this indignation, or in any subsequent issue, were ‘remarks’ coming out of Pretoria – in fact, legislation wending its way through to national law – that were about to precipitate a crisis in Edendale. The Population Registration and Group Areas Acts were both passed in the year of *Ikhwezi*’s launch. At that time, PHA residents did not have to carry passes and it was a point of pride to many Edendale landowners that they had historically offered shelter to Africans fleeing poverty, evictions and mobility controls elsewhere in the region. *Ikhwezi*’s kickoff advice on passes was thus spectacularly ill-timed. The intimation that this right could be taken away then became overt in October 1950 when the city of Pietermaritzburg requested permission for its police to enter Edendale to catch and deport ‘undesirables’ and ‘strays’ found in Edendale,³⁰ but *Ikhwezi* had already created the impression that passes were something it effectively supported. Tensions developed into rowdy protests and violence in the months to follow. Yet only the barest hint of this can be gleaned from *Ikhwezi* – a brief notice, with condolences, of the hospitalisation of the chair of the advisory board due to an unexplained assault.³¹

It was possible for correspondents to allude to past injustices, as Frank Mazibuko did with reference to national Acts in 1913 and 1923, or R.S. Mtshali when explaining the existence of widespread prejudice against whites in Clermont (‘other whites never redressed their [Africans]’ grievances’ while many still clung to ‘illogical ideas like the “Native Problem” and “White Supremacy”’).³² Two correspondents even slipped in reference to the traumatic events of

1949 in Durban, although in such a way as to emphasise the progress back to Indian-African harmony in sports and through music.³³

There is no reason to believe that LHC officials and the whites who served on the advisory board or other volunteer associations were not sincere in their theoretical commitment to multiracialism, which they sometimes demonstrated with practical effect (the LHC's second commissioner was a fluent Zulu-speaker, for example). *Ikhwezi* reported with enthusiastic approval the local state's support for inter-racial social events and sports. 'History has been made here, I think. This is the first teachers' match of its kind in Natal; let us hope it is a forerunner of other inter-community affairs.'³⁴ The LHC also seemed to see itself playing a wider role in resisting an insidious national trend simply by its example, as it delicately elaborated in 1952:

The Commission does not expect to be able to solve the problems of juxtaposition and propinquity (the close association of several races) to the satisfaction of intolerant minds. Its task is one calling for humane approach, and the discharge of its task is as much in the interests of the well-favoured ones in our society, as in the interests of those upon whom it is imposed.³⁵

That noted, there were clear and growing gaps between expectations in the community and LHC willingness to rock the racialist boat with higher authorities. This gap is hinted at in discussions over the fate of Giles Land, a farm the LHC had purchased to create new economic (non-subsidised) housing in the Edendale PHA. In its own mind, the LHC envisioned this as a middle-class Indian suburb. In the process of community consultation, however, very

strong objections were made against any racially exclusive language. Hence, a correspondent to *Ikhwezi* as late as 1955 still believed that the land was to be developed for Indians, coloureds and whites. *Ikhwezi* published the LHC response that flatly said no, that would not be possible in the light of GAA requirements.³⁶ Had the earlier accession to non-exclusive language simply been a cynical political expediency to dampen opposition by the economic class in the PHA? No further discussion was published on this issue.

(Somewhat) ecumenical faith and cross-cultural understanding

A Christianity that emphasised 'love thy neighbour' and 'let he who is without sin cast the first stone' has a pervasive presence throughout the pages of *Ikhwezi*. Church leaders who advocated acceptance of diversity, humility and community service were among the most frequent invited or re-printed contributors. The Reverend Albert Luthuli even made the roster, paraphrased, for his characterisation of Christianity as one of the four core principles of self-help. Africans, he explained to *Ikhwezi* readers, needed to embrace: 'Christianity that is positive in deeds and lending an emphasis to the study of the usefulness of the Church in the world as a source of civilisation, the teacher of morality and the only effective agency of law, order and peace.'³⁷

Homilies like this came from all the mainstream churches with the notable exception of the Dutch Reformed Church. The African Apostolic or Zionist voice is also noteworthy for its absence, presumably because these churches were widely regarded in liberal circles as inimical to modern life and good governance. Interestingly, and

acknowledging the political attractions of an African nationalist church as an antidote to the debilitating sectarianism of Christianity and the regrettable tendency of whites to dominate the leadership of ostensibly non-racial churches, the editors did allow a correspondent to discuss the idea on theological grounds. He – a white Catholic priest – determined that racially exclusive worship was against the spirit of Christianity and should be resisted.³⁸

Ecumenism also did not extend to traditional spirituality. While African Christian correspondents did sometimes vigorously defend social elements of African culture such as the extended patriarchal family and the ceremonial slaughter of cattle, and Europeans sometimes expressed respect for ‘ordered tribal society’ and ‘proud Zulu warriors’,³⁹ disdain for ‘superstition’ was commonly expressed in the language of civilised versus uncivilised, progressive versus backward, enlightenment versus barbarism, knowledge versus ignorance, and so on. Short stories and poems that told parables, or news that imparted morality tales on the subjects of hygiene, vegetable or flower gardens, and visits to the health clinic implicitly cast aspersions on the shortcomings of African traditional values. As discussed below, a strong component of this entailed correcting African men’s behaviour.

Cross-cultural understanding was extended, however, to certain other non-Christians. The February 1953 issue, notably, ran a long article explaining the core principles of Arya Samaj, a social movement within Hinduism that had a strong following in Edendale and that paralleled the liberal Christian tradition in many ways.⁴⁰ Judaism got a passing nod of approval, not for its theology or particular presence in any of the

PHAs but for its capacity for self-help as manifest by the Jews ‘making Palestine blossom’.⁴¹

This Christianity was not averse to fun and cross-cultural learning of a secular nature. For example, notwithstanding the social conservatism of *amakhohwa* community leaders, *Ikhwezi* regularly celebrated African jazz and promoted other forms of music and sports across racial lines. A regular column on the activities of the YMCA featured, among other things, lessons on coaching rugby and cricket to Africans, sports that were historically mostly the preserve of white boys and men. An inclusive Christian ethic was further propounded through regular features covering the activities of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, notably first aid, hiking and nature appreciation.

Development and the emancipation (somewhat) of women

One of the first columns contributed by an African author articulated what was to become a pervasive theme: ‘The able African Assistants of the Commission are at our disposal to advise and help us to help ourselves ... Let there be less grousing and more practical effort on our part and soon we would be contributing greatly to the welfare of our community’.⁴²

Self-help included education, reading, practising proper health care, contributing to community service through volunteer work, blood and other donations, and anything else that would lessen dependency upon the State. The bedrock that self-help stood upon, however, was private property. Hence, to Reverend J.S. Dunn of Howick West, sub-economic housing (erected and maintained by the LHC at subsidised rent to replace shanties rented from

unscrupulous landlords) could only serve as a stepping stone to economic housing (owned, maintained and improved by individual families).⁴³ Indeed, home improvement was a core message of Msimang's rebuttal of F.J. Mazibuko's appeal to the LHC to allow Africans to erect 'inferior' structures. If Africans wanted independence, he argued, they must first 'Take immediate steps, whatever the risk, to raise the rateable value of their properties', including seeking loans if necessary.⁴⁴

In addition to regular exhortations to the various paths to self-help, *Ikhwezi*'s editors and contributors alike sang the praises of African achievers, from those who built solid homes and shops, planted trees and kept neat gardens, to those who accomplished firsts in the cultural and professional world. Correspondents often praised the support offered by the LHC to help communities produce such successes, above all through schools, sports fields and funds for various social welfare societies. Something of a concern to African correspondents, however, were LHC intrusions into the free market. The provision of subsidised milk, bricks, buses and other services were seen to be undermining African and Indian entrepreneurs. Debates around the uneven (mostly very poor and dangerous) provision of bus services sparked several exchanges that included, from Clermont, a thoughtful rumination upon the comparative merits of private versus public enterprise.⁴⁵

Social development, and the amelioration not just of poverty and ill-health but of people's sense of dignity and humanity, was part of the LHC vision from the very beginning, articulated through the social medicine paradigm. As the local authority, however, it lacked both the capacity and the trust of the community

to remotely achieve this. A preferred strategy emerged of recruiting African women to the task, and to that end it and its supporters promoted the 'general emancipation of girls' and women from oppressive customs or other burdens. Ironically, the first explicit argument in this regard that *Ikhwezi* published came from a white man, Edgar Brookes, the Native Representative of Natal and Zululand in the national parliament. He acknowledged the need for legal reforms and the enforcement of existing laws. The moral upliftment of the community and the restoration of African men's dignity that were needed to underpin Africans' political and economic aspirations, however, required that girls and women be freed from the demands of men's sexual lusts. Girls should be allowed 'to marry where necessary without waiting months or years for a guardian's consent.'⁴⁶

Clearly, women's 'emancipation' was limited by the heteronorms, pervasive sexist double standards of the era, and generically masculine or patronising language regarding women: 'the history of man', 'men's progress', 'the weaker sex', and so forth. That said, women had a relatively strong, albeit not always acknowledged voice in *Ikhwezi*. The first and longstanding managing editor was Mary Lee. She was joined in writing for the paper by a number of other remarkable women leaders such as M.F. Allsop (founder of the Edendale Benevolent Society), M.A. Alexander and N. Mngadi. Their work was almost always focused on improving competencies in the domestic sphere, early childhood education and feeding, or ameliorating suffering and despondency in the community.

Limited as this imaginary of emancipation was, by establishing and

promoting women's clubs, income-generating projects, nursery schools, girls' education and nursing as a profession, women played a key role in keeping social welfare and non-racialism alive in the PHAs, and fostering a culture that accepted if not actively embraced women's economic self-reliance. The language they deployed could be quite explicit in that regard. As Nurse Mngadi put it in singing the advantages of nursing as a profession, 'from the time she commences her training a nurse becomes completely independent.'⁴⁷

Ikhwezi also published letters from ordinary women that shed light on the ups and downs of living under LHC administration. Letters from washerwomen in Hollingwood, for example, are rich in details from a community that was subsequently entirely destroyed. They respectfully complained of having to source drinking water from the Msunduzi River (downstream from the city), of poor bus service, no nursery school, inconvenient doctor visits, and no subsidised vegetables and milk as were available in other PHAs. They praised the initiative of one Miss Gasa in establishing a local tea room, the screening of a bioscope show, and the free supply of *Ikhwezi*. But most of all they fretted about the GAA: 'These are painful rumours to us because we bought these properties in the open market and with the full approval of all concerned. Now at this late hour we are likely to lose everything – Why?'⁴⁸

Conclusion

Ikhwezi was published and entirely financed by an arm of the provincial administration (the LHC), which itself was heavily dependent upon the erratic goodwill and co-operation of its neighbours (primarily Pietermaritzburg

and Durban). The editors were naïve at first to think that their stated good intentions would suffice to keep the invited contributions civil. Very quickly, however, they realised that they would need to police submissions against inflammatory statements and incitements to inter-racial conflict. Nonetheless, *Ikhwezi* did provide a platform for fairly wide-ranging debates about how to create a fair, just society. In this, it adhered closely to the vision of both the ANC (at that time) and LPSA. Indeed, the editor (Lee) and many of its contributors were founders (Brown, Paton, Msimang) or became members (Sam Chetty) of the LPSA after its establishment in 1953.⁴⁹

Ikhwezi's liberalism showed all the ambiguities and attributes of the wider liberal movement of the era: paternalism, presumption of the superiority of Western civilisation, gradualism, and defensiveness if not prickliness against Africans' criticisms. It was, however, relatively generous and open toward African and Indian aspirations. On the subjects of the franchise and eligibility for political office, for example, it was actually on the progressive side of liberal opinion by downplaying the requirement of literacy and formal education. Urging African boys to learn to play rugby put it ahead of its time in a province where the sport was synonymous with a certain type of white masculinity. Similarly, the emancipation invoked for women meant a constrained freedom to serve husbands, family and community more effectively than traditional or alienated patriarchy allowed. Nonetheless, to give space for African women to voice 'independence', of being a 'sort of head of household' and to acknowledge women in leadership positions (nurses, primarily) was undoubtedly progressive in the context. Although it always gave itself

the last word in debates about the LHC experiment, *Ikhwezi* did allow critics to air grievances without, it claimed, any censorship.

Despite its evident popularity with readers, *Ikhwezi* never attracted the quantity or quality of ‘conversation’ it claimed as its main objective. The first two years seemed promising, producing some robust exchanges between supporters and critics of the LHC alongside creative writing and chatty announcements about the woops and warfs of daily life. Submissions by Africans soon dwindled, however, often to zero in many months. Reports from the smaller PHAs were heavily dependent on single contributors and when they lost interest those PHAs in effect disappeared from public view. The number of issues per year declined after 1953 and the predominance of white authors became increasingly noticeable. This likely made it easier for the LHC to justify pulling the plug. Yet *Ikhwezi*’s disappearance in 1955 may have been an own goal that played a role in reducing the visibility of a relatively progressive and successful experiment in multiracial local authority. The newsletter’s abrupt demise made it politically a bit easier for the LHC’s many political enemies to impose their own racialist (and environmentally destructive) vision upon peri-urban Natal.

NOTES

- 1 As translated by the editors themselves and not to be confused with various 19th century iterations of *Ikwezi* (translated as *Morning Star*); notably, the American Board Mission’s publication, 1861–1868 (see Les Switzer and Donna Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: A Descriptive Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines 1836–1976* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979). *Comet* seems fitting as the paper shone brightly for a few years

then disappeared from archival records until recently.

- 2 A contemporary study is University of Natal, Department of Economics, *Experiment at Edendale: A Study of a Non-European Settlement with Special Reference to Food Expenditure and Nutrition* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1951). See also Marc Epprecht, *Welcome to Greater Edendale: Environment, Health, and the History of Development in an African City* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016); Marc Epprecht, ‘Experiment at KwaPoyinandi: African engagement with the Local Health Commission of the Edendale and District Public Health District, 1942–ca.1957’ *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* (forthcoming); Maynard Swanson, ‘The joys of proximity: the rise of Clermont’ in *The People’s City: African Life in Twentieth Century Durban* edited by Paul Maylam and Iain Edwards (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996), pp. 274–298.
- 3 *Ikhwezi* 1(1) February 1950, p. 1.
- 4 See, for example, Bill Freund’s withering critique of the liberal track record on social medicine, ‘Reflections on the 1944 National Health Services Commission: a response to Shula Marks’ *South African Historical Journal* 66(3) 2014, pp. 593–596. For the purposes of this article, I work from a less temperate definition and assessment of the significance of liberalism, drawing upon, among others, Randolph Vigne, *Liberals against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953–1968* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1997); Steven Friedman, ‘The ambiguous legacy of liberalism: less a theory of society, more a state of mind?’ in *Intellectual Traditions in South Africa: Ideas, Individuals and Institutions* edited by Peter Vale, Lawrence Hamilton and Estelle H. Prinsloo (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014), pp. 29–50; Michael Cardo, *Opening Men’s Eyes: Peter Brown and the Liberal Struggle for South Africa* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2010) and discussions of local politics, little-known personalities (like Eleanor Russell, a key supporter of the LHC on the city council) and discrete organisations and civil society groups (such as the *Natal Witness*, Black Sash and PACSA) in Pietermaritzburg, 1838–1988: *A New Portrait of an African City* edited by John Laband and Robert Haswell (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Shuter and Shooter, 1988) and *Born out of Sorrow: Essays on Pietermaritzburg and the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands under Apartheid, 1948–1994*,

- Volume One* edited by Christopher Merrett (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Society Foundation, 2021). Edendale's most prominent liberal, H. Selby Msimang, also wrote and spoke extensively on the topic; for example, 'Edendale' *Reality* 7(3) 1975, pp. 14–16. He and the ideas are respectfully discussed by Sibongiseni M. Mkhize, *Principles and Pragmatism in the Liberation Struggle: A Political Biography of Selby Msimang* (Cape Town: HSRC, 2019). Interviews with John Aitchison in Aitchison Papers 1971–72, Alan Paton Centre (APC 14/1/2).
- 5 Now also available through the Natal Society Foundation website: <https://natalia.org.za/ikhwezi.html>. The Hindi and Tamil translations were published as a separate supplement (*Prabhat* in Hindi) of 50 copies targeted at the main Indian settlements. None of these has yet been found.
 - 6 Such is the gist of my reading of the LHC's own internal documents and correspondence with residents found in Pietermaritzburg Archive Repository (PAR), LHC 1943–1957, *Annual Report for the Year ended 30th June*. It should be stressed that underlying tensions in many PHAs were high on account of 'land invasions' by African migrants from the countryside or dispossessed by urban slum clearances; and by the loss of property by historic African landowners to debt and coerced sale, often to white and Indian buyers.
 - 7 *Ikhwezi* 1(10) November 1950, pp. 9–10 and 3(8) October 1952, p. 14. Prominent Indian and white or coloured families began making significant direct donations in 1953 (*Ikhwezi* 4(2) February 1953, p. 4).
 - 8 *Ikhwezi* 6(2) March 1955, pp. 9–10.
 - 9 PAR, LHC 1943–1957, *Annual Report Minutes* 14(2b) 30 January 1956.
 - 10 Selby Msimang, 'The history of Edendale' (unpublished ms., undated, APC, PC 11/1/6/2/1–8).
 - 11 *Ikhwezi* 1(2) March 1950, p. 7. This is the first time the topic was broached. Dhlomo was the African editor of *Ikhwezi* and its principal translator of Zulu, editor of Natal's main African daily newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal*, a major *amakholwa* landowner in Edendale, and a nationally known cultural figure.
 - 12 *Ikhwezi* 1(4) May 1950, p. 11.
 - 13 *Ikhwezi* 11(11) December 1950, p. 11.
 - 14 *Ikhwezi* 3(2) March 1952.
 - 15 Selby Msimang, 'Inferior housing' *Ikhwezi* 1(4) May 1950, pp. 10–11.
 - 16 *Ikhwezi* 3(7) September 1952, pp. 1–3.
 - 17 Thomas M. Wadley, 'Social work' *Ikhwezi* 3(2) March 1952.
 - 18 D.R. Donaldson, 'Training in the ways of local government' *Ikhwezi* 1(6) July 1950, pp. 9–10.
 - 19 *Ikhwezi* 3(5) and 3(7) July and September 1952 for I.M. Mabaso's letter and Selby Msimang's reply respectively.
 - 20 Another noteworthy absence from the pages of *Ikhwezi* was the Clermont businessman and landowner A.W.G. Champion, former president of the Natal Native Congress and erstwhile supporter of the Zulu chieftaincy, including its Edendale version, in the 1940s.
 - 21 *Ikhwezi* 2(11) December 1951, p. 4.
 - 22 *Ikhwezi* 4(6) July 1953, p. 4.
 - 23 *Ikhwezi* 4(3) April 1953, p. 10.
 - 24 *Ikhwezi* 2(9) October 1951, pp. 16–17.
 - 25 Paraphrasing from a convoluted editorial in *Ikhwezi* 3(2) March 1952, p. 1.
 - 26 University of Natal, Department of Economics, *Experiment at Edendale*, p. 31; LHC, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the year 1st January to 31st December, 1958*.
 - 27 *ibid.*, p. 3.
 - 28 Edgar Brookes, 'Humiliating Africans' *Ikhwezi* 2(10) November 1951, p. 15.
 - 29 Alan Paton, 'Are Africans grateful?' *Ikhwezi* 3(3) April 1952, pp. 5–6.
 - 30 PAR, LHC 1943–1957, Advisory Board minutes of 12 October, 1950. Msimang reflects repeatedly on this event in his unpublished memoirs and 'The history of Edendale' APC, PC 11/1/6/2/1–8.
 - 31 *Ikhwezi* 1(11) December 1950, p. 6. Selby Msimang's memo to the LHC of 23 April 1951 links this assault, and other threats of violence including to himself, to the anti-LHC faction in the community led by one Peter Khumalo (PAR, LHC 1943–1957, volume 10 B annexure).
 - 32 *Ikhwezi* 1(3) April 1950, p. 9 and *Ikhwezi* 1(4) May 1950, p. 9.
 - 33 The first football match between an Indian and an African team took place at Georgetown in 1953 (*Ikhwezi* 4(9) October 1953). LHC employee in Clermont, Mr Mdlozini composed the hit song 'Isidumo sika [the storm of] 1949 African-Indian riots' *Ikhwezi* 3(1) February 1952), p. 10.
 - 34 *ibid.*
 - 35 'Lines on which the commission is expected to develop in the future' *Ikhwezi* 3(8) October 1952, p. 4.
 - 36 *Ikhwezi* 3(2) March 1952, p. 15. I could find no reference to Islam in either a positive or critical light, which is somewhat surprising given its strong presence among the Indian community in many PHAs.
 - 37 *Ikhwezi* 2(9) October 1951, p. 17.
 - 38 *Ikhwezi* 3(1) February 1952, pp. 14–16.

- 39 Edgar Brookes, 'Illegitimacy: its cause and cure' *Ikhwezi* 2(7) August 1950, pp. 7–8.
- 40 R.B. Maharaj, 'Hinduism' *Ikhwezi* 4(2) February 1953, pp. 12–13.
- 41 *Ikhwezi* 3(2) March 1952, p. 15.
- 42 R.R. Dlomo [*sic*], 'Self-help' *Ikhwezi* 1(2) March 1950, p. 7.
- 43 J.S. Dunn, 'Some essentials of a healthy community: 1. Housing' *Ikhwezi* 2(7) August 1951, p. 16–17.
- 44 Selby Msimang, 'Inferior housing' *Ikhwezi* 1(4) May 1950, p. 11. The second step was to participate in local government to learn the skills that would be needed to replace LHC administration.
- 45 P.B. Khumalo, 'Buses: a reply to Mr. Bhulose' *Ikhwezi* 4(1) January 1953, pp. 12–13.
- 46 Brookes, 'Illegitimacy', p. 8.
- 47 M.A. Mngadi, 'The advantages of nursing' *Ikhwezi* 3(2) March 1952, p. 16.
- 48 Mrs M. Mncwabe, *Ikhwezi* 4(1) January 1953, p. 11. See also Miss E.J. Mkwanzazi and Donsa Bantu in the same issue, p. 12.
- 49 Vigne, *Liberals against Apartheid*, p. 233.