

Schreiner family narratives: Written and oral sources in biographical research

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Dates:

Received: 28 Apr. 2022

Accepted: 16 Sept. 2022

Published: 19 Dec. 2022

How to cite this article:

Dominy, G.A., 2022,
'Schreiner family narratives:
Written and oral sources in
biographical research', *HTS
Teologiese Studies/
Theological Studies* 78(3),
a7693. [https://doi.
org/10.4102/hts.v78i3.7693](https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i3.7693)

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This article reflects on the research required in biographical studies. The biographical focus is on the role of three generations of the Schreiner family: W.P. Schreiner (one-time Prime Minister of the Cape Colony), Justice O.D. Schreiner (judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court) and Professor G.D.L. Schreiner (scientist, academic, liberal and early conceptualiser of alternative models to apartheid). All three were involved in developing, defending and sustaining liberal policies and values in South Africa from the late 19th century until the advent of democracy in 1994. The clarifications and contradictions within and between oral and written sources are examined, and individual cases are discussed in which they are highlighted. The research sources include family papers, official archives, publications and, crucially, oral testimony. The oral testimony includes formal and informal interviews. This study is a contribution to the history of a family, a university and a set of values. It covers a long period in South African history during which colonialism tightened into apartheid, resistance developed and the eventual vision of a democratic South Africa came to fruition.

Contribution: The primary scientific contribution is the exploration of liberal policies and values in South African political and academic history through the prism of biography. Methodologically, the article discusses possible shortcomings with oral testimony when relied on as a sole source and examines how oral evidence can be utilised in conjunction with research based on archival and published sources to develop a fuller and more nuanced picture in biographical research.

Keywords: biography; Buthelezi; constitutions; liberalism; oral history; research techniques; Schreiner; South Africa; universities.

Introduction

The contributions of the Schreiner family to South African history and culture span nearly two centuries, and their influence has been profound. The most well-known member of the family is O.E.A. (Olive Emily Albertina) Schreiner, author of the classic *Story of an African Farm* (first published in 1883), pioneering feminist and human rights campaigner whose life story is told in the Olive Schreiner House Museum in Cradock. Her legacy is too profound and complex to do justice to within the space of this article. The focus here is on the lives of three generations of male members of the Schreiner family: Olive's brother W.P. (William Phillip) Schreiner (1857–1919), former Prime Minister of the Cape Colony; his son, Appellate Division Justice O.D. (Oliver Deneys) Schreiner (1890–1980); and his grandson, Professor G.D.L. (George Deneys Lyndall, described herein as Deneys) Schreiner (1923–2008), scientist, and academic and constitutional modeller. Their lives fostering liberal politics in South Africa from the late 19th century to the 1980s are explored with particular emphasis on Deneys Schreiner.

For most of his career (from 1959 to 1987), Deneys Schreiner taught at, and later administered, the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg (now part of the University of KwaZulu-Natal). Both the university and the city of Pietermaritzburg were centres of South African liberalism in ways that other English language universities and centres were not. Alan Paton (1903–1988), a graduate of the university, author of *Cry the Beloved Country* (first published in 1948) and one-time leader of the Liberal Party, resided in Hillcrest, halfway to Durban (Alexander 1994), and retained a strong association with the university throughout his life.

The university's credentials were also enhanced by its association with another great South African liberal icon, E.H. (Edgar Harry) Brookes (1897–1979). Edgar Brookes served as a diplomat,

Note: Special Collection: Social Memory Studies, sub-edited by Christina Landman (University of South Africa) and Sekgothe Mokgoatšana (University of Limpopo).

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senator, professor and ordained Anglican priest during an illustrious career. He was also one of the founders and leaders of the Liberal Party (Webb 1979:39–42). Deneys Schreiner was mentored and befriended by both these towering figures.

Liberalism is often attacked in the democratic South Africa, as it is sometimes confused with neo-liberalism, which is an economic theory advocating privatisation and the free market (Cardo 2012:16–20). Some demagogues have even equated liberalism with racism, which is a complete contradiction, and with colonialism, with which liberalism has had a complicated relationship. This is apparent in the origins of the Liberal Party in South Africa (Vigne 1997:19).

In South Africa, liberalism grew out of the Cape Liberal Tradition, which, in turn, had evolved through British Liberalism from the French Revolution and the ideals of the Enlightenment. One feature of British liberalism was its gradualist top-down approach. Over decades and even over centuries, Whig aristocrats conceded rights to the wealthy middle classes and in turn rights were conceded to the labouring classes until eventually universal franchise was conceded, including votes to women (Taylor 1976:113–114).

Two strands of liberalism entered South Africa through the Cape Colony. Firstly, there was a structural, or constitutional, strand providing an elected legislature, independent courts and the rule of law. Secondly, there was a humanitarian strand, strongly propagated by missionaries, in whose ranks Gottlob Schreiner, the father of William Schreiner and Olive Schreiner, was to be found. Freedom of speech and human dignity were of major import to followers of this strand of liberalism. The three generations of male Schreiners fought for both strands as did Olive Schreiner who exercised a great influence on her politician brother throughout their lives.

Research methodology and use of sources

History needs to be rewritten in every generation because although the 'past does not change the present does' (Hill 1991:15). Each new generation asks new questions of the past in the light of the concerns of the present. History is, therefore, a version of events, and there is a constant interplay between the historian and the events (Taylor 1976:10). Within the historical discipline, biographical methodology favours a universalistic and encompassing approach, encouraging understanding and interpretation of experience across many boundaries, the better way to understand individual action and engagement in society (Bornat 2008:344).

Historical and biographical research can, perhaps, be best placed within the ambit of qualitative research methodology. Briefly, qualitative research methodology entails the study of the nature of phenomena, the context in which they appear 'or the perspectives from which they can be perceived' (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger 2020:1). History and biography

concern the thoughts and actions of people in the past which are phenomena in a sense. However, context and perceptions are of prime importance to historians and biographers. This article is a reflection of a research project that resulted in the publication of a biography of Deneys Schreiner, *The Man Behind the Beard* (Dominy 2020). It should be noted here that a biography of William Schreiner appeared in 1937 (Walker 1937), and a volume of essays in memory of Oliver Schreiner appeared in 1983 (Kahn 1983).

Online sources, published books, reports and journal articles, registers, guides, public archives¹ and private² papers were extensively consulted. The private correspondence³ of Oliver Schreiner was made available by the family and proved to be an invaluable resource. Many of Deneys' Schreiner letters to his father, dating from the Second World War and the post-war years when he was first at Cambridge University and then in America, form a critical part of this body of information.

Twenty-seven interviews ranging from formal and structured, usually with academics or university administrators, to more casual conversations in social or other informal surroundings were conducted. These involved friends⁴ and Schreiner family⁵ members. The process and the technique followed were based upon standard professional oral history guidelines. These are perhaps best described (Grele n.d.) as follows:

Oral history is not only getting the facts, it is the process of pushing memory, language and ideology as far as possible to bring into articulation the horizon of the interviewee, to understand how those facts are understood. (p. 1)

The image of Deneys Schreiner, as constructed in family, collegial and associated memories, has been described as that of a central figure (Gardner 2008) on the Pietermaritzburg campus of Natal University:

He and his thinking stood out firmly and visibly; there was something permanent and reassuring about him ... In fact, he was in his own very special way, an icon ... A cross between some of the old fashioned depictions of God the Father ... and Charles Darwin ... But if he was a sort of god or a venerable hero-figure, he was an extremely friendly and kindly one. (p. 85)

The informants were told in advance what the purpose of the interviews was and that what they said would be used for

1. *Alan Paton Centre & Struggle Archives (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*. 95APB16: KZN Oral History Project, Schreiner interview by Vigne, 12 April 1995. Cf. History Workshop 2004 (comp.), 'Oral History: A Guide for Educators' University of the Witwatersrand (Mpumalanga Provincial Government Department of Education) [pamphlet in library 1. Alan Paton Centre & Struggle Archives (University of KwaZulu-Natal)]. 95APB16: KZN Oral History Project, Schreiner interview by Vigne, 12 April 1995. Cf. History Workshop 2004 (comp.), 'Oral History: A Guide for Educators' University of the Witwatersrand (Mpumalanga Provincial Government Department of Education) [pamphlet in library of the National Archives of South Africa].

2. *Private Papers*. Schreiner Correspondance: G.D.L. Schreiner Letters.

3. *Private Papers*. Schreiner Correspondance: O.D. Schreiner Letters.

4. *Oral Interviews: In person; telephonic and email verifications*. Includes John Laband, 2016, childhood friend and academic colleague.

5. *Oral Interviews: In person; telephonic and email verifications*. Includes Deneys Schreiner (son of G.D.L. Schreiner), Heather Schreiner (daughter-in-law) and Lyndall Schreiner (granddaughter) in 2017.

research purposes and may well be published. All agreed to this, except for one family member who flatly refused to cooperate in any way whatsoever with the project.

The writing of the biography of Deneys Schreiner was shaped by a choice and an absence. A comprehensive three-volume history of the University of Natal has recently appeared (Guest 2015, 2017, 2018), which enabled the biography to be focused on family, public and political issues, rather than on academic administration. That was the choice. The letters between Oliver Schreiner and his soldier son, Deneys Schreiner, are missing for the war year 1944. This necessitated a reliance on published secondary sources and oral testimony to fill in the absence for this crucial year and for the period in the mid-1950s when Deneys Schreiner taught at the University of the Witwatersrand and before the family moved to Pietermaritzburg in 1959.

Oral testimony is of immense value to a biographer. It can confirm or clarify obscure textual references and provide insights into personalities rarely found in written texts. The practice of oral history in South Africa since the advent of democracy has been promoted as a means of capturing and conserving the stories of marginalised and neglected people whose lives and struggles are not highlighted in the official documentation. These are, therefore, not often found in libraries and archives. However, as a technique, it also illuminates what remains opaque in official records and provides context to otherwise narrow or dry narratives.

When one considers the intrinsic male bias in official documentation, oral history offers a unique method for balancing the record. Testimony provided by women demonstrates a 'text' that is a composite of history, community, family and cultural memories. This goes beyond a self-centred focus, but indicates concern and care for families, community interests and other people (Magwaza 2013). A cursory examination of the archives of the University of Natal for the 1970s and 1980s reveals that the governing bodies of the university, like most institutions in apartheid South Africa, were male dominated (and almost exclusively white). Just under half the informants interviewed for this project were women, and the three or four most important informants were women.

Two key informants were Colleen Vietzen, a former University Librarian, and Jennifer Verbeek. Colleen Vietzen,⁶ as one of the relatively few senior university female administrators, provided interesting insights into Deneys Schreiner's abilities as a university leader and staunch supporter of the library and free access to information. She also pointed out that he was more sensitive to the challenges faced by women in the university academic and administrative environments than many of the other male professors of the day had been.

6. Oral Interviews: In person; telephonic and email verifications. Colleen Vietzen, 28 October 2016, academic colleague [interview].

Jennifer Verbreek⁷ was both an academic at the university and a close family friend. Her husband had also been a close colleague of Deneys Schreiner. Her perspectives were, therefore, well-rounded, enriching and amusing. She provided details on family matters, academic life and even on university discipline. All in all, her perspectives, and her ability to make connections between familial, professional and political matters, were unique. She epitomised what Magwaza values in female oral testimony.

The oral testimony obtained from the Schreiner family, colleagues and friends was, therefore, invaluable. A total of 27 interviews were conducted. Some were formal and structured, some were informal and some originated in conversations at social gatherings that were followed up and contextualised in exchanges of emails. Evidence given orally was, whenever possible, cross-checked against published sources or oral testimony from other witnesses of (or participants in) the same events. When discrepancies were discovered, the informants were notified, and sometimes, they modified their information, or justified their interpretations, more coherently or emphatically.

Deneys Schreiner's life has been explored from both private and public perspectives. His family life, his academic career and his involvement and leadership in public affairs have been examined. His military service during the Second World War represents a crossover between the personal and the public. The stress of wartime revealed many of his personal qualities, and the correspondence with his father revealed the thoughts and opinions of an intelligent young man well informed about world events and South African politics. His political activism and his family background led to his most public and consequential involvement, namely, his appointment as Chairman (as it was then described) of the Buthelezi Commission in the early 1980s. This was the first time that black South Africans had initiated an investigation into the constitutional future of South Africa. KwaZulu Chief Minister, Mangosuthu Buthelezi selected Deneys Schreiner for this task because of his prominent public profile and his liberal reputation and because his grandfather had defended Buthelezi's grandfather, King Dinuzulu kaCetshwayo against treason charges in 1909 (Dominy 2020:4).

To place all this in context, one must begin with the grandparents as critical relationships in the 1980s had their roots in the first decade of the 20th century.

W.P. Schreiner (1857–1919)

William Philip Schreiner was the son of Gottlob Schreiner and his wife Rebecca Lyndall, both missionaries (Schoeman 1991:13). Despite a chequered career as a missionary and as a businessman, his children received good education, and William and his sister, Olive, were both extremely well read and schooled, although only William, as a boy, received a

7. Oral Interviews: In person; telephonic and email verifications. Jennifer Verbeek, 2016-2017, family friend [several interviews and reminiscences]

formal tertiary education. He went to the South African College in Cape Town and then on to Downing College at Cambridge to study law. His academic results were outstanding, and he loved the university, which he described as 'Jerusalem and Athens in one' (Walker 1937:22).

William was admitted as a barrister in London but began his legal career in Cape Town. He was an adviser to the Governor and many leading politicians before moving into politics himself. Elected to the legislature in 1893, he immediately became Attorney General and supported Cecil John Rhodes until he broke with him over the Jameson Raid. In 1898, he was elected as the Premier of the Cape Colony and clashed with the High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner. William campaigned for the holding of an Anglo-Boer conference in Bloemfontein in May 1899 in an effort to forestall the outbreak of war (Pakenham 1979:60).

William Schreiner married F.H. (Frances Hester) Reitz, a sister of the President of the Orange Free State, F.W. (Francis William) Reitz. This gave him a strong connection to the leadership of the Boer republics and reinforced his antipathy to the aggressive and imperialistic policies of top British officials such as Alfred Milner and Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State of the Colonies. Milner interfered in Cape politics and succeeded in undermining William's position as Premier, forcing his resignation in June 1900, although they parted with many expressions of mutual esteem (Walker 1937:233–234).

William Schreiner's views evolved throughout his political career. When seeking office in the Cape, he annoyed Olive by repeating the paternalistic and almost contemptuous remarks of the colonists towards the African population. His election manifesto in 1893 contained a 'robust keep-the-native-in-his-place effusion' (Walker 1937:272). He later attributed what he called his 'Damascene Moment',⁸ to a meeting he had with John Tengo Jabavu, editor of the first black-owned newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu*, during an official visit to the Transkei. It was the first time he had met an African who was his educational and intellectual match (Walker 1937:129).

William discovered that he was talking to an educated, intelligent man who was being discriminated against. William's period in the political wilderness, from late 1900 until 1908, also gave him time to reflect and rethink his own casual and ignorant bigotry. The war being fought so savagely between the two so-called civilised white groups in South Africa, while the black communities by and large conducted themselves in a more civilised manner, also had a profound impact on him. Then, as he began to look to fight for a seat in Parliament again, he realised that John Jabavu could mobilise those black voters on the roll in support of him; after all, William was a politician (Walker 1937:270–271).

8. A biblical reference to the experience of St Paul on the road to Damascus.

The re-elected Member of Parliament was already an elder statesman in 1908, and South Africa was on the path to unification. William was nominated as a Cape delegate to the National Convention that was to be held in Durban in 1909. However, William went to Natal on a different mission: he had been asked by the Governor, Sir Matthew Nathan, supported by the British Colonial Office (with Winston Churchill as a junior minister), if he would conduct the defence of the deposed Zulu king, Dinuzulu kaCetshwayo, who had been arrested by the Natal Government on very dubious treason charges in the aftermath of the Bambatha Rebellion (Marks 1970:272).

William faced an acute dilemma: should he attend the National Convention and work towards a new liberal constitution? Or should he follow his humanitarian impulse and defend Dinuzulu from the spurious charges against him? He tried to manage both, but the authorities in Pietermaritzburg manipulated the court dates and the schedule of the convention so William was forced to pick one or the other. He chose to defend Dinuzulu and hence spent his time at the special court in Greytown rather than at the political convention in Durban (Walker 1937:277–279).

William was praised for his legal achievement. Dinuzulu was acquitted of most of the major charges, but nevertheless the Natal Government jailed him after he was found guilty on some of the minor charges. This aroused protests from London to Pretoria, let alone from the Zulu people themselves. The important London journal *Spectator* praised William as, 'The ablest counsel in South Africa' (1909:2). Louis Botha, soon to be Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, was particularly aggrieved by the sentence as he was a longstanding friend of Dinuzulu, and he ordered Dinuzulu's release on the very day that the Union of South Africa was proclaimed, 31 May 1910 (Laband 2018:303).

The most powerful figures at the National Convention were the Transvaal leaders, generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts who favoured a close union between the four component parts of what was to become one country. Natal, under weak political leadership, favoured federation, but did not favour political rights for Africans and Indians. The Transvaal and the Orange Free State favoured close union but were also against political rights for Africans and Indians. The Cape wanted to retain its own non-racial political franchise (Thompson 1971:325–364). Of course, at this time in South Africa's history, no women, of any race, had the franchise.

There were very few politicians of stature who favoured federation and the extension of political rights across racial lines, and one of them was William Schreiner. The machinations of the Natal Government kept William out of Durban so he could not influence the convention and fight for the inclusion of non-racial political rights in the draft *South Africa Act* that was to become the constitution of the new Union of South Africa after ratification by the United

Kingdom Parliament and assent by the King. Cape delegates managed to preserve voting and civil rights within their new province, but the Union Parliament could remove these by a two-thirds majority. William Schreiner sent an angry telegram from Greytown (Walker 1969) calling the bill:

Narrow, illiberal and short sighted in conception of the people of South Africa. The great majority are not of European race or descent and their rights and future are not adequately safeguarded or provided for by maintaining temporary privileges of Cape natives or coloured electors. (pp. 313–314)

William then joined a delegation to London to try to persuade the British Government and Parliament not to approve of the *South Africa Act*, and this mission was a failure (Thompson 1971:357).

When the Union Parliament was constituted, William Schreiner accepted the nomination as a senator representing the interests of the disenfranchised African population. He was alarmed by the illiberal direction of the new Union Government, but his concern was tempered by the respect he had for General Louis Botha whose act in releasing Dinuzulu had resulted in widespread approval being expressed (Marks 1970:303). Unfortunately, his misgivings were not unfounded and battles that had been settled in the Cape had to be refought in the broader arena of Union. Olive Schreiner regretfully remarked: 'The waggon of South Africa is beginning to make a *long* slide backward on the muddy road of time' (Walker 1969:339).

William tried to resist the slide. He opposed the *1913 Native Land Act*, without success, and promoted broad human rights, including extending the franchise to women. In 1913, he submitted a petition from African women in the Free State protesting the imposition of the pass laws that were aimed at them. The petition was politely received and then ignored (Walker 1969:351). The following year, William visited London, and while he was in the British capital, the South African High Commissioner died. Louis Botha asked him to take over the position to which he agreed. Then, the First World War broke out and William remained in his position throughout the war, despite increasing ill-health, until his death in June 1919. Jan Smuts and Louis Botha were in France for the negotiations for the Treaty of Versailles and hastened over to London to his funeral. Among the family members able to attend were his wife, Frances Schreiner; his sister, Olive Schreiner; his elder daughter; and many prominent figures in South African history, including his former political foe Milner (Walker 1937:381).

William Schreiner was not a liberal at the beginning of his career, but his views were changed by his interactions with members of the educated African elite in the Cape. He came to realise that a political system wherein an ill-educated white wagon driver could vote, but an African university graduate could not, was utterly flawed. He was also challenged and inspired by other members of his family, including Olive Schreiner, but above all he was motivated by

a sense of duty and a commitment to service (Walker 1937:131).

It is an unanswerable question as to whether William Schreiner's presence at the National Convention would have significantly influenced the *South Africa Act*. Powerful forces shaped the Union, including General Louis Botha, General Jan Smuts and influential representatives of the mining industry. None of these were politically liberal. William felt that it was the right decision to defend Dinuzulu as he had accepted him as a client before the dates of the Convention were set. Of greater importance is the fact the William felt that race relations were in a perilous state. Therefore, it would be a better example for him, as a white man, to defend a black man at a time when human rights for Africans were being attacked. Had he been present in Durban, his voice would have strengthened the minority report that went to London along with the draft law of the Union, but it is unlikely that it would have changed the outcome (Walker 1937:293).

The flaws in the *South Africa Act*, particularly regarding the voting rights for mixed-race people who had been protected in the Cape province, would come back to haunt the next generation of Schreiners.

O.D. Schreiner (1890–1980)

William Philip (W.P.) Schreiner was survived by his widow Frances Reitz and their adult children, two boys and two girls. One of the boys was Oliver Deneys (O.D.) Schreiner who followed his father's footsteps into a brilliant legal career and has been described as, 'the greatest Chief Justice that South Africa never had' (Kahn 1983:1).

Oliver was born in 1890, and his childhood and adolescence paralleled his father's progression into liberalism. As he came to understand these principles, initially in the context of the events of his father's life, they underpinned the philosophical influences imparted through his education. After studying in South Africa, he went to Britain and completed his studies at Trinity College, Cambridge University. Oliver Schreiner could easily have won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford but, given his father's disillusionment with Rhodes over the Jameson Raid, this would not have been possible as 'no Schreiner [...] would take [...] such a gift from such a man' (Paton 1964:16).

Towards the end of Oliver's time at Cambridge, the First World War broke out and he joined the British Army. He saw active service as an officer in the trenches in France and was wounded in action at the Battle of the Somme. He was awarded the Military Cross for his gallantry (Kahn 1980:566–615). At the conclusion of hostilities, Oliver returned to Britain where he completed his legal studies and was admitted to the London bar as a barrister. He returned to South Africa and opened a practice as an advocate in Johannesburg. Activism entered his life in 1923 when he was one of a small group of advocates who fought to open

membership of the bar to all races (Selvan 1994). In December of that same year, his youngest son, G.D.L. (George Deneys Lyndall) Schreiner was born to his wife Edna (Dominy 2020:17).

Oliver's career progressed impressively, and in 1937, he was offered an appointment as a judge on the bench of the Transvaal Provincial Division of the Supreme Court. Before accepting the appointment, he wrote⁹ to General Jan Smuts, the then Deputy Prime Minister, to express his reservations that the offer should have gone to Adv. P. (Philip) Millin, the then most senior advocate at the Transvaal Bar. Millin's wife was the well-known biographer of both Cecil Rhodes and Jan Smuts, S.G. (Sarah Gertrude) Millin (Dominy 2020:18):

I have the clear impression that he would have been appointed had he not been a Jew. If this is so it would be extremely distasteful to me to commence my work as a dispenser of justice by being, in effect, a party to an injustice.

Jan Smuts hastened to reassure him that no prejudice or anti-semitism was involved, so Oliver took the position and Philip Millin became a judge a few months later (Anon, 1952). Eight years, and another world war later, Oliver was elevated to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court (now the Supreme Court of Appeal) that sat in Bloemfontein. He spent the rest of his judicial career as a member of what was then South Africa's apex court and confronted legal challenges that required as much moral courage as the physical courage he had demonstrated in action during the First World War (Dominy 2020:18).

Before considering these challenges, it is necessary to highlight an important trial Oliver presided over during the Second World War. South Africa's war effort was hampered by anti-British sentiment and by a vocal segment of outright pro-Nazi support in sections of the Afrikaner community. One Nazi supporter, who was arrested in 1942 and charged with treason, was Robey Leibbrandt, an extreme Afrikaner Nationalist, fervent Nazi, German spy and former South African Olympic boxer. The case was heard before Oliver Schreiner who found Leibbrandt guilty of treason and sentenced him to death (Kahn 1983:574). Mindful of the fracas that resulted from the execution of Jopie Fourie in the First World War, the Prime Minister, General Jan Smuts, advised the Governor General to commute the sentence to life imprisonment. The new National Party Government pardoned and freed Robey Leibbrandt after the 1948 election. It is quite possible that this event aroused Afrikaner Nationalist hostility towards Oliver Schreiner long before he took his judicial stand against the removal of the mixed-race people from the common voters' roll in the 1950s (Dominy 2020:18).

The National Party won the general election in 1948 with a slim majority of seats in Parliament, despite receiving fewer votes overall than the United Party. D.F. Malan, the new Prime Minister, set about entrenching racial segregation,

9. *Private Papers*. O.D. Schreiner Letters, 10 February 1937, O.D. Schreiner to Smuts [File 1939–1943].

which rapidly became known as 'apartheid'. He was also determined to entrench his party in power, and removing mixed-race voters from the common voters' roll in the Cape province would kill two birds with one stone for him. However, the D.F. Malan Government lacked the necessary two-thirds majority required to amend this clause in the constitution, the old *South Africa Act*, opposed by William Schreiner many decades earlier (De Villiers 1975:405–406).

Despite this hurdle, D.F. Malan forced the *Separate Representation of Voters Bill* through Parliament with a simple majority. It was signed into law by the Governor General, but a case was promptly taken up by the courts and it reached the Appellate Division where the Chief Justice and the judges, including Oliver Schreiner, struck it down in April 1952. This was the very month that the Nationalists were arranging the 300th anniversary celebrations of the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck to establish the Dutch settlement at the Cape (Dominy 2020:19).

Undaunted, the Malan Government decided that Parliament should be the ultimate arbiter of its own legislation and passed the *High Court of Parliament Act* to that effect. Sitting as a court, Parliament then overruled the Appellate Court decision. Litigation continued and the Appellate Division declared the *High Court of Parliament Act* invalid. Prime Minister Malan and the Nationalists were not to be beaten so they changed the mathematics: the Senate was packed with enough government-nominated senators to give Malan his two-thirds majority when both houses sat together. As an additional precaution, the number of judges in the Appellate Division was doubled with the new judges all being government supporters (De Villiers 1975:405–406).

The first that Oliver Schreiner heard of the appointment of the new judges on the court was from the court registrar who heard it on the radio. 'There it is', Oliver wrote to his wife Edna, '[...] the only course is to take things philosophically, reminding oneself of the relative unimportance of the affair in the general scheme of things'.¹⁰

The odds were now totally stacked in the government's favour, the legislation entered the statute books and the enlarged Appellate Division acquiesced, with Justice Oliver Schreiner as the only dissenter. From then until 1994, mixed-race people in South Africa lost their voting rights, except for token representation under the Tricameral system in the 1980s (Dominy 2020:20).

Oliver Schreiner's dogged resistance to the apartheid government's legal machinations accounts for the fact that no Nationalist Prime Minister, or Minister of Justice, was prepared to allow him to become Chief Justice, no matter how senior he was, and what the precedents were. In 2008, then Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke¹¹ delivered the

10. *Private Papers*. Schreiner Letters, 26 March 1955, O.D. Schreiner to Edna [File 1955].

11. Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke was denied the Chief Justiceship of South Africa for political reasons.

annual Oliver Schreiner Memorial Lecture at the University of the Witwatersrand. He remarked (Moseneke 2008) on Oliver Schreiner's privileged background, his illustrious family and yet it was Oliver's steadfastness which fascinated the judge:

He did not need a social conscience or public spiritedness. He could have lived his life without the political fallout that led to the stunting of his bright judicial career by political executive disapproval. If he had stayed within his elitist confines he would have risen to become the Chief Justice, which he never was. (n.p.)

The mantle was passed on to the next generation, and so, the focus shifted to Oliver's second son.

G.D.L. Schreiner (1923–2008)

Professor George Deneys Lyndall Schreiner (hereafter referred to as Deneys), the second son of Oliver and Edna Schreiner, was born in Johannesburg in 1923. He completed his schooling at St John's Diocesan College, matriculating in 1939 at the age of 15 years, shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War. As he was not old enough to join the armed forces, he registered at the University of the Witwatersrand for a BSc degree in chemistry. Completing his qualification in 1942, he immediately enlisted in the Union Defence Force as a gunner in the artillery (Gardner 2008:83–85). Given his education, love of sport, famous name and social standing, his enlistment in the ranks and not as an officer somewhat annoyed the military hierarchy.¹²

Deneys served in North Africa and in Italy with the South African 6th Armoured Division. He was part of the force that liberated the Renaissance city of Florence later that year before the campaign bogged down in front of strong German fortifications, known as the Gothic Line (Orpen 1975:164). Here the enemy held out until the spring of 1945 when the Allies were able to break through and liberate northern Italy before the Germans finally surrendered (Kros 1992:284).

Deneys was a regular and lively correspondent. His letters to his father, William, his mother, Edna and other family members provide colourful detail about life for young South Africans during wartime in Egypt and the Mediterranean theatre of operations. Strict military censorship precluded him from commenting on actions and campaign matters, but his entertaining writing style vividly conveyed the tedium, discomfort, stresses, tensions and humour of army life. His insights into politics and world affairs were astute for a young man in his early twenties (Schreiner Letters: Files 1943, 1945).

The young war veteran did not return to South Africa at the end of the war but travelled directly from Italy to Britain where he registered at Trinity College, Cambridge, as his father had done before him. Deneys embarked on an

abbreviated version of the Natural Science Tripos (having been given some credits for his University of the Witwatersrand BSc). He was a food lover who had experienced several years of army rations, and consequently, he objected to the rationing system still enforce in post-war Britain (Dominy 2020:52). Post-war Cambridge played a pivotal role in maintaining British scientific and intellectual pre-eminence across the Commonwealth and in the Transatlantic and European academic world, and Deneys was fitting into this network (Jöns 2016:94–114).

In 1946, Deneys was able to return home for the first time since 1943. On this visit, he renewed a brief and slight acquaintance he had made at the University of the Witwatersrand, with a young woman named Else Kops who had also been studying for a BSc, but a year or two behind him. On this occasion, they clicked. Else Kops obtained a research grant and followed him to England in 1948, the year in which the Nationalists came to power in South Africa and the year in which Deneys sat his final undergraduate examinations. It was also the year Deneys and Else Kops became engaged and they were married on 22 January 1949 (Dominy 2020:58–60).

Deneys and Else Kops settled in a flat in Cambridge, while he tackled his PhD in inorganic chemistry, which he completed in 1951. During this time, Else gave birth to their first child, a boy, and they named him Oliver. Over the years, the family grew to include two boys (Oliver and Deneys) and two girls (Jennifer and Barbara). Their son Oliver died in a tragic accident in Cambridge in 1977, leaving a young wife and a baby daughter (Dominy 2020:121).

Having completed and defended his PhD, Deneys and his little family moved to the United States where he took up a visiting position at Pennsylvania State College, now Pennsylvania State University (Dominy 2020:62). This was at a time when the United States was swept by a wave of anti-Communist hysteria, whipped up by Senator Joe McCarthy and hence known as McCarthyism (Kutler 1982:184). The paranoia affected the universities, and one of the results was that universities were required to administer oaths of allegiance to the United States to both staff and students (Shrecker 1999). This affected Deneys, and his resolution of the puzzle was imaginative and amusing. He conformed to the requirements by submitting a letter declaring that he would not attempt to overthrow the Government of the United States by force unless it was at war with the Union of South Africa.¹³

Oral testimony from a single individual requires verification, and Pennsylvania State University was contacted. The response was to acknowledge that the broad outline of the oral information was accurate, but Deneys' original letter could no longer be located. The respondents at Pennsylvania State University also shared their surprise at discovering that the oath of loyalty was still on the books although it was no

12. Oral Interviews: *In person; telephonic and email verifications.* Else Schreiner, 01 September 2016, wife [interview].

13. Interview: Else Schreiner, 01 September 2016.

longer enforced (Dominy 2020:70). The interview with Else Schreiner on this issue contributed to the development of Deneys' image as a man of principle as well as an astute manipulator of bureaucracy.

The Schreiner family returned home in 1953 to find his father Oliver was deeply embroiled in the legal crisis over the removal of the mixed-race people from the common voters' roll. The Nationalists won the general election in 1953, and this prompted a split in the opposition United Party with the more enlightened members forming the Liberal Party (Vigne 1997:19). The most prominent public figures in the new party were politicians such as Senator Brookes and Margaret Ballinger Member of Parliament, with Alan Paton providing what would today be called the 'celebrity' face (Dominy 2020:82). Deneys joined the new party on the very first day of its existence, together with his sister. The Liberals were strongly opposed to apartheid but divided on whether there should be a universal or a qualified franchise. Deneys firmly supported a universal franchise, termed 'one-man-one-vote' at the time. The party also debated whether to attend the Congress of the People at Kliptown, where the Freedom Charter was adopted, or not. In the end, their absence weakened their position in the eyes of the African National Congress (ANC) and its closer allies, even though there were Liberals who joined the armed struggle and committed acts of sabotage (Dominy 2020:83).

The break was not complete, and young African intellectuals paid heed to some of the liberal voices. Chief Justice Pius Langa said during his 1999 Alan Paton Lecture:

We did listen intently to what was being said about us in Parliament and elsewhere, the Margaret Ballingers, Edgar Brookes, Helen Suzman and others. I think these, Helen Suzman in particular, were classified as good guys. (n.p.)

In 1959, Deneys left the University of the Witwatersrand and became a professor of inorganic chemistry at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. He was drawn into local liberal politics from the very start. White English-speaking Natal was strenuously opposed to South Africa becoming a republic and leaving the Commonwealth. Deneys joined the committee organising the 1960 Natal Convention, which was one of the first attempts to devise a constitutional alternative to the oppressive central government's racially defined structures. His participation was at a junior level, and the minutes of the organising committee in the Alan Paton Centre refer to the fact that Professor Deneys Schreiner was responsible for arranging the ashtrays.¹⁴ This is entirely appropriate given that he was a heavy smoker¹⁵ for most of his life.

In the year of the Soweto Uprising, 1976, Deneys was appointed as the Vice Principal and Head of the University of

Natal in Pietermaritzburg. He held this post until his retirement in 1987 (Gardner 2008:83). The tensions in the years following the Soweto Uprising affected the entire country, including the universities. The incoming prime minister, P.W. Botha, began tinkering with the constitution, a process that eventually led to the Tricameral Parliament. Deneys saw this as an opportunity for the creation of a forum in which alternative views could be expressed.

With the support of the university authorities behind him (and funding from big business), Deneys arranged an academic conference, 'Constitutional Models and Constitutional Change in South Africa', that was hosted at the university in Pietermaritzburg from 14 to 16 February 1978. Given the restrictions imposed by the apartheid government, a wide range of opinions were represented, from what the media called *verligte* Nationalists, across the spectrum to the moderate left. There were also a few black participants, which was a rarity in the late 1970s.

This conference marks the point in the research project where oral testimony concerning a public event became as important as documentary and other sources. Two academics, professors John Benyon¹⁶ and Douglas Irvine¹⁷ from the disciplines of history and political science, were tasked with making the arrangements at short notice. They both expressed their admiration for Deneys ability to steer a pioneering academic conference through political whirlpools. After the conference, an influential set of conference papers that attracted considerable attention in political and academic circles was published (Benyon 1978). However, there was no reaction from the apartheid government.

P.W. Botha had put his faith in a new nominated legislative and advisory body known as the President's Council, which fleshed out what was to become the Tricameral Constitution. This provided the Indian and mixed-race communities with representation in 'toothless' chambers in an enlarged parliament. However, no move was made to address the fundamental inequities of apartheid or confront the unworkable concept that Africans would only have political rights in the independent homelands: P.W. Botha was adamant that the Bantustan policy was not up for discussion (Worden 1994:131).

This intransigence was challenged by the leader of the KwaZulu homeland, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who, while he had begun treading a different path to that of the ANC to which he had once pledged allegiance, nevertheless refused all offers of 'independence' for the scattered fragments of KwaZulu from Pretoria. He decided to establish his own commission in opposition to the proposals of the President's Council, and he had been studying the process that Deneys had initiated a year or two earlier (Dominy 2020:151).

14. Alan Paton Centre & Struggle Archives (University of KwaZulu-Natal). PC 101, Ainslie Papers, PC 21/9/5/3, Natal Convention Organising Committee, 1961.

15. Oral Interviews: In person; telephonic and email verifications. Else Schreiner, 01 September 2016, wife [interview].

16. Oral Interviews: In person; telephonic and email verifications. John Benyon, 11 January 2018, academic colleague [reminiscences].

17. Oral Interviews: In person; telephonic and email verifications. Douglas Irvine, 15 January 2018, academic colleague and family friend [interview].

In early 1980, Buthelezi arrived in Deneys' office at the university to ask him to lead his proposed new commission. Deneys was a chemist by training, and there were numerous eminent lawyers and judges who could have undertaken the task (Dominy 2020:4). However, although Buthelezi had been influenced by the success of the conference Deneys had organised a year or two earlier, there was an even more important consideration from the Zulu leader's perspective: Mangosuthu Buthelezi's maternal grandfather was King Dinuzulu and he turned to Deneys, as the grandson of the man who had defended his grandfather against bogus treason charges in 1908 and 1909. All this was in addition to Deneys' 'impeccable liberal credentials'.¹⁸ It was also Deneys who insisted that the commission be called the Buthelezi Commission. This was confirmed by Buthelezi himself, as well as Schreiner informants when questioned as part of the project research (Dominy 2020:156).

Deneys worked hard to obtain as broad participation as possible under the restrictions of the apartheid government. The Nationalists were utterly hostile to the commission and determined to treat it as entirely an internal Bantustan affair. Left-wing organisations were either banned internally, isolated or in exile, so there were no ANC or Pan Africanist Congress voices. The New Republic Party, the last remnant of the once powerful United Party of General Smuts, clung unimaginatively to its last vestiges of power in the Natal Provincial Council. It participated reluctantly and made no meaningful contribution. Nevertheless, a wide range of voices from civil society organisations, including labour and business, supported the strong academic and diverse contingent and were included (Dominy 2020:160).

Professor Lawrence Boule compared the contents and quality of the Buthelezi Commission report and the report of the President's Council, which came out at more or less the same time and took an unfavourable view of the latter report (Boule 1982:173). Boule pointed out that each report identified common areas of concern and advocated similar structures of 'consociational' government (Boule 1982: 257–305). The Buthelezi report was rooted in extensive socio-economic and political analysis, and it posited a complicated, but workable, power-sharing provincial government for KwaZulu-Natal that was inspired by clearly discernible liberal principles. P.W. Botha's government rejected the Buthelezi report out of hand. The President's Council's report was also gutted, although some of its recommendations were included in the Tricameral constitution in a watered-down version (Dominy 2020:167).

The Buthelezi Commission report did, however, have an influence on constitutional and administrative developments in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) region and, to a lesser extent, in the country at large. Buthelezi pressed for the establishment of a joint authority in KZN based on the report (Dominy 2020:176). Eventually, P.W. Botha reluctantly conceded that a

measure of shared power could be exercised by the KZN Joint Executive Authority (JEA) recommended by the commission. It was to be jointly headed by the Administrator of Natal, Radcliffe Cadman, and by Buthelezi himself. There was a cascading arrangement of joint liaison committees and shared meetings that went some way to reducing the absurdity of divided administrative control in KZN (Lynch 1987:231–248).

To Deneys' deepest regret, the JEA also provided the framework within which harsh repressive measures in the province occurred during the dying days of apartheid. The menacing so-called Third Force (in which Inkatha was heavily involved) was sheltered behind the confidentiality of JEA operations. Local authorities, military and police commanders could cross provincial and homeland 'borders' in peri-urban and peri-rural areas without fear of official consequences (Maré & Hamilton 1987:166–167). The liberal aspirations Deneys Schreiner took to his work on the Buthelezi Commission were thwarted by the structures of the JEA, a stepchild of the commission.

Another development in Deneys' gradual break with Buthelezi came in early 1984 when the KwaZulu leader demanded that medical students on KwaZulu Government bursaries sign pledges of loyalty to Inkatha and agree not to denigrate him as the homeland leader. Deneys was one of the leaders of a university delegation that visited Ulundi to attempt to convince the Chief Minister of the intellectual need to respect academic freedom and of the practical need to staff the KwaZulu health service. While they achieved some success in their endeavours, the gap between the Inkatha leader and the university professor was widening dramatically. This incident also harkened back to Deneys' own experiences¹⁹ with the loyalty pledge in the United States in the early 1950s.

Yet from the bleak past came the new democratic dawn, and after fits and starts, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa and multi-lateral negotiating processes delivered the interim constitution, which was partly informed by the work of the Buthelezi Commission.²⁰

Deneys completed his term as Vice Principal in September 1987, but there was no pleasant glide into retirement (Gardner 2008:83–85). Shortly before his official retirement, Jennifer (Jenny), his elder daughter, was detained under the draconian Section 29 of the *Internal Security Act*, the toughest anti-terrorism legislation then in force (Dominy 2020:183). Jenny, who had secretly joined the South African Communist Party, had been engaged in acts of sabotage on behalf of uMkhonto we Sizwe (Simpson 2016:411–412). This was a shattering blow to the family, and on retirement, Deneys and Else raced to Cape Town to support Jenny through the

19. Oral Interviews: *In person; telephonic and email verifications.* Else Schreiner (wife) and Douglas Irvine (academic colleague and family friend), 2017 [interviews].

20. Oral Interviews: *In person; telephonic and email verifications.* Jennifer Schreiner, 05 April 2017, daughter [interview, the informant was a participant at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa].

18. Oral Interviews: *In person; telephonic and email verifications.* Arthur Konigkramer, 2018, informant and intermediary with Hon. Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi MP [email].

protracted trial that only began in 1988. She was finally indemnified in 1991 (Schreiner 2000:243).

What is relevant here is that the dominant family narrative is that of complete unity behind Jenny and implacable resistance in the face of the trauma and of oppression. However, a close Schreiner family friend and academic colleague of Deneys' described the extent of the shock on the family at the time of Jenny's detention. Deneys went through the stages of anger, remorse and grief, common to most trauma sufferers. He was particularly agitated by Jenny's decision to resort to armed resistance when the family's liberal traditions favoured peaceful protest.²¹ However, this tension was not revealed or discussed in any way by Schreiner family informants (Dominy 2020:184).

Discrepancies between oral and written sources

The Schreiner family firmly believed a story that, during his military service in the Second World War, Deneys Schreiner disobeyed a direct order. The extent to which Deneys himself was the sole author of this story, as opposed to elaborations made by other family members over the years, is difficult to determine, as Deneys died in 2008. According to the family reminiscences, as the South African 6th Armoured Division advanced against German forces retreating from the ancient and historic city of Florence, a senior officer ordered the artillery battery in which Gunner Deneys Schreiner was serving to open fire on the dome of Florence's magnificent Renaissance cathedral. The battery commander refused, and the senior officer ordered the second-in-command to open fire and he in turn refused. Down the line, the orders came to Deneys who also refused²² to open fire. In this family narrative, the senior officer gave up in disgust in the face of this determined stand, and thus, a war crime was averted. Disobeying an order on the field of battle during wartime was, and still is, a court martial offence, but nothing happened.

Once this story was interrogated, firstly by checking the variations given in the accounts of various family members, the more suspect the story became. Extensive historical and archival research was then undertaken, and it became clear from a careful reading of the published military campaign histories that it was highly unlikely (Dominy 2020:44). The Allied Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean, Field Marshal Lord Alexander, had given a direct order that the city of Florence should be spared, and the Germans agreed to withdraw without damaging the city's cultural treasures. In other words, Florence was declared an 'open city'.

Alexander's order was passed down by the general commanding the South African 6th Armoured Division, Major General Everard Poole (Orpen 1975:166). If any officer

had disobeyed a direct order coming from the very top, that officer would have been court-martialled. There is no evidence in the South African National Defence Force Archives of such a court martial taking place. Neither are there any black marks in Deneys Schreiner's service record.²³ Archival research also shows that the senior officer in the position to give the order was a gallant, reliable and intelligent soldier who was promoted and sent off to Britain for advanced training soon after the event allegedly happened (Orpen 1975:159).

According to Portelli (2006), oral history tells us less about events than about their meaning (Portelli 2006:36), and the recounting of this incident by the family serves to establish Deneys Schreiner, at a very young age, as a man of integrity who was prepared to stand his ground in the face of oppressive authority. A similar narrative trajectory is clear from the accounts of Deneys' relationship with Professor Owen Horwood, a right-wing Principal of the University of Natal who later became a National Party cabinet minister. The student newspaper was a vociferous critic of the principal who demanded that the Student President order the paper to cease its criticism. The concerned student leader consulted Deneys who advised²⁴ him to write to Horwood telling him that he was consulting on the matter and to take no further action, thus adhering to the letter of the law, but not implementing the undemocratic spirit of the letter.

There is also a very minor incident that arose where oral evidence corrected a mistake that arose from misinterpreting the written record. When he was writing home from Egypt, Deneys addressed a letter to the family dog, 'Handy', at least that is what the handwriting²⁵ looked like. Presenting one of the older family members with some photographs, during an interview,²⁶ elicited the remark: 'Oh, that was his dog 'Hardy' – they had two dogs, Laurel and Hardy – after the famous comedy duo of the silent movies' era.

Although this is not a discrepancy, comparing private writings and speeches with official records, helps in identifying unnamed compilers of official documentation. In the late 1960s, the government appointed a commission, chaired by Judge Van Wyk De Vries, to investigate university financing. The University of Natal, with campuses in both Durban and Pietermaritzburg, pleaded that it was a special case. Deneys, in his personal Curriculum Vitae, claimed to have played a large part in drafting the university's input to the commission. The documentation exists in the National Archives of South Africa, and the special pleading for the maintenance of separate libraries in Durban and

23. South African National Defence Force Documentation Centre. WW2 Service Record G.D.L. Schreiner (Force No. 330219V).

24. Oral Interviews: *In person; telephonic and email verifications*. Partick Stilwell, 03 October 2017, former student leader (confirmed by email) [interview].

25. *Private Papers*. Schreiner Letters, 02 May 1943, Deneys to 'Hardy' [File 1939-1943].

26. Oral Interviews: *In person; telephonic and email verifications*. Else Schreiner, 01 September 2016, wife [interview].

21. Oral Interviews: *In person; telephonic and email verifications*. Douglas Irvine, 15 January 2018, academic colleague and family friend [interview].

22. Oral Interviews: *In person; telephonic and email verifications*. Else Schreiner (wife), 01 September 2016, [interview]. Jennifer Schreiner (daughter) and Barbara Schreiner (daughter) 2016-2017 [interviews, corroborated Else Schreiner interview].

Pietermaritzburg (one of Deneys' particular interests) and duplicated scientific equipment for both campuses clearly indicate Deneys' input. However, the giveaway comes in the phraseology, the phrase 'obvious desiderata' of a 10.5 staff: student ratio echoes the tone of some of his public speeches.²⁷ This is stylistically similar to his first speech,²⁸ as Vice Principal, to new students in 1976 when he said:

We have something in common. You are first year University students. I am a first year Vice-Principal. I am therefore almost as bewitched, bothered and bewildered as you are. (n.p.)

The research also revealed an example of how not to conduct an oral history interview. The Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of Natal (now the University of KwaZulu-Natal) conducted a series of interviews with leading liberal figures and other struggle veterans. Deneys Schreiner was interviewed by Randolph Vigne, author of *Liberals against Apartheid* (1997). Regrettably, Vigne committed one of the cardinal errors that oral historians and interviewers should avoid at all costs: He talked too much, and Deneys was barely able to get a word in edgeways. There is very little research value in the interview, unless the researcher is specifically interested in the views of Randolph Vigne, rather than Deneys Schreiner (Dominy 2020:192–193).

Conclusion

For more than a century, the Schreiners tried to exert liberal influences within South African public, political and academic life. William Schreiner developed as a liberal, thanks to the influence of John Tengo Jabavu. In 1909, WP faced the dilemma of acting on humane liberal impulses and defending King Dinuzulu or using his stature as a statesman at the National Convention to attempt to secure a better and more liberal constitutional dispensation for the new Union. He chose the former course that may have been a decision of higher moral value, but it prevented him from giving a more concrete constitutional expression to his values.

Oliver Schreiner returned to South Africa after the First World War and began his fight for human rights at the Johannesburg Bar. His battlefield was legal, his weapons were juridical. His aim was to defend the residual elements of structural liberalism in the Union of South Africa Constitution. Ultimately, he failed, because of the constitutional weaknesses in the law that allowed the protections to be circumvented by a determined apartheid government.

William's grandson and Oliver's son, Deneys Schreiner, took the slight opportunity that opened in the late 1970s, to move from reaction to action. Here the limitations were set by the farcical circumstances of the apartheid system. KwaZulu could not legislate for Natal, and the report of his commission

27. *National Archives of South African*. Commissions of Enquiry, Dept Higher Education, Vol K 263/7, 1969: 'Kommissie van ondersoek na die universiteitswese'; Memorandum re Financial Matters, submitted by the University of Natal, March 1969.

28. *UKZN Archives (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*. SP25/5/1 – 17, Schreiner GDL: Newspaper Cuttings, Natal Witness 26 May [Administration Files: 1976-1987].

was rudely rejected by the central government. The successor to the Buthelezi Commission created the JEA that helped 'let slip the dogs of war' in KZN in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, the work of the Buthelezi Commission remained relevant, and its documentation helped build the structures of our present constitutional order.

The research on William Schreiner was conducted through the study of published sources, with particular reliance on his biography written by Eric Walker (1969). This remains a useful work, both as a source and in the synthesis of opinions that it presents. The research on his son, Oliver Schreiner, was conducted through the study of both published and archival sources. The research on the grandson, Deneys Schreiner, was conducted through published, archival and oral sources. The evidence has been greatly enriched by the oral research component. While the biographical research would have been infinitely poorer without the letters of Oliver Schreiner, the life story of Deneys Schreiner would have been impossible to write without the oral testimony of numerous informants.

Constructing a cohesive and credible narrative required both textual and oral research with one evidence stream providing a check on the accuracy of the other. This is particularly important because the oral testimony almost universally painted a particular memory picture that of a good, kind and intelligent man. The written and published sources also largely bear this out. This aligns with Grele's (n.d.:1) opinion that oral history enables one to understand how the facts are understood.

We can conclude with the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Dr Blade Nzimande's assessment of Deneys Schreiner, in his foreword to *The Man Behind the Beard* (Dominy 2017):

Deneys expanded what I characterise above as the Schreiners' tendency to rebel against the colonial and apartheid order, which became a greater struggle against the system. His was a strong and far-reaching disagreement with the colonial and apartheid regime, campaigning for desegregation within the framework of a liberal world view. Deneys grew his beard in opposition to segregation and in pushing the struggle for a common voters' roll. (pp. xi–xii)

In a sense, Blade Nzimande is echoing Portelli's (2006) view that oral history tells us less about events and more about their meaning (Portelli 2006:36). In the case of the Schreiners, and particularly in the case of Deneys, this is entirely true.

Acknowledgements

This article represents a reflection on the methodology used in a biographical research project. The initial findings were first presented in the 2017 Alan Paton Memorial Lecture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. It was reproduced in *FOCUS*, the journal of the Helen Suzman Foundation, the current director of which has no objection to this article. The research project culminated in the publication of a biography

of Deneys Schreiner entitled *The Man Behind The Beard* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2020). Gratitude is expressed to all those who provided oral and other testimony to the author.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author's contributions

G.D. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author. In the interests of full disclosure, the author served as a participant in the heritage structures of the KwaZulu and Natal Joint Executive Authority (JEA) in the late 1980s.

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