

**SOME REMARKS ON SOL PLAATJE, ON THE OCCASION OF A TREE
PLANTING IN HIS MEMORY AT MMABATHO**

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Sol Plaatje was a true Renaissance man.

Although he had no formal education beyond primary school, he was an author, intellectual and lobbyist. He spoke eight South African languages, edited three newspapers and wrote several books.

Amongst these was the work for which he is best remembered, "Native Life in South Africa".

In the last years of his life he translated two Shakespeare plays into Tswana.

It is also said that he made the first recordings of Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika.

His association with Mafikeng is that, during the siege, he worked as a court interpreter and assisted several war correspondents, after which he became editor of the English-Tswana newspaper 'Koranta ea Becoana'.

Plaatje played an important role in setting up the SANNC.

After the Natives' Land Act was passed in 1913, he travelled around the country on a bicycle to research its effects. In 'Native Life in South Africa' he wrote:

"For to crown all our calamities, South Africa has by law ceased to be the home of any of her native children whose skins are dyed with a hue that does not conform to the regulation hue"

One of the stories Plaatje told was about a squatter called Kgobadi who was forced off the land by the Land Act:

"The 'Baas' said that Kgobadi, his wife and his oxen had to work for £18 a year. Before the Land Act, Kgobadi had been making £100 a year selling crops. He told the 'Baas' that he did not want to work for such low wages. The 'Baas' told Kgobadi to go.

"They were wandering around the roads in the cold winter with everything they owned...

"Mrs Kgobadi's child was sick. She had to put her child in the ox-wagon which bumped along the road. Two days later the child died.

"Where could they bury the child? They had no rights to bury it on any land. Late that night, the poor young mother and father had to dig a grave when no-one could see them. They had to bury the child in a stolen grave".

In 1914, Plaatje was part of the delegation that went to England to appeal against the Land Act.

He visited the then British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, and told him that blacks were helpless in their own country because they were voteless. 'Great Britain has thrown us away' he said to him.

Plaatje spent the last nine years of his life campaigning for African rights in South Africa. He died in Johannesburg in 1932 at the age of 56.