

University of Fort Hare as the Doyen of Pan-Africanism

ICC EAST LONDON 26th OCTOBER 2013

MVUYO TOM

LECTURE

Programme Director and National Chairperson of the ANC, Cde Baleka Mbete, allow me to salute first the King of AmaXhosa, Ah! Zwelonke!!!

The President of the Republic of South Africa and of the ANC, His Excellency, President Jacob Zuma

The former Secretary of the OAU and former Prime Minister of Togo, His Excellency Dr Edem Kodjo

The Secretary General of the ANC, Mr Gwede Mantashe

The Provincial Chairperson of the ANC, Cde Pumulo Masualle

Representatives of the various countries from our continent, members of the Diplomatic Corps

Members of the National and Provincial Executives of the ANC

Members of the University of Fort Hare Council present

The President of the UFH SRC and other members of the SRC, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a

singular honour and privilege for the University of Fort Hare (UFH) to be part of such an auspicious occasion, and I am hugely humbled to represent this great Institution here today.

With the ANC having just celebrated its Centenary in 2012, and the University of Fort Hare gearing up to celebrate its own in 2016, it may seem a short period to look back at the 50 years of the existence of the African Union (AU), first as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), when it was founded in 1963. When one looks at the 50 years, though, it is remarkable that the organisation has survived after all the severe onslaught its member states suffered under apartheid colonialism in particular and international colonialism in general.

Keywords: African Unity, OAU, AU, ANC, 50th Anniversary, University of Fort Hare, Pan-Africanism.

The AU has survived because it carries the dream of many an African, the dream of a united, democratic, peaceful, socially and economically developed Africa. That is the dream of Seme, Nkrumah, Z K Matthews, Sobukwe, Tambo, Sekou Toure, Garvey, WEB du Bois and many others. That is the dream of Pan-Africanism as an ideology, not as a partisan, separatist, exclusive and divisive phenomenon but as a unifying, humanistic and forward looking strategy.

I shall divide this address into three parts: First, I shall look at the ideology of Pan-Africanism. It is with the understanding of that concept that we can move to the second part, the role of the University of Fort Hare in Pan-Africanism. The third part will be an analysis and an assessment of whether the University has, indeed, been a doyen of the ideology.

When Pixley ka Isaka Seme wrote his speech on the Regeneration of Africa, he was expressing an ideology that was later concretised by many an African liberation movement and some scholars like WEB du Bois. The ANC itself, when it was formed did not talk about a South African Congress but an African Congress, even if it referred to Native in addition. The anthem that has sustained anti-colonial struggles in Southern Africa is, "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika," and not uMzantsi Afrika.

Nkrumah was at a university in Britain when he and other African students like George Padmore, T.R. Makonnen and Peter Abrahams (a South African) started organising a Pan-African Congress. Various discussions have been held about this ideology even though when they started their discussions this particular group identified Pan-Africanism as an approach whose ideology would be "*African Socialism based upon the tactics of positive action without violence.*" The major thrust of their struggle would be for "political freedom and economic advancement" (Nkrumah, 1973).

This brings us to the fundamental question of what Pan-Africanism actually is – a very difficult question, indeed. Various aspects are raised in this regard and one of them is just the definition of a geographic space that should be united – all colonial boundaries to be abolished to have a *United States of Africa*. The debates can also be along economic lines – an Africa that is economically self-sufficient and sustainable with various countries trading amongst themselves without excluding interdependence with other continents. There are other interpretations of Pan-Africanism based on common cultural

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and traditional notions to unite Africa so that there is an Afro-centric approach to cultural development instead of the dominant Eurocentric one.

Amilcar Cabral captures the importance of culture in the development of Africa in his short essays entitled "Back to the Source." Cabral makes examples of how culture has great value *"as a factor of resistance to foreign domination"* (Cabral, 1973). However, Cabral also challenges the nature of struggle based on a socio-cultural basis. His analysis is that it is usually a struggle originating within a frustrated petit bourgeoisie, frustrated by colonial power in their own land or in the diaspora. At times they are even against the violent clashes between the masses of the people and the oppressor. Cabral's thesis is that the "theories or movements such as Pan-Africanism or Negritude" are "expressions arising mainly from the assumptions that all black Africans have a cultural identity" and these are "propounded outside black Africa"(Cabral, 1973).

The geographic, economic, cultural, scientific and political aspects are captured very neatly in Pixley ka Isaka Seme. He moves seamlessly in linking Abyssinia with Zululand, and Gambia with Congo. He harshly deals with the undermining of African culture in deference to the European or Western civilization. The pride in the African way of doing things without undermining other cultures is carried through the speech. This pride was later developed by people like Steve Biko into the Black Consciousness ideology – Freeing the mind from slavery.

You will note from this brief introduction that Pan-Africanism has got both a physical structure and a sociology, just like the African can be identified by a particular sociological track or the physical appearance. It is in that context that the diaspora has also been brought to the picture when debates on Pan-Africanism take place. A particular physical appearance irrespective of how a person has been socialised is usually enough in many Western countries to treat that individual in a particular way, mostly as an inferior human being. The person may be from North America, having been born and bred in that part of the world but her/his physical appearance is usually sufficient to treat her/him with some suspicion or for her/him to be patronised if s/he is in another Western country. It is for that reason that when people of African origin are a minority group in these countries, either as tourists or conference delegates, there is sudden connection and solidarity. Reciprocal smiles are passed even when just passing each other in escalators or streets, as if to say, "I know what you go through in this

environment and I am with you.” Africans have been in solidarity because they accept their common history and destiny.

It is this sociological and economic oppression and exploitation of not only individuals of African origin or single African states but the whole continent and Africans in the diaspora that arouses a collective African response with a Pan-African ideology. Africans are not homogenous, though, and their response may not be the same. Students at the University of Fort Hare had their own response over decades.

The origin of the University of Fort Hare was itself based on the social, cultural, educational and economical alienation of Africans in their own land. In any other country the idea that came from Dr James Stewart in the last quarter of the 19th century would have had no reason to arise, noble as it was. For him to think of a need for a university to accommodate the African students that were being educated at schools like Lovedale and Healdtown was purely because of the African origins of those students. He thought of a university being required to accommodate those Africans. John Tengo Jabavu capped it when he motivated for the University to be founded, primarily for Africans. His logic was that this would curb the number of Africans who studied abroad and came back with very radical ideas about the society they aspired for. This worked very well in the warped minds of the Europeans who did not want to have radical Africans.

Schools like Healdtown and Lovedale were having students from not only South Africa but Sub-Saharan Africa. It was, therefore, easy for the University of Fort Hare to have not only Africans of South African origin but Africans from other parts of the continent studying here. The student body was actually not just Africans, but a non-racial student body and academic staff began to emerge, although the University was primarily for Africans. How wrong Jabavu was in thinking that the radical ideas from abroad were just because of the geographic space in which the Africans found themselves! The dehumanising attitude of Europeans was enough to create an environment where radical ideas to change society for the better would emerge.

The environment at the University of Fort Hare was very conducive to intellectual engagement, looking beyond the immediate experiences and envisioning a future free of colonial oppression. The Tyume River is well-known for the production of early twentieth century African intellectuals. Their spirits have filled the area for more than a century now. These are great intellectuals like Dr Rubusana, Tiyo Soga, John Tengo Jabavu, SEK Mqhayi and others. Mqhayi even influenced Healdtown students when Nelson Mandela

was still there. This influence affected Madiba so much that he refers to it as one of the most illuminating experiences – to see such a bold and proud African expressing himself so eloquently and not allowing Eurocentric views to change his culture or intimidate him (Ndletyana, 2007).

There is no doubt that schools from which some of the students originated played a big influence on the University of Fort Hare (UFH) students. Healdtown, Lovedale, St Peters, Adam's College and others were feeder schools that brought out the best from the students. With Oliver Tambo having taught some of the students at St Peters, they came to the University of Fort Hare being already conscious of the challenges that faced black people and Africans in particular. This was combined with the parallel curriculum that most of them exposed themselves to. Dr Edward Roux's book, "Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa" was one of the books students used to read and pass to each other. Govan Mbeki himself was influenced by Eddie Roux whilst he (Roux) camped next to the UFH Campus in the 1930s (Williams, 2001). Academic staff members like Z K Matthews, Godfrey Pitje, A.M. Phahle, J.M. Mokoena, Sam M. Guma, Monica Wilson and others played a very significant role in building this parallel curriculum and culture of enquiry with a critical mind. This was the age when professionals looked at work not only as a means to produce and get money but also to build the intelligibility of self-expression that they would be very proud of. They were not having students as mere products that would be produced in an industrial production line fashion, but individuals that they would be proud of – responsible members of society – conscious leaders who would later free their countries. In his early days as a staff member at UFH, Godfrey Pitje got a letter from Mda asking him to "Get together a small nucleus [of students] and soak them in our nationalistic outlook and indicate to them the need for youth to train for a greater leadership. These will form the core of the Movement at Fort Hare...Then call or let somebody call a meeting of those interested to launch a Youth League Branch at Fort Hare" (Williams, 2001).

Z K Matthews, having also taught at Adams College, played a very significant role in shaping the future lives of UFH students. Having been the first graduate of the University he was bound to play so many other "firsts." He was someone students looked up to. They may not have liked every decision he took or some tactical political decisions he made but they respected him. He had a clear vision and knew that he had to achieve it. He used every neuron and nerve fibre of his brilliant brains to craft the path that he

thought would lead us to freedom. He truly was committed to Africa. The African Claims he played a role in drafting was such a visionary document on human rights. His idea of a Congress of the People to decide on the nature of a future South Africa led to the drafting and adoption of the Freedom Charter. He achieved greatness without aspiring for it. This probably affected his students who demonstrated such humility in their leadership roles.

A long list of excellent leaders emerged from the University. Most were not just Pan-African in outlook but were internationalists. Even with the diverse ideological and political views there was so much unity in terms of what they wanted to do – free South Africa and liberate the continent. One of the events that spurred many a young Fort Hare student on was the Nationalist Party victory in the elections of 1948. One former student indicates how the line was drawn with that particular event, “From 1948 the students knew what they were in for... [In that year] the lines were drawn.” Another one stated as follows: “What the Boers succeeded in doing was to make everyone sit up and take a position” (Williams, 2001). There was such intense political consciousness on campus, and this continued for decades, even at the time usually referred to as a political lull in our revolution. From ZK Matthews to Govan and Epainette Mbeki, A.C. Jordan, Phyllis Ntantala, Godfrey Pitje, Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, A.P. Mda, I.B. Tabata, M.W. Njobe, Robert Mugabe, Charles Njonjo, Ntsu Mokhehle, Yusuf Lule, Seretse Khama, the Makiwane brothers, Duma Nokwe, Livie Mqotsi, T.T. Letlaka, Dennis Brutus, Stella Sigcau, Zola Nqini, R. K. Dayal, Leepile Taunyane, H.J.B. Da Gama, Chris Hani, Zola Skweyiya, Mant Tshabalala, Ivy Matsepe Cassaburi, Billy Modise, Krish Mackedujh and others, to the generation of the 70s and that of the 80s.

There was always the understanding that Africa could not be free until South Africa was free. This was the rallying cry when other Southern African states were freed. The destabilisation they suffered through apartheid oppression showed clearly that until and unless South Africa was free the continent would never be free. Sobukwe, whilst a member of the ANCYL and President of the SRC at Fort Hare in 1949 reflected this very well, “our whole life in South Africa is politics... I am sure I am speaking for the whole of young Africa when I say that we are prepared to work with any man who is fighting for the liberation of Africa WITHIN OUR LIFE-TIME... We are pro-Africa. We breathe, we dream, we live Africa...” (Williams, 2001). Oliver Tambo, while addressing the 5th Assembly of Heads of State of the OAU in Algiers in 1968 illustrated the intertwined nature of the

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anti-colonial struggles in Africa when he said, "The liberation movements and over 30 million oppressed Africans they represent are at war." On the one side are armies of white supremacy, united in the unholy alliance of Portugal, Rhodesia and South Africa. On the other are the liberation movements with their guerrilla forces bravely challenging the military machinery of white supremacy...The struggle for freedom in Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Guinea-Bissau is being intensified"(Tambo, 1987). Duma Nokwe trained as a science teacher at UFH after graduating with a Bachelor of Science in the same University; and after cycles of banning and imprisonments for fighting against apartheid he, like Oliver Tambo did before him, studied law. He is described by his peers as "one of the most brilliant and courageous talents of his time." He was the Secretary of the ANCYL between 1953 and 1958 when he took over from another great Fort Harian, Oliver Tambo, as the Secretary General of the ANC (From 1958 to 1969). "He had such a powerful pen that through diplomacy and propaganda he won a lot of recognition for the ANC internationally. He was a well-known figure in the OAU and the United Nations representing the ANC and the people of South Africa" (Mtshaulana, 2005).

Chris Hani is one of those who epitomised the international and continental struggles fought by the University of Fort Hare former students. As a young soldier of Umkonto weSizwe he fought alongside the ZAPU soldiers in Wankie as part of clearing the way for the liberation of Zimbabwe and South Africa. There are many others, like Zola Nqini who was killed in Maseru in 1982. He had carried on with the struggle he started at Fort Hare and went to exile where he continued to nurture and develop a new layer of leadership that emerged from UFH and went via Lesotho to exile with – the likes of Tenjiwe Mtintso, Silumko Sokupa, Ngwenduna Vanda, Vusi Pikoli, Dumisani Mafu, Mpilo Maqkeza, Sizwe Kondile, and many others.

The three phases of the University of Fort Hare illustrate what socio-political and economic context can do to an institution and the students who emerge from it. The first of these phases is the pre-1959 phase which is usually referred to as the glorious years of UFH, before the passing of the "Extension of Universities Act" which brought the UFH under the Bantu Administration Department of apartheid rule. This Act also created new universities which were segregated in line with the apartheid policy of "separate but equal" facilities – a sham. The second phase is post-1959 but pre-1991. This was the phase of apartheid and homeland rule over the University, a period when the University

of Fort Hare was wrecked and its fundamentals destroyed, a period in which Daniel Massey says the students were studying “Under Protest.” The third phase is post 1991 when the rebuilding of a free University of Fort Hare started. The calibre of students who made Fort Hare to be the doyen of Pan-Africanism can be classified into two groups – those who were brilliant and courageous because of Fort Hare and those who were brilliant and courageous in spite of Fort Hare. In spite of apartheid oppression, a repressive university environment and a curriculum reduced in standard to be appropriate for Africans Fort Hare produced brilliant and courageous Africans who saw beyond the apartheid government policies. Because of the presence of pockets of excellent African staff members like ZK, Pitje, Mokoena, Ngcobo and others many a young African student got the correct orientation and political perspective to embrace all humanity and seek knowledge beyond the boundaries set by colonial powers.

The ANCYL Branch which was formed at UFH in 1948 was through assistance of staff members like Pitje; similarly the student underground structures that worked so well received enormous support from staff members like Makenkesi Stofile. There were also some excellent missionary lecturers and liberal academics who knew no boundaries to knowledge production and dissemination.

From this exposition there is no one who can doubt the role of the University of Fort Hare in producing leadership that embraced Africa as a home, and its status as the doyen of Pan-Africanism. Some alumni of the University of Fort Hare are playing a big role the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). Amongst these are Mzobanzi Mboya and Wiseman Nkuhlu.

As I conclude, the University continues to play that role even in a free South Africa and a decolonised Africa. Recurriculation is one of the tools we use in bringing new perspectives in knowledge generation. The African studies programme that ZK Matthews and Monica Williams taught is back. We have not yet reached the stage that Sobukwe cried for – of being the home of African studies – but we have at least started. The doors of the University have been opened to international students and academics. African countries have made a call to UFH to assist in training their public servants even in their countries.

The embryonic public service in South Sudan has been assisted by UFH. We are training public service personnel in countries as far as Somalia. Partnerships are also formed with universities in many African countries.

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We all need to work together to make the University of Fort Hare the premiere African university in South Africa. That is the task we all have to take as we encourage our current and future students to develop the faith and love for education which was found in those early pioneers. The first Vice-Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare, Dr Kerr described those pioneers as students who, "in addition to the ordinary incentives to study... had an unspoiled enthusiasm for, and a profound faith in education – a faith which sometimes had an element of pathos in it – as almost all would have to endure the humiliation of racism and economic exploitation in their future careers."

As we approach the UFH Centenary in 2016 the University "must build on [its] own strengths and traditions" and assert its "unique contribution toward knowledge production and national development," in line with the National Development Plan. As a historical and heritage institution partnerships with all social formations, government and the private sector are required for UFH to reach its African premiere university status.

Happy 50th Anniversary to the AU!

Thank you.

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Vice-Chancellor, University of Fort Hare