



Office of the Principal and Vice Chancellor

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VIRTUAL'S INKOSI ALBERT LUTHULI RESEARCH CHAIR LECTURE
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Many remember Inkosi Albert Luthuli for a number of attributes. He led the African National Congress (ANC) during a period that saw three major developments in the life of that organisation.

He was the President when the Freedom Charter was drafted and adopted in 1955.

The ANC and other components of the liberation movement were banned in 1960 while he was still the President.

He chose to remain behind while others went into exile, staying on as the President until his tragic death in 1967. We may argue in this regard that he kept the ANC together during the intervening period as it went

underground and under very difficult circumstances, before it was reconstituted in exile. Related to that, he was the President when the ANC founded uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK). This despite the debate on whether he was bypassed when MK was formed, a point that some refute by arguing that Inkosi Luthuli was fully consulted and gave his approval for the development.¹

Inkosi Luthuli is also known for being the first African to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1960. Last, Inkosi Luthuli is known for having refused to become compliant and cooperate with the apartheid government in his position as Chief. It was for that reason that the apartheid government deposed him. Defiantly, his people and indeed all freedom-loving people continued to refer to him as Chief.

The aforementioned are largely what come to the collective memory when reflecting on the life of Inkosi Luthuli. It is his role in the education of Africans that I wish to turn to, in line with the theme of today's lecture.

¹ For more on arguments that attempt to show that Luthuli was supportive of the armed struggle see: Luthuli, Albert (1964) On the Rivonia Trial, quoted from secondary sources by Woodson, Dorothy C (1986) Albert Luthuli and the African National Congress: A Bio-Bibliography, *History in Africa*, Volume 13, pg. 354, pp. 345-362. This was a speech prepared for the United Nations, in which he defended a turn to the armed struggle due to the intransigence of the apartheid government. See also Ellis, Stephen (2011) The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle in South Africa, 1948-1961, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 37, Number 4, pg. 669, pp. 657-676. Ellis argues that Luthuli authorised the formation of MK on conditions that it remain a separate organisation, so that the ANC would remain unaffected. He argues that this was a strategic option that Luthuli adopted

Shaped by Mission Education

Like many, Inkosi Luthuli received his education from the mission schools, at a time when very few Africans were allowed to enjoy that basic right. Africans had, between 1779 and 1879, “resist(ed) both British missionary education and colonial rule.”² Some were imprisoned on Robben Island for this. It was therefore only later, having been defeated, that they became converts or accepted mission education purely for the educational part and not the religious component. Many retained their African religious and cultural practices.

In his study of the evolution of Christianity in South Africa, Sibusiso Masondo argues that while the initial intention of the European missionaries was to support colonial conquest and turn Africans into Europeans, the missions had two unintended consequences.³

The emphasis on ‘brotherhood and sisterhood’ helped influence the emergence of African Nationalism. Second, mission schools contributed to the rise in consciousness among Africans. Therefore, instead of completing the subjugation of African people, Christian mission education was “transformed (by Africans themselves) to serve the interests of an African worldview”.⁴

² Mangcu, Xolela (2014) A Critic, in Retrospect, *Transition*, Number 116, pp. 27-39, pg. 27.
DOI:10.2979/transition.116.27.

³ Masondo, Sibusiso (2018) Ironies of Christian Presence in Southern Africa, *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Volume 31, Number, pp. 209-31. DOI: 10.2307/26778582.

⁴ Ibid, pg. 227. Emphasis in parenthesis added

For Megan Paustin, mission education enabled new practices of freedom; becoming unconscious allies of anticolonial movements and even Marxism.⁵ Yet, “African discourse around missions is constantly negotiating ... doubleness, the costs and benefits of mission school”⁶, the contradictory aim being to alienate the African from his/her culture while empowering him/her for life. Thus, Christian mission education was “reassemble(d) ... toward the needs of the African present as defined by African people, using the admittedly imperfect tools—and allies—available”.⁷

Inkosi Luthuli was a product of this complexity, which had a transformative effect on mission education. Having been educated in mission schools he ended up teaching in one of them, at some stage teaching alongside another giant of the African liberation movement and a scholar in his own right, Z.K. Matthews.⁸ He used his own education to educate more Africans, thus liberating many and helping to lay the foundations of future movements of teachers and other educated Africans.

⁵ Paustian, Megan C (2014) “A Real Heaven on Their Own Earth”: Religious Missions, African Writers, and the Anticolonial Imagination, *Research in African Literatures*, Volume 45, Number 2, pp. 1-25.

DOI:10.2979/reseafritelite.45.2.1.

⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 8

⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 20

⁸ Vinson, Robert T (2018) Albert Luthuli. Athens (USA), Ohio University Press

Rooted amongst his people

The geographic location of Luthuli's education interventions, and later his chieftaincy, are critical in situating his legacy within the theme of this lecture. Unlike other educated Africans who contributed towards founding and shaping the African nationalist movement, Luthuli's entire working and activist life was in the rural settings. In this he practiced organic intellectualism, suffering with his people, and effecting changes in their lives. This he did long before the notions of rural development would be introduced into the lexicon of African revolution by Julius Nyerere in Tanzania⁹ and here at home after 1994.

It is worth noting that during his tour of the United States Luthuli made sure that he visited Howard University,¹⁰ one of the institutions with a "historic responsibility as the primary providers of postsecondary education for Black Americans in a social environment of racial discrimination."¹¹ In so doing, Luthuli was asserting international solidarity and the need for a related approach to the education of black people the world over.

⁹ Campbell, Horace (2010) Julius Nyerere: Between state-centred and people-centred Pan-Africanism, in Chachage, Chambi and Cassam, Annar (Eds) *Africa's Liberation: The Legacy of Nyerere*. Cape Town, Pambazuka Press, pp. 44-60. Cf. Saul, John S (2012) Tanzania Fifty Years on (1961—2011): Rethinking "ujamaa", Nyerere and Socialism in Africa, *Review of African Political Economy*, Volume 39, Number 131, pp. 117-25.

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ Brown II, M. Christopher (2013) The Declining Significance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Relevance, Reputation, and Reality in Obamamerica, *The Journal of Negro Education*, Volume 82, Number 1, pp. 3-19, pg. 5

It is against this background of Luthuli the educationist that we host this lecture today. The lecture is held against the backdrop of vast changes to the way we teach and conduct research as universities, let alone how we conduct other non-academic operations of the university.

In their study of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on universities in the United States universities, Andrew Kelly and Rooney Columbus postulate five short-term challenges and five long-term ones for the higher education sector.¹² Whereas we operate within different political, economic and social environments than US universities the similarities between what Kelly and Columbus postulate are striking.

Adapted to our context, the five short-term challenges are:

- Possible drop in student numbers, specifically those who should return.
- Reduced numbers of new students due to depressed economic conditions, with many students not affording university education.
- Drop in non-tuition revenue such as residence fees. While we are least affected by this category, we can correctly speculate that

¹² Kelly, Andrew P., and Columbus, Rooney (2020) *College in the Time of Coronavirus: Challenges Facing American Higher Education*. American Enterprise Institute. DOI: 10.2307/resrep25358.

some of the private residential places near our campuses may be negatively affected.

- Costly measures to conform to the re-opening protocols.
- Planning for and addressing an outbreak. We have already experienced the disruptions caused by the few infections that we have had; when we had to close certain buildings.

In the long-term the following are expected:

- Long-term revenue drop due to lower student numbers and reduced government subsidy as a result of the depressed national fiscus.
- Possible drop in enrolments for certain programmes, leading to the discontinuation of some programmes or the forced merger of departments. This reminds us of the painful contraction of the once-vibrant Department of African Languages.
- Loss of students to other universities as they transfer to other institutions who have now learnt the possibility and implementability of remote learning. Therefore, UNISA may no longer enjoy the near-monopoly over remote learning as we have done over the years.

In addition to above, one of the challenges that we have experienced is the unanticipated expansion in the scope of work for our academics. With a shift to online examinations our academics had to become

invigilators and then begin to mark the exams. Only they could do that!

What we learn from the legacy of Luthuli, in this era of Covid-19, is his perseverance as he went back to study after being expelled. We learn the dedication to the education of the nation, as he gave his all to educate the poor rural students. We learn the dedication to the people of this country, as he gave up the 'privileges' to be in the good books of the apartheid government, to a point of being dethroned from chieftaincy.

We should as an institution take a leaf from the life of Inkosi Luthuli and ensure that UNISA remains the one institution that continues to provide education to everyone, including, in fact especially, to the rural students who arguably need this education the most.

It is my hope that Professor Nkondo will provide us with rich reflections and challenges on how we may - as a university, as a nation, as a continent, and indeed as the whole of humanity - live up to the legacy of this gallant son of the soil.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Council, Senate, Management, Staff, and Students of this university, I welcome you all to this lecture.
Thank You!