

# An Analysis of the Contributions of Black Academics to Epistemology and Decolonisation in Higher Education in South Africa, 1940s-1990s

---

Mojuta Steven Motlhamme   
North-West University  
stevenmotlhamme93@gmail.com

## Abstract

This paper looked at the contributions of black academics in the humanities and social sciences and uses their autobiographies as an analytical tool to help us understand their contribution to epistemology in the African higher education space. It also looks at debates on decolonisation and how their work has shaped these debates. Autobiography is one lens of doing critical analysis and understanding the progression of a scholar. This paper analyses different scholars in different generations and hopes to contribute to the search for genealogies of intergenerational Black South African scholars whose work has been forgotten and marginalised in the academic project in the humanities and social sciences curriculum in South Africa and beyond. Using autobiography as a critical method, the paper shows how black scholars from different generations navigated institutions of higher learning to achieve excellent results and produce knowledge that challenged racialised inferiority and white supremacy. The findings suggest that there is a body of work by black scholars and shows that where support is given, black scholars can shape discourse and take leadership positions in the academy.

**Keywords:** Decolonisation, Autobiography, Black Academics, Apartheid, Scholarship

## Introduction

Black academics who have recorded their thoughts and experiences in South Africa are very few. South Africa in general, has very few academic autobiographies (Jacobs and Bank, 2019). Academic autobiography is defined as autobiographical writings by people who have held university lectureships,

professorships and managerial/administrative roles. This paper attempts a re-appraisal of Black academics who have navigated the South African academy in various contexts pertaining to the racial, ethnic and gendered contexts of higher education under segregation and apartheid from the 1940s to the 1990s. Black Academics have contributed to the South African academy and need to be part of a decolonising curriculum in South African universities and institutions of knowledge production.

## Methodology and Theoretical Lens

The methodology used in this paper focuses on academic autobiography. Five black South African academic autobiographies were chosen. The autobiographies of ZK Matthews, Bernard Magubane, Chabani Manganyi, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Mamphela Ramphele and Mabogo More. The criterion used include the fact that many of the chosen people obtained professorships, have written up their reflections and have shown commitment to decolonisation in their body of work and political activism. Data was collected through the autobiographical texts and works produced by the scholars. The research problem is about why there are fewer studies on the work, life and contribution of black academics in South Africa? Using these texts, this paper attempts to shed light on the autobiographical contributions and reflections of black academics.

This paper uses a theoretical lense of decolonisation. Decolonisation in this paper is about how the different scholars challenged the colonial system of education that was given to them and used the tools of colonial education to decolonise and create an African centered knowledge system and paradigm (Mkhize: 2021, Keto, 2001). Decolonisation is not meant to be an epistemic reverse racism but allows different voices who have historically been epistemically erased to be given platforms and recognition that they rightfully deserve. The South African academic project under apartheid was used to justify the system and played a role in the epistemicide of African knowledge in the country. Through decolonisation, we can recentre African thought and put it at the centre of the curriculum using the humanities and social sciences as a case study.

## Literature

Autobiography has been a major fixture on the South African political landscape (Masemola, 2017). Due to the racist nature of apartheid, black voices did not always have an outlet to voice and publish work about themselves and their community in an academic context. A lot of the work was autobiographical and fiction based. Writers such as Soga, Plaatjie (2007), Mofolo (1981), Fuze (1979) and Molema (2009) laid the groundwork of black writing in South Africa in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Black autobiography ranges from the work of Phyllis Ntantala (1992), Ellen Khuzwayo (2018), Naboth Mokgatle (1971), Bloke Modisane (1990) and others prove autobiography has been covered by diverse people living and working in different contexts. Many of these autobiographies focus on the struggle against apartheid and how these actors participated in it. It takes us to the deep countryside where most of the authors were born, their political consciousness awakening and their baptism into the struggle against apartheid.

Many scholars in some parts of the world have analysed academics who write their autobiographies. Academic autobiography is not an easy thing to do. This scholarship sees autobiography and life in the academy coming together to help us understand the subject matter under discussion (Popkin, 2005). Autobiography is also an extension of the academic project by narrative means and self-representation. Autobiography has epistemic and literary potential of helping us understand the locus of enunciation of the scholar/writer concerned. Scholarly autobiographies allow us to understand individual and collective histories (Aurel and Davis, 2019). Personal experience is not always inseparable from intellectual activity. The work of scholars can also be a way to reconcile all parts of oneself.

## Discussion and Analysis

South Africa became a democracy in 1994. This was a time of change for South African higher education. The literature on transformation and change in South African Universities is the “Makgoba Affair” at Wits and the “Mamdani Affair at UCT”. The “Makgoba Affair” occurred around 1995 when Professor Malegapuru William Makgoba was appointed as a Deputy Vice Chancellor with an intention to appoint him as Wits University’s first Black Vice Chancellor. The troubles start when Makgoba challenges some of the racial institutional culture at Wits which came with a backlash from white colleagues who questioned his

scholarly contributions and Curriculum Vitae (CV) (Makgoba, 1997). Mahmood Mamdani was appointed as the AC Jordan Professor of African Studies at the University of Cape Town in 1997. The “Mamdani Affair” centered on the fact that Mamdani had developed a curriculum centering African Scholars and moving away from the Eurocentric lens that had previously been used at UCT (Radebe, 2009). These two affairs show that South Africa was far from achieving the dream of transformed and African centered universities where black scholars and their scholarship would not face hostility.

Black South Africans have always played a role in the South African academic and intellectual space. Many black scholars who could have contributed were turned into native interlocutors and research assistants who were not supported to advance academically (Lekgoathi 2009). Although excluded and marginalised from the mainstream academy, black intellectuals have used their power and tenacity to write and make sure that the black experience is captured on paper in various platforms, (Biko, 1987; Andrews, 2018).

The current calls for decolonisation of education and the curriculum that was popularised by the Fees Must Fall Movement/Rhodes Must Fall Movement in 2015 is not a new phenomenon that started in 2015. It also did not start in the 1960s/70s when students in the Black Consciousness Movement agitated against apartheid. Decolonisation in South Africa has its intellectual forebears and ancestors in the late 1800s and early 1900s who laid down the intellectual framework and discourse of decolonisation when it was an unpopular time to do so (Ndletyana, 2008). During FMF/RMF students called for decolonisation. Students took ideas mainly from the Black Consciousness Movement, Frantz Fanon and the Latin American School of Decoloniality. If we ignore our own intellectual heritage, we run the risk of finding miscontextualised solutions to our colonial problems while ignoring the work that has been done by our own scholars who wrote from a marginal context but gave so much of their lives to the people and their communities (Mkhize, 2021).

### *Zachariah Keodirelang ZK Matthews*

#### *Freedom For My People: The Autobiography Of ZK Matthews, Southern Africa 1901 To 1968*

Professor Zach Keodirelang ZK Matthews 1901-1968 was the second black professor of African Studies and Languages after Don Davison Tengo Jabavu

at Fort Hare (Matthews, 1981:115). He was part of the first generation of black academics to study for their undergraduate degrees in South Africa in the 1920s. Many black students in the 1880s and early 1900s went to Britain and the United States for their studies. Many of them were Kholwa elites (mission converted believers) who were part of the rising tide of black Christians. Spaces like Wilberforce Institute in Ohio, University of Edinburgh and Columbia University in New York educated black South Africans abroad as it was tough to get a higher education at home as no white university was willing to teach blacks (Nqulunga, 2017). Tiyo Soga studied in Scotland, Pixley Ka Isaka Seme studied at the University of Columbia, and Charlotte Maxeke studied at Wilberforce in Ohio in the early 1900s.

Matthews and others of his generation were part of what Du Bois called the talented tenth and people with a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903). This was a select group of black elites who were supposed to assume leadership and development of the black race. Matthews received colonial missionary education at the United Mission School in Kimberley, St Matthews Anglican Church and then went on to Lovedale and Fort Hare to do his Matriculation and undergraduate degree. Fort Hare was founded in 1916 and named for John Hare. It was the first historically black university in South Africa and educated black people all over Africa (Wotshela, 2018). He was appointed as a high school headmaster at Adams Mission College. He got a scholarship to study at Yale. He also went to study social anthropology with Malinowski at the London School of Economics. Matthews was involved in politics and helped to write the freedom charter. He died in 1968 as an ambassador of newly independent Botswana in the United States.

ZK became Professor of African Studies in 1945 and head of the department. He taught Native Law and social anthropology. According to one of his students G. M. Pitje:

Few people realize what an influence he [Z.K.] was to generations of students at Fort Hare. This naturally applied more specifically to those who actually attended lectures given by him, but many to whom he did not formally lecture admired him and came under his influence (Matthews: 1983, 116).

ZK Matthews influenced a generation of students while he was a professor of African Studies. His generation took seriously the need to document and theorise using indigenous knowledge systems in the curriculum when it was

unfashionable to do so. His generation laid the groundwork for decolonisation by carving a place in the academic sector for black academics and researchers in the 1940s and 50s. Matthew's imprint and influence was on the students he taught. ZK was part of the famed Rivonia treason trial and the drafting of the freedom charter. ZK was an academic but also involved in politics as evidenced by his appointments.

ZK was part of the last generation of mission educated men who reached greater heights. The onset of Bantu Education and the extension of University Education Act of 1959 drove him and many distinguished black and white scholars away from Fort Hare. Fort Hare was moved from a citadel of African Education in Southern Africa to an ethnic enclave for Nguni people in the Eastern Cape (Wotshela, 2018: 14). For ZK, education did not mean westernization. He felt that it should be rooted in an African past but also embrace the modern world (Matthews, 1983: 212). He rejected apartheid and worked to see it dismantled as an engaged scholar activist. ZK was a Christian humanist who believed in the power of his time. He straddled a political and academic world and kept true to his convictions.

### *Eskia (Zeke) Mphahlele 1919-2008*

#### *Afrika My Music (1984).*

Brother Zeke Mphahlele as those close to him called him was the first black professor of African literature at Wits University in the 1980s. If the US had Du Bois, Kenya had Ngugi and Nigeria had Achebe then South Africa had Zeke Mphahlele. Born in 1919 in Lady Selborne, Mphahlele represents the second generation of African academics who went into exile and taught there in the 1960s and 70s.

Mphahlele was educated at St Peters seminary in Johannesburg in the 1930s. He studied with UNISA up to the Master of Arts level obtaining an MA in English Literature via correspondence. Whilst teaching high school and studying, he wrote an autobiographical novel entitled *Down Second Avenue* (Mphahlele, 1985) which came to global critical acclaim. It was banned in South Africa like many of his books. Mphahlele was a classic scholar as he combined writing fiction and non-fiction. Some of his books include *The African Image*, *The Wanderers*, *In Corner B*, *Voices in the Whirlwind*, *Chirundu* and *Eskia*.

Although Mphahlele was part of a generation of black scholars who normalised having a doctorate, they were preceded by a group of black scholars who had obtained their Phd in African languages in the 1940s. The likes of BW Vilakazi and Sophonia Machabe Mofokeng (Ntshangase, 1995; SALA, 2022). When speaking of black intellectuals who pioneered the path for us today, we often forget those who did so in African languages a major component of decolonisation that was started a long time ago (Ngugi, 1981).

Although an academic at the University of Denver in Colorado and the University of Pennsylvania, Mphahlele did not enjoy his stay in America. He yearned for home, he often spoke about the “tyranny of place and time” and wanted to reconnect with his ancestral roots (Mphahlele, 1984: 22). Mphahlele’s intellectual oeuvre was nourished by the South African landscape even though he was forced out by Bantu Education. Zeke Mphahlele was characterised as being part of the last generation of the New African Movement. The New African was a new kind of African who straddled tradition and modernity (Masilela, 2014: 161). They could be at home in their culture and in the world.

Mphahlele is considered the father of African Humanism. He was against apartheid and used education as tool to resist and fight the system. Here he speaks about the African University and African literature and says:

An African university should be manned by the people best equipped, in the context of today’s separateness, to perceive and promote the black man’s aspirations. As soon as possible we should employ an increasing number of Africans. But Africanisation should not mean merely employing more African teachers; curricula and syllabuses should increasingly be Africa-based, instead of constantly singing the triumphs of Western civilisation (Mphahlele, 1984: 244).

Mphahlele here remind us of the central place of the African university in a decolonising society. He speaks about the need for the curriculum to reflect an African centred orientation and look to local knowledges to define its character. The aspirations of a society should be supported by the epistemological orientations of its institutions.

Mphahlele started the African literature department at Wits University because the English department could not hire him (Mphahlele, 1984: 206). It was ironic because he had been part of prestigious institutions such as University of Pennsylvania and Denver at Colorado. Ngugi wa Thiongo, Henry Owuor-Anyumba and Taban Lo Liyong wrote a powerful paper that was called

“On the abolition of the English Department” (Ngugi, 1968: 435). This essay called for a literature department and not an English department. Mphahlele being on the African literature department was the only way for African literature to be taught and taken seriously at Wits University. Through African literature at Wits, Mphahlele was able to build a new generation of black writers, critics and students of African literature. Although many came to Wits University after he had long retired, he had a deep legacy that he left that inspired others.

## *Bernard Magubane 1930-2012*

### Bernard Magubane: My Life & Times (2010)

Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane was born in 1930 near Colenso in Kwa Zulu Natal. Magubane’s family suffered colonial dispossession from the British in the 1800s. Magubane was conscientised by his mother from a young age who spoke to him about the break-up of the Zulu Kingdom in the 1880s, the Bambatha rebellion of 1906, the exile of King Solomon and the 1913 Land Act (Magubane: 2010). Magubane was educated at mission schools and got a teacher’s certificate at Marianhill College. Many black teachers became politicised by the Bantu Education Act of 1953.

Magubane entered the University of Natal on a part time basis to do his Bachelor of Arts, BA Honours and Masters Degree from 1954 until the 1960s. Magubane was inspired by Marxist theory and analysis while the dominant paradigm in the South African academy was liberal pluralism that centred on race instead of class (Magubane, 2010: 86-87). Magubane finished his Master of Arts in 1959 then went on to UCLA to do a doctorate in the USA. A lot of Black South African academics went to study in the USA due to the institutionalised and epistemic racism of the South African academy which was been hostile to a black mind. Him going to the US shaped and influenced the rigorous scholar that he became. Magubane’s doctoral dissertation focused on African American consciousness of Africa which later became the basis for the book *The Ties that Bind*.

Magubane worked as a lecturer at the University of Zambia. Magubane, unlike most South African academics had an African bearing like Mphahlele and Matthews. Magubane was involved in the ANC in exile and was very close to OR Tambo and attended the Morogoro conference in Tanzania. Magubane left



Zambia after three years and went to the US at the University of Connecticut (UConn). He stayed at UConn for over 27 years and returned to South Africa in 1997. Magubane was involved in popularising the anti-apartheid movement in Connecticut and other parts of the US (Magubane, 2010).

Magubane's work sought to challenge the absence of the African voice in South African scholarship and historiography. Magubane was a classic inter, multi and trans disciplinary scholar. It is a crime and tragedy that he is a footnote in the South African humanities curriculum, like many of the other scholars in this paper (Nyoka, 2016). One of his most important academic papers is 'A critical look at the indices used in the study of social change in colonial Africa'. This paper looked at how African societies were studied as static, ahistorical and unchanging (Magubane: 1971). This paper was seminal and won him wide acclaim and scholarly praise for challenging colonial knowledge about African societies.

Magubane has a large oeuvre of books that he wrote. He wrote *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa* that analysed the racial capitalism of South African society. Magubane wrote the *Ties that Bind: African American Consciousness of Africa. Race and the Construction of the indispensable other*. He has an edited collection of essays. One of Magubane's most important books is the 1996 book *The Making of a Racist State: British Imperialism and the Union of South Africa*. Magubane was a well-rounded scholar who moved in different disciplines and challenged the academic orthodoxies and epistemic injustices of subjects such as sociology, anthropology, political studies and history.

Magubane returned home in 1997. He worked at the Human Sciences Research Council. A lot of South African Universities did not welcome and integrate South African black academics who came back from exile. The Mafeje Affair is a case in point as he was denied a lectureship during apartheid and was still not seen as good enough for the AC Jordan Chair in African Studies at the University of Cape Town in the 1990s (Ntsebeza, 2014). Magubane's major contribution was the road to democracy series by SADET (South African Democracy Education Trust). Here, he was able to train and give exposure to young black emerging scholars. The project was criticized for being a nationalistic project, but Magubane knew that if black people did not tell the story; major works like the Cambridge History of South Africa and the Oxford History would continue to be the exclusive hegemonic story of South African history and historiography (Sithole, 2009).

## *N Chabani Manganyi*

### Apartheid and the Making of a Black Psychologist: A memoir (2016)

Noel Chabani Manganyi was born in Makhado in Venda in 1940 in Mavambe village. He was influenced by his teachers who helped to develop a love of learning in him. He attended the newly built Mphaphuli High School and Lemana Training Institute (Manganyi, 2016). Lemana was part of the Swiss mission. Lemana was an important site of knowledge discovery for Manganyi. He was part of the last generation of students who learnt under mission education.

Manganyi and others of his generation were the first to experience segregated and tribal universities due to the promulgation of the Extension of University Education Act (Act No 45 of 1959). The University of the North catered for Sotho-Tswana, Venda and Tsonga ethnic groups (White, 1997). The aim of the ethnic university was to reinforce tribalism and break the pioneering pan Africanism of Fort Hare and other mission institutions whose acceptance was based on merit and not ethnic affiliation. Black people moved from the New African Movement of the 1940s to the ethnic intellectual enclaves by the 1980s of the grand apartheid policy of Bantustans. Though some institutions did challenge this, the era of the New African at Fort Hare was severely challenged until the emergence of Black Consciousness and Peoples Education in the 1970s and 1980s (Larkin, 2021).

Manganyi made the most of his stay at the University of the North. What led to this was the fact that some of his teachers had come from overseas. They were not tainted by the Afrikaner separatist racial ideology of apartheid. Manganyi was involved in student affairs as an SRC leader and was part of the founding meeting where the idea of SASO (South African Student Congress) was mooted (Manganyi, 2016: 102). Manganyi majored in English and Psychology. UNIN was under the tutelage of UNISA, so its students wrote UNISA (University of South Africa) exams. Manganyi, like most black academics had to study and work at the same time. He completed his MA and PHD at UNISA part time and continued working. He worked at Ellerines (a furniture company) in 1969 and delivered a report as to why African supervisors were resigning at their stores and found that it was the attitudes of white store

managers that led to this predicament. He was summarily dismissed for this report.

Manganyi was admitted as a clinical psychology intern at Baragwanath so that he could be a clinical psychologist in the department of Neurosurgery and Neurology. Manganyi published his first journal article, one issue he came across is that "African" in his article was replaced with "Bantu" by the journal editors (Manganyi, 2016: 32). His article was initially entitled 'Cases of hysteria among African women' in the South African Medical Journal. This was an instance of the political ideologies that were in place at the time that censored opinions about blackness.

Manganyi's doctoral study was on body image in paraplegia. This was in the domain of neuropsychology. Manganyi was quite lucky in his studies to receive support from his white mentors and fewer instances of racism. Manganyi received his doctorate in 1971. He went to Yale University on a study tour in 1971 and returned there as a postdoctoral fellow in 1973. Manganyi, a brilliant black psychologist was rejected for an academic post at the University of the North as he was considered a political troublemaker (Manganyi, 2016: 49). The historically white universities would not hire black people unless in the "Bantu languages" departments as research assistants and junior faculty despite their qualifications. Manganyi experienced a re-education at Yale that expanded his horizon and moved him from the apartheid inspired education he had received in South Africa. He also tried to apply for university position in the United States but was rejected due to affirmative action policies in the US favouring African Americans.

Manganyi was head hunted to become the head and professor of psychology at the University of Transkei (UNITRA) (now Walter Sisulu University). Transkei was one of the satellite states of the apartheid government in creating grand ethnic separate development amongst black South Africans in the 1970s that would see Black people seek aspiration and self-actualisation in ethnic homelands that lacked resources and were entirely dependent on the Pretoria regime (Lissoni and Ally, 2019). UNITRA at first was a warm climate for Manganyi but as time went on in the 1980s political instability engulfed the Transkei and ultimately the university was affected (Manganyi: 2016). His first publication monograph was *Being Black in the World*, a text about blackness inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement. He published *Alienation and the Body in a Racist Society* and *Mashangu's Reverie*

and *Dissenting essays on the Black Experience*. Manganyi wrote an article on *Psychobiography and the truth of the subject in 1983*. Manganyi took a position as a visiting research professor at the Wits University African Studies Institute as positions for Black Professors were not available in white universities.

Manganyi completed two biographical monographs on Eskia Zeke Mphahlele and another one on Gerard Sekoto. He also edited collections called *Treachery and Innocence*. He also published on violence and a monograph on the artist Dumile Feni. The 1980s and 1990s were a period of sustained intellectual productivity and output for Manganyi (Manganyi, 2016). Manganyi was appointed chancellor of the University of the North in 1991. He resigned in 1996 and worked in the Ministry of Education as a Director General and then returned to the University of Pretoria as scholar in the 2000s. There was quite a proliferation of many black scholars who got lost in the lucrative world of government and private sector companies who paid them huge salaries and allowed them to live a comfortable life. Many scholars who had promising scholarly careers as demonstrated by their doctoral dissertations simply abandoned any scholarly and professorial ambitions for the boardroom and state sector due to the institutionalised racism in the academic world. Another trend is that a lot of black scholars who were brilliant in the pursuit of knowledge production were simply co-opted/catapulted into managerial positions, a phenomenon that needs to be studied for its impact/effect on their scholarship and contribution in the academy (Ramoupi: 2017, Matebeni: 2014). Manganyi is one of the success stories of the black professoriate in South Africa. From his rural and humble origins in Mavambe he went on to publish in leading journals, wrote scholarly monographs, engaged with the community, and worked in government.

### *Mamphela Ramphela A Passion for Freedom: My Life (2014)*

Mamphela Ramphela is a black consciousness activist and academic who became the first black Vice Chancellor of UCT (Ramphela: 2014). She was born in the Northern Transvaal (Limpopo Province) at Bochum in 1947. Her parents were teachers who built her inspiration for education and knowledge. She grew up in the Soutpansberg area dominated by Afrikaners and was alerted to racism from a young age. Mamphela attended Bethesda Normal College in the Former Transvaal. The poor conditions of the school motivated her to work harder.

Mamphela studied medicine at the University of Natal Black section. This part of the university was meant to cater to the education of black students while still maintaining apartheid racial segregation (Noble, 2013). She became a founding member of the Black Consciousness student organisation SASO (South African Student Organisation). Mamphela, despite her relationship with Steve Biko, was a committed activist who cannot be reduced to being the girlfriend of Steve Biko as she played her part in the Black Consciousness Movement (Biko, 2021). Mamphela was part of the Black Community Programs. She was instrumental in setting up Zanempilo Community Health Center. The apartheid regime started cracking down on the BCM and Mamphela was one of the banished members. She was banished to Lenyenye Township outside Tzaneen.

Ramphela managed to keep busy by studying further and doing community work in Lenyenye. She was unbanned in the 1980s and left for the University of Cape Town and received a doctorate in social anthropology (Ramphela, 2014: 135). Her study was entitled the lives of South African migrant workers. In 1991, she became a Deputy Vice Chancellor at UCT. In 1996, she became the first black woman Vice Chancellor at a South African university. The first black person to head a historically white university.

Her work includes *Uprooting Poverty* with Francis Wilson. She also wrote *The Affirmative Action* book. Ramphela is an important part of this paper because women are excluded and marginalised from academic settings. Due to the patriarchal nature of the South African academy, it was not easy for black women to enter academia and thrive (Mokhele, 2013). Women who wanted to enter the academy had to sacrifice their personal lives for academic success. Ramphela dared to dream and push boundaries of race, class and gender.

Ramphela's success compels us as a country to work even harder in making sure that black women are given opportunities and supported in their academic endeavours. Once one discovers Ramphela's academic work, one realises the power of how her upbringing as her mother was a teacher and her committed involvement in the Black Consciousness Movement meant that she was motivated to transform universities. Although her tenure as VC of UCT did not change the racist structure of the university, it did lay a foundation for the likes of Njabulo Ndebele and Mamokgethi Phakeng. Although many women today hold powerful academic positions in academia, they are still undermined

and reduced to juniors and undermined by their male counterparts (Khunou et al, 2019; Magubane and Mabokela, 2004). Grace Khunou et al have shared the challenges that face black women academics in the academy just like the book by Mabokela and Zine Magubane did in the early 2000s.

### *Mabogo Percy More*

#### Looking Through Philosophy in Black: Memoirs (2018)

Mabogo More was born in 1946 in Benoni. He matriculated at Tlakula High School in Springs, Kwa Thema. More read voraciously from a young age. He then went to the University of the North for his undergraduate studies. This autobiography was one of the first ever by an academic in the discipline of philosophy in South Africa (More, 2018).

Mabogo More was a student of philosophy at the University of the North (UNIN) in the 1970s. For him to get to university, he sold liquor at a municipal bottle store to save money for university. Showing us the precarious nature of the schooling system, which was often conflated with race and class. Unlike Manganyi who started in 1960, More was part of the second cohort of students who came to the University of the North in the 1970s. The University of the North was starting to get on its feet. The aim of UNIN was to enforce the separate development ideals of the apartheid system. More reflects on the crippling nature of Bantu Education, which did not give him a good/strong philosophical foundation and prepare him for the academic world (More, 2018).

More was at UNIN at the same time as Black Consciousness started blooming on the campus. More was inspired by his Black Consciousness Movement schoolmates. He was in the same class as Onkgopotse Tiro who made a rousing speech called the Turfloop Testimony that changed Black Consciousness to take a more radical posture (Tiro, 2019). He was also inspired by black lecturers such as Gessler Muxe Nkondo and Candlish Maja who was taken to Robben Island for his political activities with the African National Congress. More also relates that some Afrikaans lecturers like Prof Herholdt struggled with the course material and taught using a system of rote learning or fundamental pedagogics (More, 2018).

In his undergraduate degree, More was expected to read white philosophers from a European perspective. More had to read the western

philosophical canon which was not always in touch with his reality as a Black South African. He says:

I however felt disappointed that most of what I learned from that type of philosophy was made to have absolutely not much to do with my everyday experiences in my lived world of the township or the reality of my situation in an antiblack apartheid society (More, 2018: 59-60).

Thus More felt that the philosophy he was being taught was far removed from his roots and culture as a black person and could not use it to fight against the oppression he was experiencing. More was a student and teacher in the radical 1970s where a lot of Black Consciousness and black power literature started to emerge. Although a lot of the literature was banned, students managed to smuggle the works of Fanon *Black Skin White Masks*, Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, Jackson's *Soledad Brothers*, Stokely Carmichael's *Black Power*, Malcolm X's *Autobiography*, Angela's Davis's *Voices of Resistance* and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. These works helped to politically conscientise and radicalise a new generation of black students who went on to influence the generation of 16 June 1976.

Philosophy as a subject was used to legitimate the apartheid system. As More shows, all philosophers consciously stayed out of politics. More became a lecturer in 1974 after receiving his honours degree in philosophy. More was not a political activist which allowed him access to become a lecturer. There was a perception in the 1970s and 1980s Black South African imagination that everyone who was not radical or political was a potential sell-out (More, 2018: 81). More introduces the term mastery of form or masking. Here More refers to people like himself who pretended to the system of being a compliant black but, was showing resistance in their own way.

More was admitted to Indiana University in 1980 and did his second master's degree with a view to starting a doctoral degree. Due to the uneven standards of education, a South African Master's degree was not credited and had to be redone in the American context (More, 2018: 110). Indiana opened the world of philosophy for More. More got to read African philosophy for the first time. He read the works of Mbiti, Wiredu and Paulin Hountondji and got to understand that there was a thriving African philosophy. More was taught to read critically and write journal articles on his sojourns overseas. More returned to SA in 1981 with a MA and then went to the University

of Birmingham. He then went to the University of Illinois at Chicago on a fellowship. His travels helped him to make up for his miseducation in the South African apartheid academy.

In 1986, More was part of a group nine black lecturers who were promoted to Associate Professors at UNIN. Most of them hardly had a doctoral degree and publications. They were mostly given the titles because a lot of their white counterparts were given professorships without the proper protocols being followed (More, 2018: 115). More was pursued by the University of Cape Town as a Junior lecturer in the early 1990s as part of its effort to transform, he rejected the post in favour of working at the more progressive and activist inclined University of Durban Westville as an associate professor of philosophy.

More had a difficult time with the South African philosophy establishment. He was always marginalised and treated like an outsider yet had respect from his international counterparts. More was awarded a lifetime achievement award by the Carribean Philosophical association. This award recognised his impact and stature as a philosopher (Sosibo, 2015). More has done a lot of work on the philosophy of race. Some of his important work is on Steve Biko and Black Consciousness. He has also written on Paul Sartre and Contingency. More has done a lot to push African philosophy in South Africa, challenging the Eurocentric continental and analytical philosophical traditions that do not want to transform as exemplified by the formation of the Azanian Philosophical society (Webster, 2021).

## Black Academic Autobiography and Decolonization

This paper has looked at academic biographies of different black academics operating in different times and contexts in the humanities and social sciences. The one major feature in most of the narratives is the influence of mission education. A lot of the scholars went to mission run schools which were different from their public-school counterparts. Mission schools introduced a lot of black scholars to reading and some academic literature. Mission schools expected more from their students and often insisted on high standards for their students (Chisholm: 2017). A lot of black scholars and academics during the apartheid era were influenced by mission education. If we are to decolonise the academy, black academics need to link up with their counterparts in basic education and make sure that their scholarship is accessible to a wider readership beyond the academy.



Going into university was different for the early generations as compared to those who came later. Matthews and Mphahlele went into teaching after getting their matric qualifications. They studied under correspondence for their bachelor's degrees with UNISA (University of South Africa). The generations who came later do not have the same pressures and start their undergraduate education as full-time students. Ramphele as a woman and activist had a difficult journey into academia and it shows how women have the odds stacked against them (Mabokela, 2007).

A lot of the scholars had a mixed site/split site graduate education. Many studied for their honours and master's degrees at home while others went to the US to do masters and doctorate. Fellowships, scholarships and opportunities to go overseas opened doors for many of the scholars and countered the deleterious and debilitating effects of Bantu Education in the academy (Nkomo: 1990). It would be interesting to think why American education became a popular option for black South Africans whereas the white scholars in the South African academy often preferred European universities in Holland, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Many of the scholars took up positions as lecturers in South African and American universities. In South Africa, the situation was exacerbated by the apartheid policy and lack of academic freedom. Matthews left his Professorship at Fort Hare in 1959 due to the repressive nature of the apartheid system. A lot of the scholars became faculty in US universities and really helped to establish a good reputation for South African scholarship in the American academy. Some like More and Manganyi and Ramphele stayed behind and taught at South African Universities. Many black South African academics wanted to come back home since the 1960s, but incidents like the UCT Mafeje affair and tight grip of the apartheid system on academic freedom meant that a lot of them would be considered *persona non grata* by the regime. Many were away for close to thirty years, they became erased/marginalised from the intellectual memory of this country. Many of their books and scholarly contributions can be easily found overseas but one struggles to locate it in most South African academic libraries and course material. What was a disappointment is that when many scholars returned from exile in the 1990s, many of them were not offered scholarly positions by the historically white institutions whilst the black universities embraced and gave them leading positions.

The scholarship of many black academics under apartheid was distinguished considering the place of underprivilege and suffering they experienced at the hands of the regime. A lot of females did not get an opportunity to become scholars due to the oppressive system of intersectional gender oppression. Only Ramphela was able to rise to the position of Vice Chancellor. The exclusion of black females makes black scholarship under apartheid poorer as women would have brought an enriching perspective. The scholarship of black scholars should be included when constructing a decolonised curriculum. Many of the scholars mentioned here are just a tiny fraction of the many black scholars who have contributed to scholarship on a global scale. They deserve to be read in their disciplines and inter disciplinary forums and African studies as they made contributions to black studies and academia on a global scale. These scholars need to be memorialised and remembered for the work they have done. One is simply saying that for us to achieve decolonisation, we must know our own scholarly traditions and upraise them before we jump on the global bandwagon. No one is going to come and do it for us, but we must do the difficult work of citing, unearthing, analysing and putting the older generation back into the curriculum, scholarship and public discourse.

## Conclusion

This paper has discussed the autobiographies of black scholars under apartheid. It has looked at how these black scholars experienced life in the South African Higher education system under apartheid. Many of the black scholars suffered and had to work twice as hard to be on the same level with their privileged white counterparts who had the support of the apartheid system. These autobiographies are important in informing current generations of black scholars about those who came before and the struggles they faced in academia and how they navigated those challenges. As we think about creating a new generation of black scholars, these autobiographies of black scholars are an important part of the discourse and historical narrative about transformation and decolonisation in the South African academy. The success of policies and institutional reform can be traced against the backdrop of critical reflections by scholars on their academic journeys. This paper shown that genealogies of black scholars under apartheid is diverse and cannot be put into a box. These autobiographies can be used to teach and encourage current scholars to document their lives. As we engage with decolonisation,

may we never forget those who came before us and laid the foundation for the academic and critical scholarly work being done to decolonise and create a truly African university understanding its epistemic location.

## References

- Andrews, K. 2018. *Back to Black: Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century*. London: Zed Books. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350218574>
- Aurell, J & Davis, R. 2019. History and Autobiography: The Logics of a Convergence, *Life Writing*, 16:4, 503-511, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2019.1648198>
- Chisholmy, L. 2017. *Between Worlds: German missionaries and the transition from mission to Bantu Education in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University. <https://doi.org/10.18772/12017111746>
- Biko, H. 2021. *Black Consciousness: A Love Story*. Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers.
- Biko, S. 1987. *I Write what I Like*. London: Heinemann.
- Davis, A. 2013. *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*. New York: International Publishers and Co.
- Du Bois, WEB. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago: A.C. McLurg and Co.
- Du Bois, WEB. 2014. *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Franklin, J. 2005. *Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Fuze, M. 1979. *The Black People and Whence They Came*. University of Natal Press: Pietermaritzburg.
- Jacobs, N & Bank, A. 2019. Biography in post-apartheid South Africa: A call for awkwardness, *African Studies*, 78:2, 165-182, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2019.1569428>
- Jansen JD 2003. Guest editorial. On the state of South African universities. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 17(3):9-12. <https://doi.org/10.4314/sajhe.v17i3.25399>
- Keto. C. 2001. *Vision and Time: Historical Perspective of an Africa-Centered Paradigm*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Khunou, G, Phaswana, E, Khoza-Shangase, K and Canham, H (Eds). 2019. *Black Academic Voices: The South African Experience*. Pretoria: HSRC Press.
- Khuzwayo, E. 2018. *Call Me Woman*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa.

- Larkin, C. 2021. The University College of the North, student politics and the National Union of South African Students, 1960-1968. *Southern Journal for Contemporary History*, 46(1), 3-28. <https://doi.org/10.18820/24150509/SJCH46.v1.2>
- Lekgoathi, S. 2009. 'Colonial' Experts, Local Interlocutors, Informants And The Making Of An Archive On The "Transvaal Ndebele", 1930–1989. *The Journal of African History*. 50. 61 - 80. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853708003976>
- Lissoni, A and Ally, S (Eds). 2019. *New Histories of South Africa's Apartheid-Era Bantustans*. London: Routledge.
- Mabokela, R and Magubane, Z (Eds). 2004. *Hear Our Voices: Race, Gender and Black South African Women in the Academy*. Pretoria: UNISA Press. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004492479>
- Mabokela, R. 2007. *Soaring Beyond Boundaries : Women Breaking Educational Barriers in Traditional Societies*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789087901684>
- Mabokela, R. 2016. *Voices of Conflict: Desegregating South African Universities*. London: Routledge.
- Magubane, B. 1971. A Critical Look at Indices Used in the Study of Social Change in Colonial Africa. *Current Anthropology*, 12(4/5), 419–445. <https://doi.org/10.1086/201229>
- Magubane, B. 2010. *My Life and Times*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Kwa Zulu Natal Press.
- Makgoba MW. 1997. *Mokoko: The Makgoba Affair: A Reflection on Transformation*. Johannesburg: Vivlia Publishers.
- Manganyi, NC. 2016. *Apartheid and the Making of a Black Psychologist: A memoir*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18772/12016058622>
- Masilela, N. 2014. *An Outline of the New African Movement in South Africa*. Trenton: Africa World Press.
- Matebeni, Z. 2014. Why are there so few black professors in South Africa? *The Guardian Newspaper*. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/06/south-africa-race-black-professors>
- Matthews, ZK with Monica Wilson. 1983. *Freedom for My People the Autobiography of Z. K. Matthews: Southern Africa 1901 To 1968*. Cape Town: David Phillip.
- Mkhize, N. 2021. John L Dube Lecture 2020 – Professor Nomalanga Mkhize. *Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa*. URL: <http://www.cihablog.com/john-l-dube-lecture-2020-prof-nomalanga-mkhize/>
- Modisane, B. 1990. *Blame me on History*. New York: Touchstone Books.

- Mofolo, T. 1981. Chaka. London: Heinemann Publishers.
- Mokgatle, N. 1971. *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African*. Berkeley: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520316157>
- Mokhele, M. 2013. Reflections of Black Women Academics at South African Universities: A Narrative Case Study. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol 4 No 3, 611-620. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n3p611>
- Molema, S. 2009. *The Bantu, Past and Present: An Ethnographical & Historical Study of the Native Races of South Africa (1920)*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- More, P. 2018. *Looking Through Philosophy in Black: Memoirs*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Mpahlele, E. 1972. *Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-81570-8>
- Mphahlele, E. 1963. "On Negritude in Literature". BlackPast.org. URL: <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/speeches-global-african-history/1963-eskia-ezekiel-mpahlele-negritude-literature/>
- Mphahlele, E. 1984. *Afrika my Music: An Autobiography 1957–1983*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Mphahlele, E. 1985. *Down Second Avenue*. London: Farber and Farber.
- Ndletyana, M. 2008. *African Intellectuals in 19th and Early 20th Century: South Africa*. Pretoria: HSRC Press.
- Nkomo, M. (Ed.). 1990. *Pedagogy of domination: Toward a democratic education in South Africa*. Trenton: Africa World Press
- Noble, V. 2013. *A School of Struggle: Durban's Medical School and the Education of Black Doctors in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press.
- Nqulunga, B. 2017. *The Man Who Founded the ANC: A Biography of Pixley ka Isaka Seme*. Johannesburg: Penguin Random House South Africa.
- Ntantala, P. 1992. *A Life's Mosaic: The Autobiography of Phyllis Ntantala*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ntsebeza, L. 2014. The Mafeje and the UCT saga: unfinished business? *Social Dynamics*, 40(2), 274–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2014.946254>
- Ntshangase, D. 1995. *Between the lion and the devil: The life and works of B.W. Vilakazi, 1906-1947*. Seminar Paper presented to the Institute for Advanced Social Research, University of Witwatersrand. URL: <https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/9603>

- Nyoka, B. 2019. Bernard Magubane's critique of anthropology in southern Africa: an introductory essay, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 37:2-3, 169-190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2019.1662892>
- Plaatjie, S. 2007. *Native Life in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa.
- Radebe, Y. 2009. The meaning of academic freedom in the former "open universities," in post apartheid South Africa. Unpublished Masters Research Report: Wits University.
- Ramoupi, NLL. 2017. Why are there so few black professors? Mail and Guardian Newspaper. URL: <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-06-15-00-why-are-there-so-few-black-professors/>
- Ramphele, M. 2014. *A Passion for Freedom: My Life*. London: IB Tauris.
- SALA. 2022. SM Mofokeng. URL: <https://sala.org.za/sm-mofokeng/>
- Sithole, J. 2009. Contestations over knowledge production or ideological bullying?: a response to Legassick on the workers' movement. *Kronos*, 35(1), 222-241.
- Sosibo, K. 2015. No Country for Brilliant Thinkers. Mail and Guardian. URL: <https://mg.co.za/article/2015-01-15-no-country-for-brilliant-thinkers/>
- Thiongo, N. 1968. On the Abolition of the English Department. In Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Tiro, G. 2019. *Parcel of Death: The Biography of Onkgopotse Abram Tiro*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa.
- Webster, A. 2021. South African Social Science and the Azanian Philosophical Tradition. *Theoria* 68 (168):111-135. <https://doi.org/10.3167/th.2021.6816806>
- West, C. 2010. *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud, A Memoir*. New York: Smiley Books.
- White, C. 1997. *From despair to hope: The Turfloop Experience*. Sovenga: UNIN Press.
- Wotshela, L. 2018. *Fort Hare: from Garrison to Bastion of Learning 1916-2016*. Johannesburg: KMM Review Publishing.