Marumo Moerane, interviewed by Danny Massey, 1999

MM: So much has happened between then and now. One was very young. When I got to Fort Hare I had just turned 17. And as you probably know, that was a very hectic time in terms of South African politics. 1959 is when the PAC was born. 1960 is Sharpeville.That's when the government took over Fort Hare from the old regime. We call them the new regime and the old regime. The changes were dramatic. I'm sure you've been told that a number of lecturers and professors resigned at the end of 1959 because they didn't want to be part of the new order.

There was an influx of Afrikaner lecturers, some of whom spoke very little English, some of whom had just completed senior degrees at Afrikaans universities. They were given lectureships, science subjects, mathematics, physics, chemistry. It was really a traumatic time. The problem for the students was how to adjust to the changes. There was a school of thought which said rather destroy Fort Hare, because these people have come to impose new values and new ethos, new politics, bantustan-politics. Many of the students felt that was something to be resisted.

I'm sure you've been told there was a boycott of classes, mass action in 1960, when the new regime had taken over, culminating in an u1timatum issued by the rector where he called upon the student body to sign a declaration that they are now prepared to abide by the rules and regulations of the college. Otherwise they are to leave.

Meetings were held. I remember one particular day where meetings were held the wholeday. There was division in the middle. The question was to sign or not to sign. Some senior students could see their futures going down the drain. Some had received telegrams from their homes saying that they dare not return. Eventually the resistance crumbled. Many people signed. I personally didn't sign. But I don't think the object of the administration was to get people to sign. It was just to break the strike. It crumbled and people went back to their books. To a great extent the spirit of resistancewas broken. So 1960, 1961, people just concentrated on their books, trying to get out of Fort Hare as quickly as possible. That was the idea….

[I came from a political home.] So when I got to Fort Hare in 1959, I was politically conscious. And believe it or not, I joined the Pan Africanist Congress.

DM: Was there a branch at Fort Hare ?

MM: There was a branch, yes. There was a branch of the PAC at Fort Hare. It was a very small branch. Abie Nkomo was part of our cell. It was a small grouping. The largest grouping was ANC. There was another large grouping of Unity Movement folks. There was a guy named P—S-- He was charged in 1962, spent 8 years on Robben Island. When he left Fort Hare he went and taught in Pretoria. He tried to recruit some of his students and was arrested and charged and convicted and sentenced. There was another gentleman named S-. He left the country, went to Lesotho, to the University of Lesotho. There was another fellow named Ndingi. I don't know what became of him. And one of K.D. Matanzima's sons was also a member of our cell.

DM: Apparently he was very embarrassed by his father.

MM: He was. We used to hold meetings on Sundays in the bush. In 1959 meetings were not secretive. It was still a lawful organization. In 1960 and '61, when the ANC and PAC were declared unlawful organizations, then we had to meet in secret. It was really a question of studying literature about pan-Africanism, holding discussion groups. No action, no qualitative action. We were very excited in 1960 when Robert Sobukwe decided to launch the anti-pass campaign which culminated in Sharpeville. But then after '61 when I left Fort Hare and I came to the University of Natal, political activity for the next 4, 5, 6 years was at a very low end. The PAC itself started disintegrating because of internecine fights. That was my last contact with the PAC.

DM: How did you end up with the PAC coming from such a strong ANC family?

MM: I suppose it was the influence of my father. Within the ANC you had a

nationalist faction, an Africanist faction, and a Marxist faction. My father was not a Marxist. He was an African nationalist. He influenced me. So when there was a question of making a choice between what I viewed as Marxist-Leninist ideology and pan-Africanist ideology, I opted for the Pan-Africanist ideology.

DM: Was the PAC recruiting at Fort Hare ? Did you meet someone who drew you in?

MM: Frankly I don't remember. I really don't remember how it actually happened. But I was attracted to the Pan-Africanist ideology rather than the Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Oh yes, Ndingi was in the same house as me. I was in Iona hostel. He was a rabid Africanist. So we got talking and I shared his ideas and we sought others who thought as we did. Abie Nkomo who I was talking about before is a cousin of mine. Others were friends.

DM: Were SOYA and the Youth League and the ANC all united in the fight against the takeover?

MM: Yes. Oh yes. There were no divisions. It was not drawn on party political lines. It was just great antipathy to the new regime.

DM: Do you remember some of the members of the new regime coming in 1959?

MM: No, I saw them first in 1960.

DM: What was the initial reaction of the student body?

MM: It was very hostile. I don't even think there was a formal introduction. I don't really remember how they introduced themselves. But there was just opposition and hostility to them from the word go….

DM: Can you compare the before- and after-1960 Fort Hare academically, socially, etc?

MM: After they crushed the resistance, it was very dull. There was hardly any student life. The only student activities were the usual dance practices and some sports activities. There were hardly any meetings worth mentioning. People just decided to be bookworms, study and leave.

DM: Was there any underground activity? People told me there were extensive ANC youth league cells.

MM: There was. In fact political activity then was conducted in terms of cells. We had our own PAC cells. I don't think the NEUM was banned in 1960. So I suppose they continued with their meetings. But the ANC had to conduct meetings underground.

DM: ANC Youth League members at that time talked of a prevalence of special branch members on campus and spies amongst the students. Is that something the PAC had to deal with?

MM: From what I've gathered then and subsequently, there certainly wasn't a spy amongst our small group.I know the ANC was a much larger organization and obviously it was easier to infiltrate spies. Prominent members of the Youth League then were some of the people in this *Fort Harian* magazine 1959. Billy Modise was there. Thami Mhlambiso, Stanley Mabizela,Abie Nkomo, Didi Ntoye, and there was a coloured fellow, Peter Mok. He joined the Labour Party and became a member of parliament. He was known as a howler. The ambassador to Russia, [Simon] Makana, was there. I saw him on TV yesterday. I've not seen him for forty years. There was Ivy Matsepe.

DM: She told me she wasn't active at the time, but completely awestruck by people like Modise and [Ambrose] Makiwane. People from this era talk about speeches and having an impact on those who weren't politically active. People became conscious through those speeches.

MM: Another person who used to speak, but he wasn't ANC, he was SOYA, is the present judge president of Transkei, Somyalo. Another guy who used to speak and introduce every speech of his with the phrase "according to Karl Marx," was Seretse Choabi. I remember him. He used to speak until he frothed at the mouth.

DM: What were some of the issues at the time? Was it mostly the transfer?

MM: Well at the time, in ‘59, when we knew the new regime was coming, there was debate as to whether or not the lecturers should resign. That was the burning issue in 1959. The student body felt the lecturers should resign. As I say, a number of them did resign. We did respect those that did resign. One physicist also resigned, went abroad to the UK. Others stayed for one year, for instance, Professor Guma. Then at the end of 1960 he proudly pronounced that he's now exercising his manhood, that he's resigning. I think he got a job as vice-Chancellor of the university inLesotho.

DM: In this *Fort Harian*, the last page has almost a tombstone. It says RIP, 1916-1959, marking the death of Fort Hare. Did students look at it that way, particularly those who were continuing?

MM: Yes, particularly we who were going to come back the following year.

DM: What was it like coming back to an institution where you didn't want to be?

MM: Demoralizing. It was really demoralizing. Those years, 1960 and 1961 were terrible years. They really shattered our morale, particularly after they crushed the resistance. Most people continued with underground activity….

DM: Do you remember Professor Oosthuizen in botany?

MM: No, I didn't do botany. I know there was a lady that taught botany. And Professor Galloway taught chemistry. Then at some point Dr. Govinden came. He taught physical chemistry. He was a good guy. In fact he was living proof of the fact that the good guys should have stayed on to mitigate the circumstances.

DM: Getting back to that issue, you said the students felt the staff should resign despite the fact that they were going to continue. Was there ever a movement for the students not to continue as well?

MM: I think some students believed that the best solution to the problem was to have Fort Hare shut down. That would have been a very temporary solution if a solution at all.

DM: The students at Fort Hare around the takeover hadn't grown up in Bantu education. Most of those who went to Fort Hare in ‘59 and ‘60 were still of the missionary tradition. They definitely opposed the takeover, but weren't going to completely shut the school down. Maybe the people brought up in the Bantu education schools would have reacted differently.

MM: Yes, I go along with that. It was a difficult time, difficult choices. Parents had invested a lot of money in their children’s education. Some had one year to go, others two. Others had to get a University teaching diploma. And these other universities did not readily accept students who were not white. And fees were lower at Fort Hare. Sothe students were faced with very, very difficult choices.

DM: Can you speak a bit about the atmosphere at Fort Hare before 1960 in terms of its non-racial composition?

MM: In ‘59 when I got there Fort Hare was completely non-racial, except they didn't accept white students. They accepted every other color. There were Africans, Indians and coloureds amongst the students and faculty. Students were drawn from the whole of Southern and Central Africa. We had a lot of students from what later became Zimbabwe and what later became Malawi and what later became Zambia. Many students from Swaziland and Botswana and Lesotho. And the student body was completely integrated as far as Africans and Indians and coloureds were concerned. I'm not so sure about the staff. I assume the whites would have socialized with the whites and the blacks with the blacks, particularly residentially. But there was no obvious apartheid within the staff.

DM: Until 1960?

MM: 1960, it was stark.

DM: They introduced differential salary scales and separate councils. How aware of these were the students?

MM: They were aware of the council and the advisory council which had blacks and mostly bantustan supporting people. That advisory council was obviously useless…

DM: Supposedly the history and sociology departments were completely revamped. I guess you can't really change physics or chemistry, although you can change the way it's taught. Some of the non-science people said that they chose the majors based on the fact that the head of the history department was an absolute monster.

MM: Yes, and as you probably know, from 1960, the accrediting university was the University of South Africa and not Rhodes. So the curriculum was the University of South Africa curriculum, not Rhodes.

DM: So you were amongst the last to receive a Rhodes degree?

MM: Yes. Then it became an autonomous university.

DM: Then the students wanted it to remain UNISA.

MM: Yes I know. Because what they taught at UNISA they taught to everybody, to whites and blacks and Indians and coloureds. Now they were going to be taught a particular Fort Hare curriculum which they associated with bantustans. That's why they resisted that.

DM: So you were spared Bantu education until you got to Fort Hare ?

NN: Yes.