

# THE TRANSKEI BANTUSTAN AND IT'S UNIVERSITY : A CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY

During 1984, events in the Transkei Bantustan and its University, the University of Transkei (Unitra), have received a great deal of publicity which has focussed on the boycotting of lectures, the storming of the University library by the Transkeian police and army, the beating, detention and expulsion of several hundred students, reports on court cases, allegations of corruption and mismanagement within the University, the appointment and findings of an "independent" commission of inquiry into University disruption, and the deportation over a period of months of nine University academic staff members by the Transkei government. These events have resulted in the almost complete disruption of the University academic year.

In this article I will attempt to explain why this disruption occurred. I will also attempt to demonstrate that these events cannot be explained in isolation from the dynamics of change in the South African political system. I will finally speculate on the future of the University of Transkei in the context of the Transkei Bantustan.

As a starting point one must look at the background and purposes for which the Transkei Bantustan and its University were created. The foundations upon which the Bantustans were laid can be traced back to last century, however the decision to create politically "independent" and racially exclusive geographic areas carved out of greater South Africa is of more recent origin. The Bantustans are now referred to by their creator the South African Government and its supporters in them as "independent nation states" in the hopes that this change in terminology will give them a greater degree of respectability. I find little that is respectable about them and will continue to refer to the Transkei as a Bantustan.

The decision to create politically "independent" and racially exclusive geographic areas within the boundaries of South Africa, was taken in the early 1960's by a white Afrikaner minority Nationalist Party government in Pretoria headed by Dr H.F. Verwoerd. Verwoerd was Prime Minister from 1958 to 1966 and is the main theorist behind the doctrine of "separate development" or "apartheid". Verwoerd is described as the "architect of apartheid", (1) the doctrine which provides for the creation of "independent nation states." The Transkei was the first so called "independent nation state" to be created in terms of this doctrine. Although Verwoerd was not a born Afrikaner (he was born in the Netherlands) he identified very strongly with the Afrikaner nationalist cause, and became one of the most dedicated and fanatical proponents of racial segregation and territorial fragmentation. It was in 1962 that Verwoerd stated that,

"the Bantu (blacks) will be able to develop into separate states. This is not what we would like to see. It is a form of fragmentation that we would not have liked if we were able to avoid it. In the light of the pressure being exerted on South Africa, there is however no doubt that eventually this will have to be done thereby buying for the white man the right to retain his domination in what is his country." (2)

The creation of the Transkei Bantustan was plain and simply a product of the perceptions of Verwoerd in particular, and the Nationalist Party and its auxiliaries like the Broederbond, the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs, Afrikaner academics and senior government officials, as to how South Africans of different colours should be politically and economically accommodated within the same territory. The Bantustans were clearly a product of white political thought rather than black political thought.

Now before a territory can become "independent", it must have a government and leadership generally supportive of the idea of independence. In order that the South African government could achieve its objective of an "independent" Transkei, it had to embark upon a black leadership recruitment and development program. One of the key "leaders" recruited by the South African government was a black South African tribal chief by the name of Kaiser Matanzima. Matanzima was already a collaborator in the early 1950's of the South African government's race segregation policy. In order to make an "independent" Transkei work, support had to be shored up for Matanzima and a future government. The South African government used a number of devices to achieve its objectives. It offered material, financial and other inducements to potential black supporters. It moreover resorted to extremely dubious electoral techniques during successive elections to pack a parliament with generally supportive members, South African government officials were used to manipulate events in its favour, and further, considerable power was given to government paid and appointed chiefs who were therefore obliged to support an "independence" government. Finally, wide ranging "security laws" were passed and used to further build up support for Matanzima and his Transkei National Independence Party (TNIP) and to demoralize and jail individuals and political party members who were opposed to racial segregation and an "independent" Matanzima-led Transkei. (3)

A further important factor to consider in relation to this process is that the opinion of the Xhosa-speaking Transkeian population was never sought either in a referendum or special election as to whether they really wanted an

"independent" Transkei or an alternative form of political accommodation in South Africa. Data gathered in sample surveys and observations made by several researchers indicate an overwhelming rejection of an "independent" Transkei amongst the residents of that territory.(4) By not holding a referendum it would suggest that the South African government and the Transkeian "leadership" were anxious to avoid the possibility of the idea of an "independent" Transkei being rejected by a Transkeian electorate. Another important fact to consider is that in the 1981 Transkei election for members of the National Assembly, only thirty-one percent of the eligible Transkeian voters actually voted. This must surely indicate a general lack of support and enthusiasm for the Transkeian government and its "leadership."

The above indicates that "independence" was foisted upon the Transkeian population. No request for "independence" was ever made by the Transkeian population. Any requests that were made for "independence" were made by South African government supported puppets. The "independent" Transkei was therefore set up by the South African government to fit with Verwoerdian ideology and was not created in response to the general will of the population of the Transkei. A government lacking in legitimacy and support will of necessity resort to measures to protect its existence and interests when it perceives itself to be threatened. It is this perception that has brought about the disruption of the University of Transkei academic year as will be explained below.

With the pending "independence" of the Transkei Bantustan in 1976, it was felt that the establishment of a University in the territory would lend it status, legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the local and international community. An official publication of what became the University of Transkei in 1976, states that "on request of the Honourable the Chief Minister of Transkei, Paramount Chief K.D. Matanzima and his cabinet, the University of Fort Hare was approached during 1974 by the Honourable the Minister of Bantu Education, Mr M.C. Botha, with a view to the establishing a branch of the University of Fort Hare at Umtata in 1975." (5) From this statement it can be seen that the establishment of a university was seen as necessary to an "independent" Transkei and supported by both governments. Moreover, Matanzima acknowledged in 1977 that "the establishment of a university in Transkei has been a personal ideal for many years, the present events (the official opening of the university) should in many a way be regarded as a long cherished dream." (6) The establishment of a university might therefore assist Matanzima in realising the personal ideal of being recognised as the leader of an internationally recognised "nation-state."

In order for a university to fulfill its functions "suitable" staff members have to be appointed. This was all the more important in the case of the University of Transkei in view of the role that this University would have to perform. One of the key staff positions in any university is that of principal. The University of Transkei Act, 1976 was framed so as to ensure that the political goals of the University were likely to be met. In terms of this Act, the principal was to function as "chief executive officer and shall by virtue of his office be a member of every committee and joint committee of the council and senate." (6) This provision places the principal in a very strong posi-

tion within the University. A further provision was included so as to ensure that the government could exercise indirect control over the University. Section 7(1) of the Act states that "the principal of the University shall be appointed by the Minister after consultation with the council." Moreover, in terms of government notice No. 118 of August 1977, "the Minister may dismiss the principal on the advice of the council." As the processes of government work in the Transkei Bantustan, the Minister is in fact the autocratic and domineering Kaiser Matanzima who became Prime Minister at "independence" and later President. Despite Matanzima's constitutional designation as President and ceremonial head of state, he continues to dominate the government of the territory. As a consequence of the provisions of the University of Transkei Act, 1976, the incumbent of the office of principal is in effect answerable to Matanzima rather than to the Council of the University to which all other University staff members are answerable. A conclusion that one can draw from these provisions of the Act is that the draftsmen of the Act who were no doubt the Transkeian and Pretoria governments, feared the consequences of a truly autonomous university. A provision for indirect control was therefore included. However, as time passed by it was discovered that this control mechanism was not adequate and other control measures had to be used as will be explained below.

Besides making legal provision for the control of the University the type of person appointed to various offices is of great importance. When it came to appointing the first principal in 1976 of the new University of Transkei, (Unitra was still a branch of the University of Fort Hare at that stage) Professor J.M. de Wet, Rector of the University of Fort Hare, and no doubt with the blessing of the erstwhile Minister of Bantu Education, M.C. Botha, appointed, Professor B. de V. van der Merwe as Rector's representative in Umtata. This was a most suitable appointment from the point of view of both the Pretoria government and the Matanzima government in that Van der Merwe was a conservative autocratic Afrikaner from the Orange Free State who still believes in Verwoerd's racial segregation vision and would ensure that this vision was implemented. He was moreover a former Professor in the Philosophy and History of Education at the University of Fort Hare and would ensure that Matanzima's "Xhosa nation" received a good dose of ethno-national education.

Both the Matanzima government and the Pretoria government have long desired that the Transkei gain recognition in the international community. If the Transkei was recognised by the international community as a *de facto* independent state, then the apartheid doctrine would gain in legitimacy. Part of the strategy towards international recognition would be for the new University of Transkei to be placed in the most favourable international light possible. In an address Van der Merwe said that "the university of Transkei aims at developing into a modern university" and will "have strong ties with the people of Transkei" and the "Xhosa nation." He continued, "it will be the task of the university, both staff and students alike, to remember the historic past, the particular nature of its present responsibility towards the people of Transkei. But this must not be seen in a narrow or exclusive sense; the university also wants to be universal and therefore is also open to all who qualify to lecture and study here....."

The university must be of Africa, but not of the dark Africa of the colonial past; on the contrary, the university must show the way to the new Africa, freed from the influence of the past, and free in its own right without falling prey to a new form of colonialism or pseudo-democracy." Van der Merwe concludes that the task will be to blend the best of the Xhosa past with what is worthy in western civilization. It must of necessity be a joint effort of black and white. (7)

In the context of an enforced racial order, it is impossible to attain all these goals. Some of these goals were however partially attained. As the years progressed, the University acquired in 1974 an academic staff numbering approximately one hundred and eighty and originating from sixteen different countries as diverse as the Soviet Union and South Africa. Further, the 1984 student enrolment numbered nearly three thousand of which nearly ten percent originated from outside the borders of the Transkei. In the context of southern African universities, the University of Transkei became one of the most open of all universities in the region to "all who qualify to lecture and study here." Naturally if the University was open to a student and staff complement from diverse backgrounds, they would bring with them diverse political, economic, educational and social views and promote views contrary to the existing order. It is a clash of diverse views which is at the heart of the legitimacy crisis which is being fought out at present and has resulted in the almost complete disruption of the academic year.

The participants in this crisis can be viewed as two loose and shifting alliances. The one alliance comprises Matanzima as founder of the University and the University's first Chancellor. Matanzima is also effective head of government as mentioned above. Other members of this alliance include functionaries like Matanzima's younger brother as Prime Minister, Van der Merwe as an employee of Matanzima, the Ministers of Education, Interior, Police, Prisons and Defence, and their immediate subordinates. About a third of the University academic and administrative staff and a number of students and more particularly part-time students are also members of this alliance.

There are several factors which have brought this alliance together. Almost the entire membership of this alliance has an interest in preserving the status quo. For example, if a different political, economic and social order prevailed in greater South Africa, Matanzima would not hold the position of power that he holds at present. Matanzima owes his position to the South African government and not to the general wish of the Transkeian population as explained above. Matanzima would obviously not support any effort or allow any doctrine to be propagated which might upset the status quo and redistribute power and wealth. Similarly, Van der Merwe owes his position to Matanzima as referred to above, and is unlikely to easily relinquish his position or fall out of favour with his employer Matanzima. Van der Merwe is also useful to Matanzima in that he can act as a useful conduit to Pretoria for Matanzima's financial and other requirements. Other members of the alliance also have material interests in the status quo like good salaries, positions of power and business opportunities. Members of the alliance also include recipients and potential recipients of patronage from Matanzima and his functionaries. Patronage might include the awarding of high positions in government, the alloca-

tion of scarce resources like housing, loans, land and trading rights. A further binding factor in this alliance is a blind acceptance of the Transkei Bantustan and the status quo within the Bantustan as being legitimate and a finality. As far as education is concerned, members of this alliance do not understand the concepts of "university autonomy" and "academic freedom". They see the University as an extension of the civil service where everybody is required to work according to a strict set of rules and code of conduct. They believe that "students are at university to study and not to dabble in politics. Students must obey the authorities." Any deviation from this perception of a university is considered to be rebellion against the authorities. In resolving even minor conflicts, members of this alliance do not have a great deal of competence, they do not see the utility of consultation as a conflict resolution mechanism. They would rather resort to stern measures like force and intimidation as being necessary and appropriate in bringing any form of "rebellion" under control.

Ranged against this alliance is another loose alliance comprising broadly, members of the Students' Representative Council, a sizeable proportion of the student body which includes almost all four-hundred and eighty students in residence, and approximately two thirds of the University academic and administrative staff. This alliance shares several characteristics. Members of the alliance do not have a great material interest in the status quo, they have very little to lose if the existing order is changed. They are not the recipients of patronage. They abhor apartheid and all its implications, and the great disparities of wealth and poverty within the Transkeian and South African societies. Members of this alliance are highly critical of the corrupt and irregular activities in which members of the opposing alliance are perceived to be indulging.

Further binding factors in this alliance are the implications and beliefs in the ideas of "university autonomy", "academic freedom", an "open university" and the "rule of law." With the aid of critical and enlightened staff of diverse persuasions, the student body developed enlightened and critical attitudes towards their society. As a result of this learning process, they have become more articulate and confident in themselves. This process is moreover reinforced by the vicious racial practices including political and economic discrimination to which many of them have been subjected in greater South Africa. Finally, they could see that the prevailing order within the Transkei and in greater South Africa would not afford them the opportunities in the political, economic and social sphere that they would be afforded in a new order.

Members of this alliance do not accept the notion of a "Xhosa nation" but support a greater South African nationalism. They also support real democracy and not "pseudo-democracy" as is practiced within the University and in the Transkei and greater South Africa. Members of this alliance see the role of the University as showing "the way to a new Africa" and not the Africa as seen from the perspective of the Xhosa nationalist or the Afrikaner Broederbond. This view of an alternative society was manifested in various student protest demonstrations against the South African government Coloured and Indian elections held in September of 1984. Some of the slogans chanted with great gusto were, "Mandela is our leader" (referring to detained ANC leader Nelson

Mandela), "we are going to Pretoria" (referring to the take over of the South African government), "students unite," "Tambo lead us" (referring to Oliver Tambo, President of the ANC in exile), "amandla wethu" (strength to the people), and "a luta continua." (the struggle continues) Evidence of a view of another order in South Africa amongst the student population is found in unpublished survey research undertaken by staff members at the University.

The disruption of the 1984 University year has come about as a result of a conflict between these two alliances. Conflicts over large issues are very often set off by relatively minor issues and this is in fact what has happened in regard to the University of Transkei issue. This conflict has followed a general retaliatory pattern between these two alliances. This conflict has developed broadly as follows. It began over the setting up of an informal commission of enquiry by certain staff members to investigate allegations of corruption and mismanagement within the administration of the University. The findings of this commission of enquiry were stopped by an unknown source from being referred to the Attorney-General for possible prosecution which would have most certainly been an embarrassment to the Matanzima alliance. This alliance felt threatened by this and retaliated by Van der Merwe singling out several staff members for attack in public during a graduation address. Further, the Matanzima alliance detained several students for "questioning" who were linked to the Students' Representative Council. This was an attempt to block the Students' Representative Council from mobilising student opinion against the Matanzima alliance. The students responded by holding a mass meeting to discuss the detention issue and decided to protest against the detentions by using the only weapon at their disposal, the boycott of lectures. The Matanzima alliance retaliated by deciding that there must be so-called "agitators" amongst the university staff, and on very subjective and arbitrary grounds, deported four academic staff members and later a further five. This action only provoked further student anger and led to the extension of the lecture boycott. Later in the year, the Matanzima alliance again responded by detaining several hundred students and releasing them without charge. Students again were not intimidated by these actions and again did not return to lectures in great numbers. The Matanzima alliance again responded by prohibiting entry to the campus of five hundred and eighty students. These drastic measures were used in order to control the course of events within the University. Van der Merwe as an employee of Matanzima with a great deal of power in the University was not able to control the course of events.

What are the consequences of these actions? They have besmirched the name of the University throughout the world and set back any progress that the Transkeian government might have made in having the Transkei state recognised by the international community. The little credibility that the University might have had in the international community has been completely destroyed. These actions have moreover radicalised and angered students and sympathisers and unsettled and demoralised staff. As far as the students are concerned, these actions have wrecked many of their academic careers and many of them will be driven more firmly towards the co-called "enemies" of the South African state, in particular the African Natio-

nal Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and other liberation movements.

As far as the future is concerned, the conflict will continue until a legitimate order is established in South Africa. The conflict is unmanageable within the parameters of the Transkei Bantustan. Many of the conflicting and bungled decisions made by the Matanzima alliance assisted by incompetence in this alliance, are symptomatic of the unmanageability of the conflict. All the Matanzima alliance can really do about the conflict, besides abdicating their positions of power and authority, is to use all repressive and intimidatory measures at their disposal to protect themselves.

In the future, the idea of an "open university" will in practical terms be cast aside in favour of a Xhosa ethnic university. The university will to an increasing extent be staffed by Xhosas or as they are called, "Transkeian Citizens." They are more easily controlled than so-called "expatriate" staff. Their mobility in the job market is restricted by the prevailing racial order in South Africa. They therefore have to "toe the line" or they might be threatened with dismissal or jail sentences. This is perhaps more serious punishment than what deportation with one hour's notice might mean to an "expatriate" staff member. Other repressive measures that the Matanzima alliance will use will include student expulsions and denials of admission to the University.

The consequences of the legitimacy crisis are that the students who are supposed to be helped by the University are going to be deprived of a good education. Standards must inevitably decline if a University draws its staff from a small population. Further, no self-respecting academic will be prepared to work at the University, and those who might remain at present will eventually leave for other universities. The University of Transkei will fall in line with the sterile racial order in South Africa as envisaged by Verwoerd and others and will become what is commonly referred to as a "tribal bush college." The Matanzima alliance has gained the upper hand in the conflict for the present, and through its possession of state power will continue to dominate and repress opponents. Nevertheless, forces of change have been released by the University which are uncontrollable and in time will lead to a more legitimate order. The conflict will continue. □

#### REFERENCES

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4. *ibid.*
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