



Speaking Truth to Power

The Steve Biko Transformative Education Project online newsletter

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Issue Dedicated to Mbulelo Mzamane



Professor Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane (28 July 1948 – 16 February 2014) was a South African author, poet, and academic. Nelson Mandela described him as a “visionary leader and one of South Africa’s greatest intellectuals”.

Professor Mzamane joined the UMTAPO Centre Board in 2007 and remained an active member who provided dynamic leadership and inspiration to the organisation until his unexpected passing on.

He had the gift of captivating his audience with his skilful and innovative use of humour yet beneath that humour he explored the paradoxes of black lives in a race-conscious and polarised South Africa. At the same time he loved life and lived his life to the fullest.

He always emphasised that teachers and academics should understand at all times that one cannot educate others effectively if one is afraid of being educated. He was of the view that research educates and sets the educator on a partnership with students as fellow enquirers, of the world they live in.

Politically, Mzamane’s roots have been in the Black Consciousness Movement. He spent many years in exile in Nigeria and the USA.

Professor Mbulelo Mzamane studied at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, where he obtained dual first degrees in English and Philosophy as well as a Certificate in Education (with distinction), and an MA in English. He completed a Doctorate in English Literature at the University of Sheffield (England).

He returned to his country of birth in 1993, after an exile of over 30 years, to take up the position as the first Black Vice-Chancellor at the University of Fort Hare, where he also held the faculty rank of Professor in English Studies and Comparative Literature.

Mzamane has held academic appointments, visiting professorships and research fellowships at the Universities of Essen (Germany), Sheffield (UK), Vermont (USA), Georgia (USA), UBLS (Roma and Gaborone campuses), Ahmadu Bello University (Nigeria), University of South Australia, Boston University, Yale University, and University of California in San Diego, amongst others.

He is the author of many books, was also chairperson of the African Arts Fund (under the auspices of the UN Centre against Apartheid). In 2007, Mzamane became the Director of the Centre for African Literary Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), a position he held until his retirement in 2010.

Continued on back page

Inside this issue:

Steve Biko Transformative Education Project: Background	2
Corruption Trumps Human Values	3
The State of the Nation	5
Quotable political quotes	8

The Project

A Steve Biko Transformative Education Project

*In Memory of
Comrades Mbulelo
Mzamane, Neville
Alexander, Oshadi
Mangena, and Strini
Moodley*

See page 2 for more details

The Steve Biko Transformative Education Project

UMTAPO has been convening the Annual Steve Biko Lecture & Awards (now Steve Biko Seminar) since 1996 and the Annual Strini Moodley Memorial Lecture since 2007. The initial focus on Biko was not only because his ideas and beliefs were an inspiration to the founding of UMTAPO but also because it was at a time when Biko was not being acknowledged for his contribution to the liberation struggle. This, of course, has dramatically changed over the past few years especially amongst the youth.

Remembering the late Strini Moodley was much closer to the core of Umtapo's existence, Strini being a founder member, an ideologue, and a contributor to freeing the mind of many who have passed through Umtapo's training programmes.



More recently, UMTAPO lost three eminent scholars and revolutionary political activists: Board member, Professor Mbulelo Mzamane; and patrons, Dr Neville Alexander and Dr Oshadi Mangena. Recognising all these important contributors to the struggle for a free South Africa (Azania) and to the growth and development of UMTAPO Centre, a combined national project was mooted as a progression of that journey. This laid the basis for the new unique initiative:

Speaking Truth to Power: A Steve Biko Transformative Education Project

In Memory of Mbulelo Mzamane, Neville Alexander, Oshadi Mangena, and Strini Moodley

The project, started on the principle of self-reliance, will take the form of political and transformative education workshops/lectures at different universities and communities for specifically targeted audiences. It will also include an online publication specifically on political education and current issues within the socio-political context. The online publication will be produced four times a year, each in memory of the four UMTAPO stalwarts mentioned above.

This project is especially vital at this moment in the history of SA because of the growing restlessness of youth and the continuing unrest at universities. Without transformative political education, people can be manipulated by political opportunism and competing agendas that embroil them in agendas which are not of their own making. UMTAPO has begun the journey towards the creation of a new ethical leadership amongst tertiary students through its anti-corruption, anti-racism, anti-sexism, and democracy programme and its recent formation of the UMTAPO Student Movement.

CORRUPTION TRUMPS HUMAN VALUES

by

Mosibudi Mangena

Mosibudi Mangena is the former president of AZAPO and the BCM (A). Dr Mangena also served as Deputy Minister of Education and Minister of Science and Technology.

He was one of the first BC leaders to be sentenced to Robben Island in 1973. After his release and subsequent banning and house arrest, he went into exile. When the BCM (A) was formed in exile, he became the President.



In the book: *Triumphs & Heartaches*, corruption is described as not only a moral, ethical or criminal issue, but as a matter of life and death. Corruption can actually kill.

The gut-wrenching deaths of 94 Esidimeni psychiatric patients in Gauteng has no other logical explanation except corruption. It reminds us of stories of government tenders and jobs being shared in backrooms among the politically connected individuals and groups well before publication in the media. The connected are informed about government plans, they are advised to register companies in the relevant field in order to tender for projects that are still in the planning stages. The proceeds of the tenders are then shared among the corrupt officials and those who won the tender.

The Esidimeni patients were hurriedly parceled out to unregistered or improperly registered NGO's, some were moved without their medical records, some of the centres had neither suitable staff nor facilities. It seems every rule relating to the care of patients was broken by people who should know better. It cannot be that all those people in the Gauteng health department suddenly took leave of their compassion, humanity and knowledge of all protocols pertaining to the handling of the sick.

We can't have patients dying of dehydration and other such basic forms of

neglect. This suggests that the psychiatric patients were simply dumped in facilities that were wholly unsuitable and ill-equipped to look after them.

Whatever investigations are conducted into this horrible episode that offends all our values of compassion, humanity and human solidarity, should probe the extent to which the sordid greasing of dirty palms played in this nightmarish saga.

The Esidimeni horror is a manifestation of a widespread phenomenon that manifests itself in many public institutions in our country. Patients in our hospitals and clinics are frequently told their medication is not available, not because of a scarcity of funds, but because of corruption and incompetent personnel. Some of these are sent home to die needlessly.

The situation affects mostly the poor and is thinly spread across the country to make the kind of impact Esidimeni had on our collective awareness and conscience.

I had a mature female guest from Soweto at my home in Polokwane not so long ago. It turned out that she took part in the struggle for freedom but was now bitterly disappointed with what our country has become. At one time she burst out: *"If I had known I would not have fought for freedom. In fact, I would not mind if apartheid comes back. During apartheid I could be*

admitted at Bara and have bed linen, medication and be attended to by health workers in a clean hospital. You can't get that in Bara today. What is the point of freedom if I can't get basic things like that? I can go on and on into other spheres of life and the verdict will be the same."

All of us in the room were shocked and I was shaken to the core. Yes, there is a lot that is wrong, but to yearn for the return of apartheid! Are some of our people so fed-up with all the unsavoury shenanigans taking place in public life that they regret the advent of freedom?

Investigations are underway in Gauteng about corruption in the vehicle testing, licensing and the issuing of driver's licenses. Apparently, there is widespread fraud involving the issuing of fitness permits for vehicles and the passing of drivers who should fail. Driving schools are said to be part of these malpractices in their desire to have as many of their learner drivers getting their licenses as soon as possible, regardless of whether they can drive properly or not. The scale of the problem is frightening if we consider the fact that this is not only happening in Gauteng, but in many other municipalities in South Africa. This results in the unleashing of a combination of un-roadworthy vehicles and unfit drivers onto our roads. Is there any wonder that our road accident rate is so high and so much life and limb are lost in South Africa? The hue and cry that saturate the airways and newspaper pages during the December and Easter weekend holidays about the carnage on our roads would always amount to nothing for as long as we do not root out corruption in the administration of transport matters.

During the State of the Nation Address this year, we once again witnessed some of the most embarrassing and shameful scenes inside Parliament. We are a society fighting a gigantic headache emanating from a variety of sources, including poor education, a limping healthcare system, poverty, inequality, homelessness, unemployment and many other such debilitating ills. And yet all our elected representatives seem to be excelling in are insolence, insults, fisticuffs and vandalism. And at the root of that SONA debacle is sleaze. We have the Nkandla scandal, the damning Constitutional Court ruling and the State of Capture report, all of which point to large scale looting of the state and its businesses by the present political incumbents.

"We are a society fighting a gigantic headache emanating from a variety of sources, including poor education, a limping healthcare system, poverty, inequality, homelessness, unemployment and many other such debilitating ills. And yet all our elected representatives seem to be excelling in are insolence, insults, fisticuffs and vandalism"

Corruption needs to be fought tooth and nail if our values of Ubuntu, solidarity and compassion are to prevail.



The State of the Nation

by

Leigh-Ann Naidoo



Leigh-Ann Naidoo is a student at the School of Education at the University of Witwatersrand. She has been actively involved in the WITS chapter of the **#FeesMustFall** movement, and the **#RhodesMustFall** campaign at the University of Cape Town, which is the subject of her current research.

In a previous life, she was an Olympic beach volleyball player, and she recently represented South Africa on the international freedom flotilla or Women's Boat to Gaza, along with a dozen other women activists from around the world, to show solidarity and break the inhumane siege of Gaza.

It is clear that we are in a new moment in South African history, even though many are unable or unwilling to read it as such. The signaling of this new time can be found in the Marikana and more recently the #LifeEsidimeni Massacres, as well as by the emergence of the new student movement of 2015/16.

The Marikana Massacre violently drew attention to the ways in which unions are failing workers, but also to the extent to which the South African government is willing, through the police, courts and their impotent and expensive commissions of inquiry, to defend and act on behalf of business to maintain the dismal status quo. Even though this is disappointing it is not surprising, as **many 'post-colonial' states, led by ex-liberation movements, have seamlessly slipped into the role of managers of inequality.**



The education system has seen its own violent fuck-ups. From the dismal performance of learners in a failing basic education system, to the dreadful death of a young learner who fell into a pit toilet and drowned, to rising student debt because of the privatization of universities. In 2015, black students led the call for radical change in the Higher Education system, questioning persistent institutional racism entrenched by outdated and problematic signs and symbols, Euro-centric curricula, untransformed staff, dehumanizing outsourcing, sexual violence, and rising fees and debt amongst other things. Students were also insisting that these questions relate to the critical questions and challenges facing society at large. Again the government and its forces acted to swiftly suppress the very valid critiques and demands being voiced and fought over by students. This response while disappointing is not surprising precisely because we have already seen the way the government has treated dissenting and active citizens. The killing of protesting teacher Andries Tatane at the hands of police and in full view of cameras is a case in point.

But the student protests didn't only see the state tear-gassing, shooting and arresting protesting students. It challenged university managements and progressive academics in the hope that they would show themselves as different to the current government, and possible allies in the fight to imagine a new future.

A dreadful moment in the student protests, in my opinion, was when university managers, some with struggle credentials, welcomed government officials and the police, along with private security companies, to deal with student protestors and restore the status quo at universities. A status quo that students had done well to expose as wholly unequal, untransformed, corporatized and in the process of being further privatized. The violence meted out on protesting students, and later on anyone in proximity to them is unforgettable



as much as it is nauseating. Maybe we were naïve to imagine that progressive thinkers would dare to jeopardize their privilege and comfortable lifestyles to support a different kind of university, in service of imagining and working to produce a different kind of society.

We are all still shocked by the #LifeEsidimeni Massacre of over a hun-

dred citizens by our government's incompetence and disregard for its vulnerable. This massacre has killed over three times as many people as in Marikana. Most notably for me, the violence has not been the overt violence that everyone responds to easily – a gunshot, a stabbing, an explosion. This massacre lays bare the structural violence that is endured daily by poor black South Africans... a lack of access to clean water, sufficient food, basic care and health provisions. They died of dehydration and malnutrition. This structural violence has also been highlighted by students who have exposed the problematic ways that everyday violence inflicted on poor black people by growing inequality, unemployment and poverty, is accepted while the violence in bourgeois spaces are explicitly condemned. All these events have forced into the open conversations and struggles that have been happening outside the bourgeois sphere for more than a decade in poor communities, largely under the name 'service delivery protest'.

While there has been changes to apartheid legislation, while the state has provided social grants to keep many of our people from starving, while the state is the largest employer of black people through Affirmative Action policies, what has remained largely untouched is the class project of apartheid and white capital. **Instead of producing a democracy of opportunity for all, the state is harnessed for narrow party political agendas and individual enrichment. Students have seen this complicity and are refusing to inherit it as a political project.** They have exposed the myth of the 'rainbow nation' and the failed project of reconciliation, centering the stubborn survival of racial hierarchy, and the ANC's unwillingness to end it. I take this as a signal that we may just be able to change this status quo such that we do not tip into the post-colonial demise that has become the norm across the continent. The students' have united around the call for 'decolonisation' resurrecting older political traditions – the PAC, BC, rich continental conversations from the 1950s and 1960s – that provide critical ideas, resources that could reroute us if we dare to listen and take up their challenge.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, the student movement has been making a number of key critiques that we would do well to pay attention to.

1. Black-led student movements have shown the pervasive colonial and apartheid character of our institutions, and called for a deep and radical reevaluation of the work that needs to be done to shift this inheritance.
2. They have been fighting for access to education for all by critiquing the incremental privatization of universities, which includes the critique of NSFAS and the use of debt as an unacceptable technique for granting access.
3. They have been experimenting with new forms of political process, mobilizing and organizing outside of political parties and SRC's (and university workers outside unions), and by so doing raising questions about the success of representative democracy. They are challenging the idea that representative democracy is the only legitimate form of politics.
4. They have insisted that multiple forms of political work are needed to attend to the future, including against class, against race, against patriarchy, against homophobia, transphobia, ableism. This is an expansion of our vision of freedom that is new and questions the authority of who gets to speak, and for whom.

The state and university managements have responded by repressing what many see as a viable claim for free quality decolonised higher education for all who qualify. And as one would expect, there has been a militancy emerging amongst students as a direct response to this repression. The dismissive and patronizing responses directed at students from the ANC leadership, similar to their co-optive responses to community struggles, is one of the most worrying signs of a growing alienation between government and our people. Such alienation is not good for the future of democracy.

Many of us think that the ANC will not be able to self-correct at this point even as there are

attempts inside the party to democratize and self-critique. And even if it becomes possible to change the current leadership of the ANC, we can't just blame the status quo on the current leadership. We have to be willing to reflect and speak honestly about the transition and its failings. Returning from exile, the ANC believed it could own liberation, and control the country from an increasingly centralized government. The many grassroots structures, both within the underground ANC as well as in other political traditions were an important political resource that was dismantled and belittled at the time of transition.

Now is the time to bridge back into community, not for votes but for ideas, for political resources, to build a deeper democratic process that allows for the majority to have access to making decisions about their own lives, decisions that would have to involve a serious discussion about redistribution.

We have to build collective public institutions that direct us towards serious conversation about our collective well-being.



We cannot continue to have some people flourish at the expense of others.

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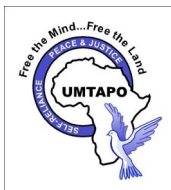
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Issue Dedicated to Mbulelo Mzamane

Continued from page 1

Mbulelo Mzamane was deeply concerned about the future of the country and in a speech at the UMTAPO Truth Conference in Durban in 2010, he stated:

"The function of the unfolding culture of liberation at this moment in South African history is to forge a new national ethos that is inclusive, accommodating, affirming, life-giving, and predicated on the values of ubuntu."

Tributes

"The best all us can do is to ensure that his star shines forever as he taught us courage, endurance and love for this great continent of ours and the whole of the human race."

Professor David Macharia, Kenya

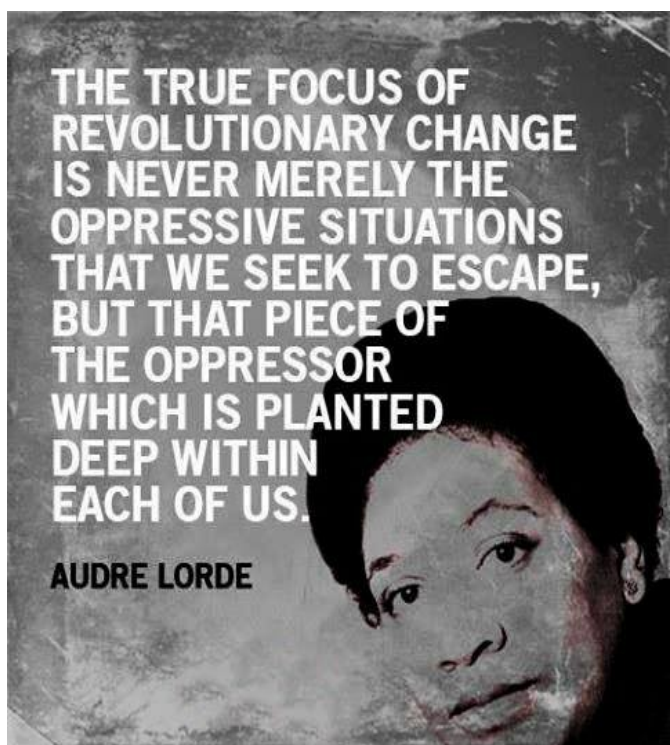
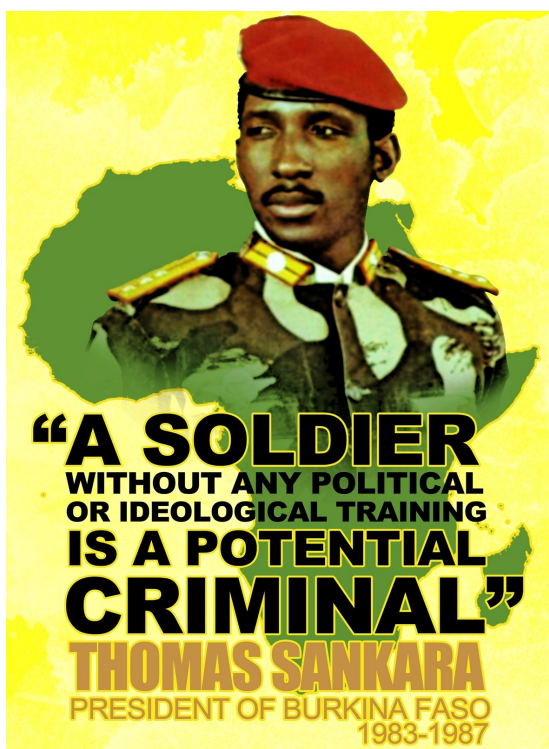
"We give thanks for the gift of life of our beloved friend Mbulelo. May his soul rest in peace and may his family and friends find solace in the light that he shone for all of us."

Dr Wangui wa Goro, UK

"Let us recall that wonderful wisdom of Mbulelo's in scripting a new, just and equitable history for our country in every way we can, through speaking truth to power as he did. We owe this to him and countless others who have directed all their efforts to create, in his own words, "just one race in the world, the human race." We owe this to ourselves and future generations"

The Truth Movement

Quotable political quotes...



Comments and contributions are welcome. Kindly email to info@umtapocentre.org.za