THE *EPISTEME* OF ACADEMIA IN AFRICA: THE DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BOPHUTHATSWANA/NORTH-WEST AND THE CITY OF MMABATHO AS AN EXEMPLARY CASE[1]

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OPSOMMING

In hierdie artikel word aangetoon dat die stand van die akademie in Afrika ten nouste saamhang met die politieke aspirasies van die heersende politieke party. Die oorspronklike idee van die universiteit, soos oorgelewer deur die eeue, word hierdeur nietig verklaar, sodat die konsep van 'universiteit', soos ons dit vandag ken, eintlik 'n kontradiksie in terme is. Vanweë die praktiese eise van Afrikaregerings moet die konsep van 'universiteit' na regte vervang word met die konsep 'multiversiteit'. Die ontwikkelingsgeskiedenis van die Universiteit van die Noordweste (vroeër Universitieit van Bophuthatswana) toon duidelik aan hoedat die teorie van die Afrikauniversiteit in die praktyk gestalte gekry het. Die begeerte om 'n eie akademiese identiteit te verkry was gedra deur politieke aspirasies, met streng kontrole deur die destydse staatshoof, Lucas Mangope. Alhoewel akademiese vryheid gedetermineer is deur politieke aspirasies, en veral deur die vestiging van 'n kultuurtrots, het die universiteit desnieteenstaande 'n uitstekende balans tussen Westerse standaarde en gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid gehandhaaf. Die artikel fokus ook op die komplementêre ontwikkeling van Mmabatho as tuislandhoofstad en die ontwikkeling van die universiteit. Daar word aangetoon hoedat hierdie frenetiese bou gedryf was deur die begeerte om 'n eie identiteit vas te lê, 'n eie unieke kulturele ruimte vir die Batswana tot stand te bring.

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INTRODUCTION
There is a global dynamic transforming the role of higher educational institutions, and more particularly the developmental function of these institutions, within an emerging socio-economic, and cultural milieu. In Africa, but specifically in South Africa, this trend has re-emphasized the fact that the university is a crucial strand in the social fabric. Furthermore, this global dynamic has brought into focus the crucial importance of societal perceptions of universities.

It is not possible to define the relationship between the university and its resident city, and linkages with local and regional communities, without taking into account the socio-economic and political context. South Africa's system of Higher Education, for instance, has been shaped by ethnic, racial and geographic factors and is clearly symptomatic of a society whose deep cleavages and inequalities need no recitation here.

The central concern of our investigation is how universities are affected by their societal role. Inevitably, what is required is to examine the episteme within which (South) African academia functions. A few of the formative factors that constitute this episteme will be touched upon, such as the discourse between universities and their environments; and the fact that society is constrained by the twin concerns of autonomy and relevance as counseled/dictated by governments.[2]

Using the University of the North West, and its city, Mmabatho as our focal point, we will attempt to examine the far-reaching dilemma of meshing nationalism with the existing conception of a university as a supra-national entity.

THE AFRICAN *UNIVERSITAS SCIENTIARUM* AS *CONTRADICTIO IN TERMINUS*.
Whilst the concept of the university only emerged in the Middle Ages, its origins can be seen as early as 300 years before Christ when Aristoteles, in his *Politika*, discussed the nature, and impor-

tance of education both for individual and state development, and thus the state's responsibility towards education. At that point Aristoteles had already noted that no consensus existed about whether pupils should practice pursuits that were practically useful, or morally edifying, or studies that were simply geared to higher academic accomplishments.

Plato, in his *Akadémos*, the blueprint for Western universities, advanced his belief that the academic exercise be conducive to the promotion of virtue and character. Knowledge, as well as the activity of sharing knowledge, he argued, had a formative or moulding quality. Thus, Plato believed that all academic activities should be geared towards producing balanced, cultivated and holistically orientated citizens. This ideal of unity, setting the individual apart and directing him in a scientific manner towards wisdom, is captured in the word *university* derived from the Middle Ages concept of *universitas scientiarum*.

The single most important factor influencing and eventually transforming the Ancient Greek idea of the University, was the tremendous growth of the natural sciences from the sixteenth century. This transformation made the Industrial Revolution possible and created those massive cities, which would eventually became the cradle of modern universities. As a result of this major demographic shift, the character and ethos of the university was bound to change, to democratize. Dreyer calls this "the unrestricted accessibility" of the modern university.[3]

As a result of this new emphasis, governments soon realized that universities were essential instruments assisting them in directing their populations towards the modern world. Next to government, the universities had the greatest concentration of expertise and talent.[4] Needless to say, there was an increasingly politicised emphasis on the functionality and vocational aspects of the curriculum. The community, through its government and tax receipts, was

P. S. Dreyer, "Die aard en taakstelling van die universiteit" in P. G. Nel, (red.), *Die Universiteit : Verlede, hede en toekoms*, (1982).

A. Porter, " Third World Universities" in *Commonwealth Foundation: A new look at Commonwealth University cooperation.* Occasional paper no. 19, (1973).

forced to provide for the upkeep of this new democratised institution, and in time, became the proud owners. The university had become a *contradictio in terminus* - the University had become a Multiversity.

THE MODERN COMMUNITY MULTIVERSITY: THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

Symptomatic of this changed state of affairs, was the address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe,[5] with the opening of the University of Zimbabwe, where amongst other revealing statements, Mugabe argued that the functions of the University should be guided by societal needs and the specific national reality. According to Mugabe, individuals who put themselves first and society after, constituted a dangerous intellectual bourgeoisie. He concluded by paraphrasing the well known aphorism about generals and war; higher education was too important to be left entirely to deans, professors, lecturers and university administrators.

This utilitarian perception of the role of the university and its accountability to both community and government can be seen throughout Africa, whose universities are all relatively young. The concept of a university it seems, was to be tolerated, but not truly accepted in Africa, either by the masses paying taxes, or by the political leaders dispensing such taxes. Only by achieving greater societal relevance, might the universities be welcomed by the mass of the people.[6] It has therefore been widely accepted that African universities would have to make a direct contribution to the economic well-being of their nations as well as the transformation of their societies.

To try to find a way of reconciling the responsibilities of scholarship with societal responsibility is the major dilemma facing all African universities. As Smelser has observed, the educational system is precariously balanced and in a state of conflict over frequently con-

R. G. Mugabe, Opening speech in N. T. Chideya, *et al., The role of the University and its future in Zimbabwe,* (1982).

J. F. A. Ajayi, "Towards an African academic community" in T. M. Yesufu, (ed.) *Creating the African university.* (1973).

tradictory priorities.[7] The question boils down to the extent to which universities should it be expected to maximise their own values of cognitive rationality (generating knowledge, the search for truth, teaching and learning in the broadest sense) versus the other extreme of universities being required to'service' the values and needs of other sectors of society. Since higher education today serves many masters, including itself, it is to be expected that it stands on the precipice of constant value conflicts.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BOPHUTHATSWANA AS COMMUNITY MULTIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF MMABATHO

The grand apartheid plan of 1960's envisaged the formation of a number of self-governing and 'independent' homelands or bantustans in South Africa. Territorial apartheid during the 1970's and 1980's produced several new cities and universities. The city of Mmabatho and University of Bophuthatswana/University of North West, are good examples of such apartheid structures.

Neither the city nor the university, however, were purely the creation of apartheid engineering. The acceptance of independence by the Bophuthatswana Homeland Authority in December 1977 was also the end of a long standing desire by a disenfranchised Tswana majority to attain a national identity, denied by a British Colonial Administration some 80 years earlier.[8] The planning and construction of the capital city and new university, along with a complex of government, commercial, business and residential areas, was indicative not only of political initiatives but was also an expression of the aspirations, beliefs, dreams and symbols of the time.[9]

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

After considering several sites, the Bophuthatswana Legislature decided to establish the city of Mmabatho north-west of the South African town of Mafikeng in December 1976. This site was chosen to reinforce the long association of the Batswana people with the

N. Smelser, "Epilogue" in T. Parsons & G. Platt, (eds). *The American University,* (1973).

J. W. Cowley, "Mafikeng to Mmabatho: Village to capital city", poster paper presented at the Conference for the Society for Geography, University of Stellenbosch, (1985).

M. F. Kamstra, "A celebration of sovereignty", *Journal of the Institute of South African Architects ,* (May/July 1984), p. 41.

town of Mafikeng. Prior to the establishment of the colonial settlement of Mafikeng in 1885, there had been a Batswana settlement on the banks of the Molopo river from the 1850's. The first of these settlements was called 'Molema's Stad', after its founder Chief Molema. Later, following the arrival of Chief Montshioa in 1859, the settlement became known as Mafikeng, 'the place of the stones', taking its name from the large boulders found along the river banks.

At the turn of the century, this settlement gained the attention of the English speaking world for its role during the Anglo-Boer War. The siege of Mafikeng remains one of the most documented and well-known periods of the settlement's history, leaving behind a legacy which attracts visitors from all parts of the world. The town also became associated with the World Scouting movement. Colonel Baden-Powell, Commander of the besieged British forces was believed to have conceived of the idea of the Boy Scouts during the siege. Mafikeng is still regarded as the spiritual home of the Scout movement.[10] Between 1895 and 1965, Mafikeng also had the distinction of being one of only two extra-territorial administrative capitals.[11] The administrative functions of the Bechuanaland Protectorate (later Botswana) remained in that part of Mafikeng town known as the Imperial Reserve, until the capital city of Gaborone was established.

CAPITAL CITY
In December 1976, the decision was taken by the Bophuthatswana Legislature to establish the capital of Bophuthatswana on a green field seven kilometres to the north-west of Mafikeng. The city was to be called Mmabatho, meaning 'mother of the nation'. The Government of Bophuthatswana hoped from the very beginning to develop an integrated and multiracial city from the existing settlements of Montshioa township (the black residential area of Mafikeng), the traditional Montshioa stadt, and the town of Mafikeng.

In spite of the initial exclusion of Mafikeng from the territory of the Republic of Bophuthatswana, a Master Plan for the entire settlement area was prepared and approved in principle by the end of

R. Dale, "The tale of two towns, (Mafeking and Gaberone) and the political modernisation of Botswana", *SAIPA*, 4, 2, (1969), pp. 130-144.
A. Sillery, *The Bechuanaland Protectorate,* (1952).

1978. At the same time a development plan for the Mmabatho Government and Business areas was prepared and approved by early 1979.[12]   An important aspect of these early plans was the directive received from the president, Lucas Mangope, clearly stating the capital city should incorporate traditional Batswana architectural forms. These were clearly evident in Montshiwa stadt and the town of Serowe in Botswana, two of the oldest traditional Batswana urban settlements.[13]

To coordinate the planning and development of the Mmabatho-Montshiwa-Mafikeng settlement complex, a Five Year Development plan was prepared. [14]   This plan was implemented to ensure an equitable distribution of resources between competing projects and to establish service priorities. Within the city, a government and business centre was planned and laid out, as were the head offices for an industrial development agency, a civic centre, a parliament building, magistrate courts, the university core building and several low and medium-cost housing areas. [15]

The initial building and construction programme was estimated by various government sources to amount to approximately R300 million. Subsequently, however, additional buildings for government and para-statal organisations were constructed during the 1980's. These included a vocation training centre, a Television and Broadcast Centre, a soccer and tennis stadium, an international airport, new parliament buildings, a cultural centre and a Supreme Court building along with additional housing developments and associated infrastructure. Such additions meant that the cost was much higher. In the early years of independence, unofficial sources estimated that between 20 to 30 per cent of the total national budget was spent on the development of the City of Mmabatho.

M. Hutton-Squire, "Mmabatho: Capital of Bophuthatswana: Its planning and development", *Journal of the Institute of South African Architects,* (Autumn 1981), pp. 40-41.
   Ibid. Also "Government Square, Mmabatho", *Journal of the Institute of South African Architects,* (May/June 1984), pp. 34-39.
   Mallows, Louw and Hoffe and Partners, "Mmabatho-Montshiwa-Mafikeng Five Year Plan, 1980 - 1985", (1980).
   "Mmabatho", *Journal of the Institute of South African Architects,* (Autumn 1981), p. 40.

The various projects and Master Plan proposals did not pass without criticism. The urban design was regarded as simplistic and rigid in attempting to relate a simple traditional small-scale Tswana village to a new urban scale. Questions relating to the functioning of the two business centres of Mmabatho and Mafikeng were raised, along with the effect the featureless flat landscape and large spaces between buildings might have on inhabitants. Lastly, the need for such large expenditure in order to solve urban design and planning problems, was questioned.[16]

From independence in 1977, the economy, population, and size of the urban area expanded rapidly, as a direct result of the massive building and construction programme. Apart from the expansion and growth of the traditional employment sectors of building and construction, transport and agriculture, the city's economy was expanded by the development of tourism. More relaxed gambling regulations resulted in the development of a casino complex and resort hotel. Several smaller hotels and game lodges along with a local game reserve and cultural village, also attracted visitors and provided additional employment opportunities.

In spite of this widening economic base, the heavy reliance on state and para-statal employment by many of the inhabitants posed a real threat to the future economic stability and well- being of the city. By 1991, 32% of employment was in the public sector with less than 8% in manufacturing, commercial and wholesale activities.[17] In spite of these economic imbalances, the population grew very rapidly from approximately 55,000 in 1977,[18] to an estimated 170,000 in 1993.[19]

The rapid rise in population that resulted from population growth and in-migration , created a number of problems. Foremost of these was the lack of low-cost affordable housing and inadequate unskilled employment opportunities.[20] The failure of the

[16] J. B. Senior, "An appraisal of the Mmabatho Government and Business Centre", *Journal of the Institute of South African Architects*, (Autumn 1981), p. 49.

[17] M. L. Mosadi, "Mmabatho: The changing face of a South African City. " Paper presented at the International Geographical Union Conference Commission on Urban Development and Urban Life, University of Cape Town, 21-25 August 1995.

[18] Hutton-Squire, *ibid.*

[19] J. H. Drummond and S. Parnell, "Mafikeng-Mmabatho", in A. Lemon (ed.), *Homes apart: South Africa's segregated cities*, (1991), pp. 162-173.

[20] Cowley, "Mafikeng to Mmabatho"; and Mosadi, "Mmabatho".

Bophuthatswana Government to adequately address low-cost housing needs, and the problems of employment, together with a rapidly changing political climate, was, amongst other reasons, responsible for its overthrow in March 1994.

REINCORPORATION

From the most successful bantustan capital,[21] Mmabatho and the many institutions and organisations established by the former Bophuthatswana government faced an uncertain and challenging future. The decision to make Mmabatho the provincial capital of the new North West Province of South Africa meant that some administrative functions were retained and the existing infrastructure utilised, at least in the short term. However, the re-integration of the former homeland government administration has also resulted in the transfer of some civil servants, administrators and assets in the re-organisation process. The removal, downgrading and closure of some facilities and services resulted in a noticeable decline in middle class house prices and an increased volume of such properties for sale. The uncertainty of residents was reflected in greater demand for rented rather than purchased accommodation.

Further possibility of rationalisation in the public sector has created considerable unease amongst the business and commercial sector previously very dependent on the large public sector. Some construction and building concerns have re-located to the more central national locations of Johannesburg and Pretoria. A number of smaller businesses and suppliers linked to the provision of goods and services related to former administrative functions have either reduced staff or are also contemplating re-location.

The peripheral location of Mmabatho in relation to other industrial, commercial and market centres in South Africa, along with problems of water supply, holds little promise of expansion in industry or manufacturing, so as to compensate for decreasing public sector employment opportunities. The uncertainty caused by such factors is likely to continue until the process of transformation and re-integration into the South African administrative and political system is complete.

Drummond and Parnell, "Mafikeng-Mmabatho".

THE UNIVERSITY OF BOPHUTHATSWANA / NORTHWEST
The University of Bophuthatswana (North West) was constituted against the background of political and urban development within the former Republic of Bophuthatswana and the city of Mmabatho. Like Mmabatho, the establishment of the university was also an expression of national identity, dreams and wishes.

The university had its origins in the late 1960's when a spontane- ous movement raised more than R100,000-00 from the Batswana people. In August 1978, the National Education Commission pre- sented a report on the site, nature, priorities and people to lead such a tertiary institution.[22]

Among its recommendations was the need for the university to be part of the community and sensitive to its needs. Emphasis was to be placed on the development of the community and not solely the development of students. Priority was also to be given to the im- mediate constituency while having relevance to developmental and occupational problems and opportunities. Account was also to be taken of the culture of the community which the university served, but at the same time having a developmental impact on both stu- dents and community.[23]

At the inaugural meeting of the Council of the University following the passing of the University of Bophuthatswana Act on the 28th September 1978, the then President of Bophuthatswana, Lucas Mangope, indicated that the university should look further than the traditional western type as typified by existing South African uni- versities. A more relevant model appropriate to the needs of Bophuthatswana should be developed. [24]

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
In the 1980's, the University of Bophuthatswana progressed from a few hundred students in converted residential accommodation, portacamp cabins and temporary school hostel accommodation,

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[22] E. P. Lekhela, *Report of the National Education Commission - Education for Popagano*, (1978).

[23] University of Bophuthatswana, *University Calendar*, (1985).

[24] University of Bophuthatswana, *University Calendar*, (1984).

to a purpose built campus within walking distance of the Government and Business centre of Mmabatho. The development of residences, an administration block, lecture theatres, recreational and sports facilities replicated the frenetic building and construction activity elsewhere in the capital city. An attempt was made to keep pace with the increasing applications from students. The popularity of the university increased both to staff and students who wished to avoid the continual disruptions which were becoming a common and regular occurrence in other black universities in South Africa.

Towards the end of the 1980's, these problems which had became a characteristic feature of black secondary and tertiary education, spread to the campus resulting in increasing polarisation and disenchantment between university and the state. The close proximity of the state in the city, and the almost total reliance of the university on state funds, made questions of autonomy largely academic.

Prior to the early 1990's, despite increasing difficulties on campus, the university had lived up to many of the ideals set out at its inception. Graduates and diplomats were produced to meet the considerable human resource needs of the country, particularly in the spheres of education, management and administration, law, agriculture and health. Community involvement by staff and students resulted in participation in adult literacy programmes, Winter Schools for examination pupils, various administrative, financial and teaching assistance to local schools, involvement in broadcasting, legal advice and assistance, education in human rights, participation in local government, development of early learning centres, resolution of family problems, treatment of animals and pets, establishment of school gardens, and feeding schemes. [25] Not all involvement was purely at a local level.

The dual functions of Mmabatho as premier city and national centre meant that community involvement was both at a national and local level, members of staff often providing advisory services for government as well as being involved in city issues and affairs.

Prior to the overthrow of the government of Bophuthatswana, the university had an increased enrollment approaching 4,000 students,

[25] M. R. Malope, "Vice-Chancellor's Report, 1992", University of Bophuthatswana Mmabatho.

30 per cent of whom were part-time, the majority being from the local community and government employees. The budget had risen by then to some R80 million, 79 per cent of which came in the form of government grants.[26]

THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTH WEST

The University of the North West will have to operate within the confines and constraints of the present funding system (SAPSE), which has been applied for some time to other South African Universities. The South African government is not likely to fund at the same generous rate that the previous government managed. Government subsidies will now depend on the admission of full-time students and their successful completion of courses in the prescribed period of time. The large numbers of unsubsidised part-time students, and the lack of economies of scale together with an absence of outside funding, mean that the university is at a considerable disadvantage financially.

The pressures of students who cannot afford the increasing costs of tertiary education, but also the growing demand from the community in a city that is not likely to develop in terms of employment opportunities, that the university should in some way accommodate them, will pose further problems.

The uncertain political climate is not conducive to the development of the city or the university. Furthermore the cultural milieu is still tribally based. The University became the Batswana's symbol of intellectual awakening, and will always be considered as their university. Neither provincial government nor the central government attach the same symbolism, values and beliefs to the city of Mmabatho and the university as did the former government. Rather, they are perceived as being part of the previous regime and ideology, requiring transformation and change.

The university is currently engaged in an extensive consultative and strategic planning exercise which in all likelihood will change the nature of the university. The main emphasis will be to decentralise the activities of the campus to more rural areas, possibly in the form of satellite campuses, taking education to the people. Research and community involvement is more likely to be

Ibid.

focused on the provincial capital through constructive and entre-
preneurial research on the possibilities for development which might
prove to be of mutual benefit.

It is thus very apparent that reconciling responsibility for scholar-
ship with societal responsibilities will be the major challenge in the
transformation of the University of the North West.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
In this article we have indicated that academia in Africa is closely
related to the political aspirations of the ruling political party. On
this continent, the original and now global idea of the university is
being discarded, with the result that the concept of 'university' has
become a contradiction in terms. Because of the practical demands
of the African environment, the concept of 'university' should rather
be viewed in terms of being a 'multiversity'. The developmental
history of the University of the North-West clearly shows how the
theory of the African university has been determined by practical
realities.

The desire to have an own academic identity was implemented, in
the first instance, by political aspirations, of the then head of state,
Lucas Mangope. Although academic freedom was determined by
political aspirations, the University nevertheless managed to strike
a balance between Western standards and the pragmatic need of
African Universities to be intimately involved with the community.
This article also focused on the complementary development of
Mmabatho as the capital city of the then homeland. It had been
clearly shown how the frenetic building of those years was moti-
vated by the desire to create an own identity in stone, to bring into
being a unique cultural space for the Batswana.