

https://dspace.org/

Anton Muziwakhe Lembede and African nationalism

Edgar, Robert

1995-07-24
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8675

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED SOCIAL RESEARCH

SEMINAR PAPER
to be presented in RW 7003 SEMINAR ROOM
at 4.00PM 24th JULY 1995

TITLE: Anton Muziwakhe Lembede and African Nationalism.

BY: Robert Edgar

NO: 380



ANTON MUZIWAKHE LEMBEDE AND AFRICAN NATIONALISM

Robert Edgar and Luyanda ka Msumza

[This essay is an abridged version of the introduction to a forthcoming volume of writings by Lembede.]

On Easter Sunday 1944 a group of young political activists gathered at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Orlando township to launch the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL). Motivated by their desire to shake up the "Old Guard" in the African National Congress (ANC) and set the ANC on a militant course, this "Class of '44" became the nucleus of a remarkable generation of African leaders: Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Jordan Ngubane, Ellen Kuzwayo, Albertina Sisulu, A.P. Mda, Dan Tloome, and David Bopape. Many of them remained at the forefront of the struggle for freedom and equality in South Africa for the next half century.

However, the figure the Youth Leaguers turned to in 1944 for their first president is not even listed in this group. He was a Natal-born lawyer, Anton Muziwakhe Lembede. Known to his friends as "Lembs," Lembede was a political neophyte when he moved from the Orange Free State to Johannesburg in 1943 to practice law. His sharp intellect, fiery personality, and unwavering commitment to the struggle made an immediate impression on his peers, and he was quickly catapulted into prominence in both the Youth League and the ANC. Though his political life was brief - he died tragically in 1947 - he left an enduring legacy for future generations. He is best remembered for his passionate and eloquent articulation of an African-centered philosophy of nationalism that he called "Africanism." A call to arms for Africans to wage an aggressive campaign against white domination. Africanism asserted that in order to advance the freedom struggle, Africans first had to turn inward. They should shed their feelings of inferiority and redefine their self-image, rely on their own resources, and unite and mobilize as a national group around their own leaders. Though African nationalism remains to this day a vibrant strand of African political thought in South Africa, Lembede stands out as the first to construct a philosophy of African nationalism.

Writing about Lembede is a challenging task for several reasons. One is that we are still faced with significant gaps in our knowledge of his life, especially the years before he moved to Johannesburg and entered politics. Another is that Lembede did not have the opportunity to develop many of his ideas fully because of the short time period in which he was politically active. Consequently, it is difficult to chart precisely the evolution of his political ideas. However, we believe this collection, which brings together Lembede's writings from his student days to just a few days before his death, significantly broadens our understanding of a seminal figure in South African political thought. (1)

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Looking back on his childhood days in Natal, Lembede was fond of telling his Johannesburg friends, "I am proud of my peasant origin. I am one with Mother Africa's dark soil." This declaration served a dual purpose: defining a political orientation and commitment and underscoring the fact that whatever his considerable educational, professional and political achievements, he remained strongly attached to his rural roots.

Born 21 January 1914 on the farm of Frank Fell at Eston, Muziwakhe Lembede was the first of seven children of Mbazwana Martin and Martha Nora MaLuthuli Lembede. (2) His father was a farm labourer who, according to his family, had a reputation among whites and blacks in his area for "listening, thinking...and...a quality of the fear of God which he impressed upon his children by deeds."

His mother attained a Standard 5 education (a considerable achievement for any African at that time) at Georgedale School and taught at schools at Vredeville, Darlington and Umlazi Bridge. She tutored Anton at home in the basics of reading and writing until he was ready to pass Standard II. But she was anxious for him and her other children to escape their gruelling lives as farm laborers. Around 1927, she prevailed on her husband to move the family to Mphephetho in the Umbumbulu district so that their children could have access to formal schooling. Lembede's father could not make ends meet as a farmer, and he had to supplement his income by working on nearby Indian farms. (3)

Before the family moved to Umbumbulu, Muziwakhe, who had been baptized in the Anglican church and given the name Francis, converted to Catholicism and, with his father and brother Nicholas, joined a Roman Catholic church near Eston. The priest at Eston, Father Cyprian, gave Muziwakhe an additional name, Anton.

The church was to play a central role throughout Anton's life. As teenagers, he and Nicholas often played a game in which they acted out the role of a priest. Indeed, both told their family that they intended to become priests. However, Anton promised that before joining the priesthood, he would teach for a few years to pay school fees for his brothers and sisters.

Anton's formal education did not begin until he was 13, but he showed immediate promise in his classes. His teacher at the Catholic Inkanyezi school was nineteen year old Bernadette Sibeko of Ladysmith, who was fresh out of Mariannhill Training College. Inkanyezi was her first teaching post.

About 60 students squeezed into her classroom in a "building made of wattle and daub with a corrugated iron roofing but with no ceiling." (4) To Standard I and II students, she taught Zulu, English, hygiene and scriptures. In addition, to Standard III and IV students, she taught nature study, short stories from

South African history, regional geography and reading, writing and arithmetic.

Sibeko was the sole teacher for all the classes, and one of her techniques for coping with such a large and diverse group of children was to parcel out responsibilities. Since Anton was one of her best students, she often taught him a lesson and had him instruct the others.

Anton's dedication to his studies left distinct impressions on both his family and Sibeko. His family remembers him herding the family cattle, but being so engrossed by his books that he invariably let the cattle wander off. One of Sibeko's recollections was of watching him at a football match, walking up and down a field in deep thought and occasionally kicking the ball when it came his way. (5)

On one occasion, Sibeko asked Anton to write an essay on money. His response, written out on a slate with a pencil, so impressed her that she copied it and entered it in a contest at a teachers' conference. It was awarded first prize. When we interviewed her in August 1992, she had no hesitation recollecting his short essay.

> Money is a small coin, a small wheel bearing the picture of the king's head. Round this head is an inscription - head of the king of England - George V. You can go to any store. If you present this coin the store-keeper gives you whatever you want. The nations know the value of money, and we too realise that money rules the world.

After Anton completed Standard III, Sibeko encouraged him to continue his education. He worked for a while in a kitchen at Escombe in order to buy books and pay school fees at Umbumbulu Government School, where he completed Standard VI with a first class pass. Then, Hamilton Makhanya, a local school inspector, assisted him in securing a scholarship at nearby Adams College.

ADAMS COLLEGE

Established in 1849 to train African assistants to European missionaries, Adams College had by the 1930s become one of the premier schools for African students from all over southern and central Africa. Adams had three divisions: a high school which took students through matriculation; an industrial school for training students in carpentry and building; and a teachers' training college, opened in 1909. A new teachers' course introduced in 1927 prepared students for the Native Teachers Higher Primary Certificate (later renamed the T3), which allowed a teacher to assume jobs in Intermediate Schools, High Schools, and Training Colleges. This was the course for which Lembede enrolled in 1933.

Lembede left indelible impressions on his classmates at Adams. First, there was his abject poverty which was apparent to everyone because of his shabby dress: his patched pants and

worn-out jackets. Jordan Ngubane, a classmate and one of the founders of the ANC Youth League, described Lembede as the "living symbol of African misery." (6) Girls were embarrassed to be seen with him in public. Lembede was "very stupid in appearance," one female classmate recollected. "If any girl ever saw you, even if Antony [Anton] was innocently talking with you, then you'd become somebody to be talked about for the day." (7)

But there was another side of Lembede that his classmates consistently commented on, his brilliance and dedication to his studies. Edna Bam drew a comparison of Lembede with J.E.K. Aggrey, the Ghanaian-born educator who had addressed an Adams audience in April 1921 when he visited South Africa as part of the Phelps-Stokes delegation investigating African education. (8) Aggrey was touted as the role model for all aspiring African students. Bam and other Adams students were told stories about Aggrey being so dedicated to his schooling that in the middle of winter he studied with his feet in a bucket of hot water. And that was the image that came to mind when she remembered Lembede.

Lembede excelled in learning languages. At Adams he picked up Afrikaans, Sesotho and Xhosa as well as German from German nuns residing near Adams, and he began studying Latin. Learning Afrikaans was even then regarded skeptically by African students. But Ellen Kuzwayo recollected an occasion where Lembede spoke before a group of students preparing for a debate with students at Sastri College, an Indian school in Durban. He started off his speech in English, but then switched easily to Afrikaans.

In one of his student essays in the Adams' publication, Iso Lomuzi, Lembede advised that the best way to learn new languages was to combine the techniques of learning grammar with reading elementary readers. (9) In that same essay, he maintained that studying foreign languages allowed one to understand other people and that contributed to lessening racial hatred. However, he also supported Africans learning languages other than their own in order to put them in a position to challenge whites who had established a monopoly over African languages through their control of orthography and publications. "It speaks for itself," he stated, "that we want educated Bantu men who have studied various Bantu languages, and who will be authorities on them."

Two other student essays, "The Importance of Agriculture" and "What Do We Understand by Economics?", provide a glimpse into Lembede's thinking on political and economic issues. (10) In them, he placed the onus for black poverty on the African people themselves. He charged that poor farming techniques and the laziness of African farmers were directly responsible for their failures. Instead of drawing a connection between government policies and land shortages, he faulted African farmers for reducing themselves to the level where they had to seek work on white farms for a pittance. Lembede's own father had been forced to supplement his family's income by going out periodically to work on the farms of neighboring white and Indian farmers.

Lembede's solution was an education that taught people an

appreciation for manual labor and applied modern agricultural techniques. His role model was Booker T. Washington, the black American educator whose ideas on industrial education and self-help were still in vogue in educational circles in South Africa.

Lembede's student views are a pointed contrast to his criticisms of the government in the mid-1940's, but they highlight themes that consistently surface in his later writings - that Africans had to rely on their inner resources to overcome inequities and that spiritual beliefs were a necessary component of economic and political advancement.

The fact that Lembede's essays were not overtly political is not surprising since descriptions of Adams generally agree that the school did not have a politicized environment. Although Adams' teaching staff included Albert Luthuli and Z.K. Matthews, who were to become prominent figures in the ANC, its administrators and teachers carefully insulated students from the political currents circulating about them. There was nevertheless one aspect of Adams that possibly influenced Lembede's nationalism of later years, a conscious effort on the part of teachers and students alike to downplay ethnic differences.

In this regard, a highlight of the school year was Heroes of Africa Day set aside to celebrate heroes of the African past. The campus had recognized Moshoeshoe Day and Shaka Day in the past, but when Edgar Brookes took over as Adams' principal in 1934, he created a Heroes' Day on 31 October, the eve of All Saints Day when "heroes" of the Christian faith were honored. (11) On Heroes' Day, students wore their national dress and gathered at an assembly to pay tribute to noted African figures from a culture other than their own. An Adams' student, Khabi Mnqoma, has described the day's significance:

> The day is set aside to sing praises to heroes of South Africa, and to attempt to recapitulate the mode of life of our ancestors. As Adams College is what one might term cosmopolitan, the various students contribute towards drawing picture of primitive African life. (12)

Ellen Kuzwayo recalls her feelings about the day:

> We crossed the tribal division on that day....If I was Tswana, I had a freedom to depict my hero in another community in that cultural dress. Because I lived very near Lesotho, my grandfather's home...and I saw more of the Basotho people, saw their traditional dresses, their traditional dances, everything, and I would be nothing but a moSotho....And I think we didn't realize it...but it kept us as a black community without saying, "You are Zulu. You are Tswana. You are Xhosa." (13)

TEACHING AND THE LAW

After leaving Adams in 1936, Lembede took up a series of

teaching posts, first at Utrecht and Newcastle in Natal and then in the Orange Free State at Heilbron Bantu United School, where he taught Afrikaans, and Parys Bantu School, where he was headmaster.

His thirst for more education never stopped. Over the next decade he steadily advanced himself through a series of degrees, all through private study and financed with his meagre personal resources. He passed the Joint Matriculation Board exams in 1937, taking Afrikaans A and English B and earning a distinction in Latin. Next he studied for a B.A. degree, majoring in 1940 in Philosophy and Roman Law, through correspondence courses with the University of South Africa. He then tackled the Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) degree through the University of South Africa, completing it in 1942. Finally, he registered for a M.A. degree in Philosophy in 1943 at the University of South Africa, submitting his thesis entitled "The Conception of God as Expounded by, or as it Emerges from the Writings of Philosophers - from Descartes to the Present Day" in 1945. (14) Considering the fact that only a few Africans had attained graduate degrees, A.P. Mda's tribute to Lembede on completing his M.A. was well-deserved: "This signal achievement is the culmination of an epic struggle for self-education under severe handicaps and almost insuperable difficulties. It is a dramatic climax to Mr. Lembede's brilliant scholastic career." (15)

Lembede's ascetic lifestyle and his disciplined, austere study regimen were a major part of his educational success. According to B.M. Khaketla, his roommate in Heilbron, Lembede would wake up at 5 a.m. and read until 6 a.m., when he prepared for school. (16) He taught from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. After lunch, at 2 p.m., he came directly home and studied until seven o'clock when he broke for his evening meal. After dinner, he studied until 11:00 p.m. He followed this timetable religiously on weekdays. On Saturdays, he read from 5 a.m. until lunch. Then he read from after lunch until he went to bed. Sundays he set aside for church, reading newspapers, and socializing.

Lembede's studies did not consume all of his spare time, and he took part in a range of activities. He participated in the Orange Free State African Teachers' Association, an organization he scathingly censured in a letter to Umteteli wa Bantu (8 November 1941). Never one to hold back his criticisms of African shortcomings, Lembede's impatience with the Association's inaction and lax discipline and his desire for positive action foreshadowed sentiments that made their way into his political views several years later.

> Every year, many resolutions are adopted by the Conference. What is the fate of many of them? Some end just on the paper on which they are written. They are not acted upon, thus they fail to realise their ultimate destiny - action....We must be action-minded. The philosophy of action must be the corner-stone of our policy....In our ranks we have men and women of high talent and ability. Our poor, disorderly position is not occasioned by lack of

talent, but (a) by lack of scientific organisation and utilisation of that talent, (b) by lack of will-power. Africans! Our salvation lies in hard and systematic work!

Lembede also attended church services of the African branch of the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)), where he occasionally translated Afrikaans sermons into seSotho. Khaketla was struck by Lembede's fluency in both languages, and that he was willing to attend and appreciate services of denominations other than Catholic. His attitude was that "God is indivisible" and not subject to man-made divisions. He put on his best clothes and prepared himself for the monthly naqmaal services. Lembede thought naqmaal (Holy Communion) was more graceful and meaningful than the Holy Communion celebrated in the Catholic church; and he even chided Khaketla, an Anglican, that he could never understand the joy of naqmaal because Anglicans celebrated communion too frequently.

This is a pertinent anecdote because much has been made of Lembede's attachment to the Catholic church. Khaketla recollected that during one vacation, he went to Johannesburg and met Lembede by chance at Park Station. Lembede invited him to visit a friend, A.P. Mda, in Orlando township. As they approached the Roman Catholic church in Orlando, they saw Mda in the churchyard. Khaketla recognized Mda because they had trained together as teachers at Mariazell school near Matatiele. Lembede asked Khaketla not to tell Mda that he had regularly attended DRC services in Heilbron. To Lembede, church affiliation did not mean as much as a belief in God. Moreover, participating in the DRC had partly been a tactic to get a job. He represented the DRC at Bantu United School, where every sponsoring denomination had to be represented on staff.

An interesting sidelight of Lembede's stay in the Orange Free State was his search for a wife. According to his Parys roommate Victor Khomari, Lembede had a great reverence for educated women. (17) He vowed that he wanted to meet and marry the most brilliant woman he could find rather than confining himself to someone from within his own ethnic group. When he read in the press about a woman from Lesotho who had been a spectacular student at Morija Training College and the University College of Fort Hare, he decided to go to Mafeteng in Lesotho with Khomari on their school holiday. Khomari loaned him a bike to peddle to Thabana Morena, the school where the woman was teaching, but he was not able to meet her. By coincidence, the young woman in question, Caroline Ntseliseng Ramolahloane, later married B.M. Khaketla, Lembede's Heilbron roommate, in 1946.

JOHANNESBURG

When Lembede had finished his LL.B. degree, he took up an offer to serve his articles with the venerable Pixley ka Seme, who had established one of a handful of African law firms in Johannesburg. After practicing law for over three decades, Seme was in poor health and on the verge of retirement, and he was looking for someone to take over his practice. His law career

had had its less than distinguished moments. In 1932 he was struck from the roll of attorneys in the Transvaal, but was reinstated in 1942.

He had also been a founding father of the ANC in 1912, and had served as its president from 1930 to 1937. A conservative, autocratic figure, Seme's presidency was marked by discord, and when he was ousted as president, he left the ANC at a low ebb. By the time Lembede began to work in his law firm, Seme was no longer a major player in ANC politics.

Whatever vicissitudes Seme had experienced in his legal and political careers, Lembede still held him in high regard. (18) Moreover, because Seme was still a respected figure in the African community, he certainly eased Lembede's entry into African political and social circles. In 1946, after Lembede had served his articles, Seme made him a partner in his firm. (19) An Umbumbulu businessman, Isaac Dhlomo, loaned Lembede L500 to buy into Seme's firm.

Lembede's law career was brief, but his linguistic abilities and his uniqueness as an African lawyer provided some memorable moments. One was when he shocked a magistrate in Roodepoort by conducting his case in Afrikaans. Another was when Lembede broke into Latin in a magistrate's court in Johannesburg, prompting the magistrate to interrupt and implore him: "Please, Mr. Lembede, this is not Rome, but South Africa." (20)

After moving to Johannesburg, Lembede also renewed his friendship with A.P. Mda, whom he had first met in 1938 at a Catholic teachers' meeting in Newcastle. The two exchanged addresses, and when Lembede had occasion to visit Johannesburg, he would look up Mda. Born in 1916 in Herschel district near the Lesotho border, Mda had also received a Catholic education and earned his Teachers' Diploma at Mariazell. He moved to the Witwatersrand in 1937 and, after taking up a variety of jobs, he landed a teaching post at St. Johns Berchman, a Catholic primary school in Orlando Township. He rapidly rose to prominence in the Catholic African Union, the Catholic African Teachers' Federation, and the Transvaal African Teachers' Association. In the latter, he became a leading figure in the campaign to improve teachers' salaries and conditions of service.

He was also a veteran of African political organizations. He had been baptized into politics by attending the All African Convention (AAC) meeting in Bloemfontein in 1937. But he soon grew disenchanted with the AAC, and he moved into the ANC when it was revitalized in the late 1930s. Mda was clearly more politically experienced than Lembede. As Ngubane put it, living on the Witwatersrand had seasoned Mda as a political thinker and "as a result he had more clearly-defined views on every aspect of the race problem." (21)

For a while Mda and Lembede shared a house in Orlando. And as Lembede wrote his M.A. thesis, they became "intellectual sparring partners." (22) Mda sharpened Lembede's understanding

of philosophical ideas by assuming opposing positions on issues and vigorously debating them with him. Mda was the perfect foil for Lembede because he loved the cut and thrust of debate, and he doggedly defended his positions with as much fervor as Lembede. Mda remembered their exchanges this way:

> I had to defend a certain position while he attacked it....He wanted to gain some clearer understanding of the subject matter he was studying. He used me as a tool to achieve that goal....He learned a lot from controversies because sometimes I attacked his positions just to give him an exercise in refuting his arguments. (23)

In the same manner, the pair took on the major political questions of the day. There were occasions when Mda and other Youth Leaguers had to curb Lembede's instinctive bent to take extreme positions. When Lembede was living in the Orange Free State, in order to improve his command of Afrikaans, he began reading Hendrik Verwoerd's column, "Die Sake van die Dag," in Die Vaderland, the ultra-nationalist Afrikaans newspaper, and imbibing his ideas. As a result, after Lembede moved to Johannesburg, "Mda found Lembede rather uncritically fascinated with the spirit of determination embodied in fascist ideology, to the point where he saw nothing wrong with quoting certain ideas of Hitler and Mussolini with approval." (24) In the Orange Free State Lembede did not have the benefit of having peers around who could scrutinize and refine his thinking, but in Johannesburg, he had Mda and others who challenged him - not always successfully - to rein in some of his extremist ideas. For instance, Mda forced Lembede to rethink his fascination with fascism by pointing out Hitler's ideas about racial superiority and how they specifically applied to black people. By the close of the Second World War, Lembede was unequivocally rejecting fascism and Nazism in his writings.

On many political issues Mda and Lembede found common ground. And out of their discussions with each other and with their peers emerged a vision of a rejuvenated African nationalism - centered around the unity of the African people - that could rouse and lead their people to freedom.

THE FOUNDING OF THE ANC YOUTH LEAGUE, APRIL 1944

The years of the Second World War saw a quickening of the pace of African protest on the Witwatersrand. The immediate cause of this ferment was the war itself which disrupted trade flowing into South Africa. As a consequence, South Africa's manufacturing and mining sectors dramatically expanded to supply goods and arms for the allied war effort and for southern Africa. The economy boomed, but as white workers were siphoned off into the army, tens of thousands of African men and women, fleeing the stagnation of the rural areas, poured into the urban areas seeking jobs. Between 1936 and 1946, roughly 650,000 people moved into the urban areas. During those same years, Johannesburg's population leaped from 229,122 to 384,628, almost a 75% increase.

The wartime economy may have opened up employment opportunities for African workers, but at a cost. Prices of basic goods soared; housing shortages grew more acute; and municipalities charged higher prices for public transportation. White government and municipal officials did little to alleviate these burdens, and as a result, a series of protests - bus boycotts, squatter protests, and worker strikes - were triggered off in African townships throughout the Witwatersrand.

By and large ANC leaders remained aloof from this protest. For the ANC the 1930's had been years of inaction and the All African Convention (AAC) had taken advantage of the ANC's lethargic leadership by eclipsing it as the pre-eminent vehicle for African opinion during and after the controversy over the Hertzog Bills. By the late 1930s, however, a group of activists, unhappy with the lack of direction and the compromises of AAC leaders, turned to resurrecting the ANC.

An important step in the ANC's revitalisation was the election (by a slim majority of twenty-one to twenty) of Dr. A.B. Xuma as ANC president in 1940. Xuma, who had a flourishing medical practice in Johannesburg, rescued the ANC from its parlous economic condition by raising dues, soliciting donations from private sources, and contributing some of his own resources.

He also pushed through a new constitution in 1943, eliminating an Upper House of Chiefs. He toured throughout South Africa, imposing discipline and shoring up support among provincial ANC congresses. He opened a national office for the ANC in Johannesburg in December 1943. And he put the ANC in a position to respond to day-to-day situations by setting up a small working committee of people who lived within a fifty-mile radius around Johannesburg.

There was no question of Xuma's commitment to equal political rights for Africans and the abolition of discriminatory laws, but he remained wedded to bringing about change through constitutional means. Although he was not at heart comfortable with mass protest and he was wary of the ambitions of younger ANC members, he recognized that the ANC could not survive unless it brought younger members into its fold.

The inspiration for forming a Youth League came from several different quarters. One influence came from the numerous youth and student organizations that had sprouted up around the country. For instance, in 1939, Manasseh Moerane, principal of Umpumulo High School, and Jordan Ngubane, a journalist, founded the National Union of African Youth (NUAY) in Durban to promote literacy, economic and business training and political advancement for the African community. Without openly declaring it, they also intended to build an organization capable of breaking A.W.G. Champion's personal stranglehold over the Natal wing of the ANC.

Several cohorts of future Youth Leaguers - Oliver Tambo, Congress Mbata, Lancelot Gama, William Nkomo, Nelson Mandela,

Lionel Majombozi, James Njongwe and V.V.T. Mbobo - also emerged from the mid-1930s on at Fort Hare, the university college founded for African, Coloured and Indian students in 1916. By the Second World War several hundred students from all over southern Africa were studying for degrees at Fort Hare; and a number of them were intensely engaged in discussing and debating the political issues of the day: the abolition of the Cape African vote, the creation of a Natives Representative Council (NRC), the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and the contest for global supremacy during the Second World War and its implications for Africans.

In the early 1940s Fort Hare students also received a bittersweet introduction to protest politics through their involvement in two strikes. The first was touched off in September 1941 after the white supervisor of the dining hall struck an African woman employee. Over 3/4s of the students showed their sympathy with the worker by boycotting classes for three days. The Fort Hare administration had no sympathy for the strike and the issues raised by the students. They demanded that strikers submit a formal letter of apology for their actions and pay a fine of L1 or be suspended. All but one complied.

The second strike in September 1942 came about when Bishop C.J. Ferguson-Davie, the warden at Beda Hall, the residence for Anglicans, turned down a request by Beda students to play tennis on Sunday. When the majority of Beda students refused to cooperate with Ferguson-Davie in other activities such as chapel, he demanded that they sign a formal apology; if they did not they would be suspended from the university. Most of the students refused to sign the apology, and forty-five of the sixty-four Beda students, including Ntsu Mokhehle and Oliver Tambo, were suspended for varying periods of time.

Another route to the Youth League was through the aggressive campaign of the Transvaal African Teachers' Association to improve the paltry wages and poor job conditions of black teachers. Teachers like A.P. Mda and David Bopape played prominent roles in educating and mobilising their communities behind the teachers' grievances. A high point of the teachers' protest was a march through downtown Johannesburg in May 1944 that reinforced a belief among its participants that militant resistance to the government could produce positive results. African teachers were to form a significant constituency in the Youth League.

A final factor that produced the Youth League was the challenge to the ANC by the newly-formed African Democratic Party (ADP), which featured two dynamic young leaders, Paul Mosaka and Self Mampuru. Mampuru had sought support from ANC youth when he considered standing for the presidency of the Transvaal ANC in 1943, but he had suddenly jumped to the ADP. Fearing the ADP would siphon off younger ANC members, Xuma cultivated relationships with youth leaders. And he responded positively when they proposed establishing a Youth League within the ANC.

Whatever their backgrounds, the common denominator for young ANC activists was their impatience with the unwillingness of the ANC "Old Guard" to adopt militant tactics to contest white rule. In the latter half of 1943 they began holding conversations on trains and at meetings at churches, the Bantu Mens Social Centre, and homes to discuss forming a youth wing in the ANC. A formal proposal to found a Youth League was put forward at the December 1943 meeting of the ANC in Bloemfontein, where pressing issues such as the approval of Africans' Claims in South Africa, a policy statement that spelled out ANC objectives as well as a Bill of Rights, and the relationship of the AAC and ANC were on the agenda. Youth leaders introduced and passed a resolution, proposed by Moerane and seconded by Mda, that stated: "henceforth it shall be competent for the African youth to organise and establish Provincial Conferences of the Youth League with a view of forming a National Congress of the Youth League immediately." (25)

After winning the blessing of Xuma, who overcame his misgivings about the ideas and roles of Youth Leaguers within the ANC, the Youth League issued its manifesto in March 1944 and held its inaugural meeting at the Bantu Men's Social Centre the following month. (26) Speakers included Lembede, Mda and V.V.T. Mbobo as well as senior Transvaal ANC leaders such as R.V. Selope Thema, E.P. Moretsele and Xuma. Youth Leaguers selected W.F. Nkomo and Lionel Majombozi, medical students at Witwatersrand University, as provisional chair and secretary, respectively, until the Youth League drafted a constitution and conducted a formal election for officers.

Nkomo and Majombozi enjoyed popularity among Youth Leaguers, but they were also selected because their status as medical students gave them the right educational credentials for senior ANC leaders such as Dr. Xuma. However, Nkomo and Majombozi were viewed as transitional appointments since it was known they would have little free time as students. In addition, Nkomo's leftist leanings troubled nationalists in the Youth League such as Mda and Lembede who believed Nkomo was secretly a member of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). A tip-off, according to Ngubane, was Nkomo's suggested wording for the Youth League Manifesto "which in our opinion would have given it a slightly Communist slant." (27)

However, a political showdown was unnecessary. When Youth League elections took place in September, Nkomo stepped aside to concentrate on his studies. He remained a strong supporter of Youth League activities. Lembede was then elected first president of the Youth League, a position he held until his death.

Lembede had already begun making his mark on Youth League policy when Youth Leaguers delegated him, Ngubane and Mda to draft the Youth League manifesto adopted in March 1944. Like Lembede, Ngubane was an Adams product and a newcomer to the Witwatersrand. He had been a reporter for John Dube's Ilanga lase Natal before moving to Johannesburg in 1943 to become an

assistant editor at Selope-Thema's Bantu World. Ngubane, Lembede and Mda were all Catholics and implacable opponents of the Communist Party.

The manifesto remains a classic statement of the African nationalist position. The conflict in South Africa, it asserted, was fundamentally a racial one between whites and blacks, who represented opposite political and philosophical poles. The oppressors, whites, represented a philosophy of personal achievement and individualism that fuelled fierce competition; the oppressed Africans embodied a philosophy of communalism and societal harmony where society's needs were favored over those of the individual. Because whites had defined their domination in terms of race, this had led the African "to view his problems and those of his country through the perspective of race."

The manifesto was also a blistering indictment of the orthodoxies that black and white leaders had been wedded to for decades. One was trusteeship, an idea promoted by white politicians that blacks were their wards who had to be brought along slowly to a civilized state. The manifesto surveyed the long litany of government laws that had hindered, not advanced Africans, and concluded that trusteeship was a bluff aimed at perpetuating white rule.

Another orthodoxy was the belief of ANC leaders that change could come through compromise and accommodation. The Youth Leaguers charged that senior ANC leaders had grown remote and aloof from the African community and were trapped between their apprehensions over losing the few privileges the government granted them and their qualms over mass African protest that would have brought down the wrath of the government. The result was that ANC leaders had become "suspicious of progressive thought and action" and offered no innovative policies or strategies for combatting "oppressive legislation." They were so locked into segregationist structures such as the Natives Representative Council (NRC) that they had drifted away from the ANC's original vision and vitality.

The manifesto's criticisms of ANC leadership were devastating, but rather than calling on people to defect from the ANC, it invited Youth Leaguers to remain loyal and serve as "the brains-trust and power-station of the spirit of African nationalism" and infuse the ANC with a new spirit. The manifesto's political goals were clear: self-determination and freedom for the African people. But other than calling for a radical reversal of ANC policies, the manifesto did not clearly spell out alternative strategies. That tactical omission was not addressed until after Lembede's death, when Youth Leaguers launched their drive to pressure the ANC to adopt a Programme of Action.

That Lembede was a relative newcomer to Johannesburg and politics did not hamper his rapid rise to prominence in the Youth League and the parent ANC. This can be attributed to several factors. One was that he was a lawyer, serving his articles with

Seme, and thus in a prestigious position looked upon favorably by the ANC "Old Guard," who did not treat anyone seriously who lacked education or status. Another was that Lembede had completed his legal studies and was in a profession relatively immune to direct government pressure. Many of the Youth Leaguers were teachers, and they, like Moerane, had to tread cautiously when it came to their political activism.

Moreover, there was no question of Lembede's leadership qualities and his zealous devotion to Youth League causes. A tenacious debater and a stirring orator, he showed no hesitancy in staking out contentious positions and promoting them fearlessly in any setting and against any adversary. Even within the Youth League, which had a strong left-of-center faction, Lembede had to defend his Africanist positions against charges they were too extreme. Congress Mbata recollected: "He was almost alone and he fought a very brave battle; I must say we respected him for his stand. He was a man who if he was convinced about a thing would go to any length to make his viewpoint." (28)

Whatever reservations Youth Leaguers had with Lembede's ideas and his lack of grounding in practical politics, they recognized that he was willing to take on any challenge, no matter how much opposition it provoked. An example was Lembede's call for African leaders to boycott the NRC, set up by the government in 1937. The government never intended the NRC to be more than an advisory board, but conservative and moderate African leaders (including some prominent ANC officials), hoping to exploit the NRC as a platform for expressing African opinion, decided to participate. However, the NRC never became more than an irrelevant talk-shop. To Youth Leaguers, the real issue was full political rights for Africans, and they appealed to African leaders to refrain from participating in NRC elections. In the aftermath of the 1946 mine workers strike, Lembede introduced a resolution at the ANC national conference calling on NRC members to resign immediately. However, most senior ANC leaders, including prominent Communists, argued that a boycott would not succeed unless there was unanimity about the strategy within the African community. Otherwise, some African politicians would participate in the NRC and do the government's bidding. When Lembede's resolution was overwhelmingly defeated, it was further proof to the Youth Leaguers of how out of touch ANC leaders were with the militant mood in the African community. "The masses are ready to act," Lembede challenged the ANC national executive, "but the leaders are not prepared to lead." (29)

Although Lembede's stances provoked harsh reactions, he never shied away from controversy. Indeed he seemed to revel in it. Mda recalled a meeting in Orlando where he and Lembede shared a platform. Lembede thought the meeting was not lively enough, so he deliberately stirred up things by launching an attack on the Communist Party. This meeting, according to Mda, provoked a ferocious response from the Communist Party newspaper Inkululeko. Quoting an eyewitness at Lembede's speech, Inkululeko reported: "'He spoke firmly but like a qualified Nazi.

In fact if one were to close one's eyes, one would certainly think one was listening to Hitler broadcasting from Berlin.'" (30)

Joe Matthews recounted another occasion where Lembede and Mda were invited to address the debating society in the geography room at St. Peter's School where Youth Leaguers Oliver Tambo and Victor Sifora were teaching.

> So Lembede got up, and he was dressed...in a black tie, black evening dress, which in itself was quite something. And he started off, "As Karl Marx said, 'A pair of boots is better than all the plays of Shakespeare.'"

This provocative statement roused his predominantly student audience, but it also prompted a sharp retort from the school's geography teacher, Norman Mitchell, a devotee of the British Empire, who angrily shouted back, "That's not true." (31)

A PHILOSOPHY OF AFRICAN NATIONALISM

In South Africa, "nation" and "nationality" have been elastic concepts whose boundaries expand or contract according to the relative power or powerlessness of those defining them. A case in point is Lembede, whose starting point for his vision of African nationalism was his recognition of a fundamental political
reality: that as long as Africans did not transcend their ethnic divisions, they would remain minor political actors. Unless the continent's millions of inhabitants agreed to work cooperatively, Africans could not hope to take advantage of global power shifts and compete with established powers such as the United States, Japan, Germany, Russia, England, and France and newly emerging ones such as China and India. Moroever, in South Africa, where white domination was perpetuated by dividing the African majority, African unity - based on a shared oppression - was a precondition for challenging the status quo.

Because Lembede's brand of nationalism was aimed at forging a pan-ethnic identity, he discounted the usual building blocks of nationalism. What bound the peoples of Africa together and made them unique was not language, color, geographical location or national origin, but a spiritual force he called "Africanism." This concept first appeared in his writings in 1944, and was based not only on the fact that Africans shared the same continent but that they had adapted to Africa's climate and environment. "The African natives," he contended, "then live and move and have their being in the spirit of Africa, in short, they are one with Africa." (32)

Borrowing liberally from Darwin's law of variation in nature, Lembede maintained that because nations differed in the same way as flowers, animals, plants and humans, they had special qualities and defining characteristics. Accordingly, Africa had to "realise its own potentialities, develop its own talents and retain its own peculiar character." (33)

This deterministic line of reasoning had a kinship with the neo-Fichtean ideas then being advanced by some Afrikaner nationalists. Lembede was certainly familiar with their writings through the Afrikaans press and his M.A. research. In his thesis, he quoted from a booklet on communism by Nicolaas Diederichs, a professor of Political Philosophy at the University of the Orange Free State and a Broederbond leader. (34) Lembede's ideas mirrored aspects of Diederichs' philosophy of nationalism, presented in his Nationalisme as Lewensbeskouing en sy verhouding tot Internasionalisme (1935). For instance, the unifying characteristic of Diederichs' nationalism was not "a common fatherland, common racial descent, or common political convictions," but a divinely ordained "common culture."

> Just as He ruled that no deadly uniformity should prevail in nature, but that it should demonstrate a richness and variety of plants and animals, sound and colors, forms and figures, so in the human sphere as well He ruled that there should exist a multiplicity and diversity of nations, languages and cultures. (35)

No doubt Lembede appropriated some of the ideas of Afrikaner nationalists for his version of African nationalism. While Afrikaner nationalists distorted evolutionary theory to justify white domination, Lembede probably took special delight in recasting the same ideas to promote African equality with Europeans. Lembede's attitude towards Afrikaner nationalists is illustrated by a story Jordan Ngubane related to Mary Benson about Lembede having a meeting with a leader of the Ossewa Brandwag (OB), an ultra-nationalist Afrikaner movement. The OB leader told Lembede that "we Afrikaner nationalists realise that no nationalist is an enemy of another nationalist. We have much that is common, land, you are exploited by Jews, English and Indians just as we are by Jews and English, we know that you are suffering and in final record [the] only real friend of a nationalist is another nationalist. We want to make a gesture of friendship." The OB leader then allegedly handed Lembede a L500 check to be used as Lembede saw fit as a gesture of "goodwill towards African nationalists." Lembede expressed his appreciation but pointed out that the "goals of Afrikaner and African nationalism [are] irreconcilable therefore [it is] unfair to you and me if I accepted help from your side." Lembede then walked away. (36)

Because Lembede did not accept that ideas and innovations were bound by culture, he saw no inconsistency in taking ideas from non-Africans to construct an Africa-centred philosophy. Thus his writings drew on an electic range of sources: nineteenth century European romantic nationalists, Greek and Roman philosophers, and leaders of Indian, Egyptian and other anti-colonial struggles. He valued the contributions of Western and Eastern civilizations and he argued that Africa was ideally placed to absorb the best from both. However, he warned against uncritically borrowing ideas that had no application to the African continent. (37)

Lembede's ideas clearly were Pan African in scope, but it is striking that at no point in his writings did he refer to the Pan African Congresses or any of the leading lights of Pan Africanism. Lembede's ideas, for instance, echo those of Edward Wilmot Blyden, the West Indian/Liberian educator and philosopher who wrote on the creative and distinctive genius of the 'Negro' race and the necessity for Africans to express racial pride and forge a unified nationality. Also curiously absent from Lembede's writings is any mention of Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican-born black nationalist. Garvey's ideas had not only caught hold in the United States after the First World War, but had also attracted a fervent following in South Africa. There is ample oral evidence that Lembede was conversant with Garvey since Lembede frequently peppered his speeches with quotations from The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, but we do not have an explanation why Lembede did not cite Garvey in his writings. (38)

Lembede is most commonly associated with the framing of a philosophy of African nationalism, but one cannot separate his ideas from the political ends they served. One objective was to create an ideological arsenal for African nationalists in the ANC to wage combat with their principal political rivals, who had staked out clearly-defined doctrines and policies. For instance, the Communist Party of South Africa was rooted in Marxist dogma and regularly issued policy statements. The Non-European Unity Movement, which had an influential Trotskyite wing, had its 10-Point Programme (a central plank was the boycott of government-created institutions), ratified in December 1943. And the African Democratic Party, touting a multi-racial membership, had adopted its manifesto in September 1943 advocating change through peaceful negotiation and opposing militant protest. African nationalists were at a disadvantage in proselytizing their cause unless they translated their emotions, aspirations and convictions into a logical and coherent set of doctrines independent of European ideologies. In the battle of the "isms", the Youth League could put forward "Africanism" as an alternative.

In order for Africans to combat white domination, Lembede maintained they had to overcome psychological disabilities. The system of segregation had erected tangible political and economic barriers that were easily targeted, but white domination also had a corrosive impact on the self-image of Africans, and this was more difficult to cope with. This negative self-image was manifested in Africans' "loss of self-confidence, inferiority complex, a feeling of frustration, the worship and idolisation of whiteness, foreign leaders and ideologies." (39) According to Lembede,

> ...the African people have been told time and again that they are babies, that they are an inferior race, that they cannot achieve anything worthwhile by themselves or without a white man as their "trustee" or "leader." This insidious suggestion has poisoned their minds and has resulted in a pathological state of mind. Consequently the African has lost or is losing the sterling qualities of self-respect,

> self-confidence and self-reliance. Even in the political world, it is being suggested that Africans cannot organise themselves or make any progress without white "leaders." Now I stand for the revolt against this psychological enslavement of my people. I strive for the eradication of this "Ja-Baas" mentality, which for centuries has been systematically and subtlely implanted into the minds of the Africans. (40)

Lembede's ultimate cure for these ills was political freedom, but he prescribed several intermediate steps which Africans could take to reassert an independent identity. One was reversing the distorted image of their own past. This meant constructing a history that accentuated the positive achievements of African civilizations, praising the heroic efforts of African leaders who resisted European expansion and resurrecting the glories of the African past. Influenced by Seme, Lembede's historical vision drew a linear connection between present and past African civilizations, going back to ancient Egypt.

> The roots of civilisation are deep in the soil of Africa. Egypt is the cradle of civilisation not only in the sciences but even in the matter of sharing. Hannibal, conqueror and polygamist, had three black African wives; Moses married an African; neither Europe nor Asia is devoid of African blood. Christ himself, at a young age, found protection in Africa. On His way to Calvary his support came from Africa. (41)

Lembede had no tolerance for anyone who presented a contrary view of Africans and their history. Reviewing B.W. Vilakazi's novel, Nje-Nempula, situated during the Bambatha rebellion, Lembede reproached Vilakazi for casting Malambule, a collaborator in Lembede's eyes, as a lead character because it might "sew the seed of a defeatist mentality or an inferiority complex in the minds of our children."

> we should not tell our children that we were routed, humiliated and cowed by white people, we should merely tell them that in the face of superior force and weapons, we were compelled to lay down arms....The motto of a National hero should be 'My people, right or wrong.' (42)

Lembede also called on Africans to break their reliance on European leaders and ideas by building up their own organizations. A key to this strategy was making the ANC and African leadership central to the African national struggle. In this regard, Lembede did not operate in a world of political ambiguity. He set down clearly defined lines of demarcation between the ANC and other organizations. He spurned appeals to ethnicity; he promoted African national unity over class identities; and he rejected Africans merging their cause with other "non-European" groups and sympathetic whites.

For instance, he dismissed the prospect of "Non-European unity" - combining African, Coloured and Indian political organizations into one movement - as "a fantastic dream" because

they were split along the lines of national origin, religion and culture as well as by their relative positions in the pecking order of segregation. (43)

Lembede took a rigid and narrow view of Indians: they were merchants who fought 'only for their rights to trade and extract as much wealth as possible from Africa'. His analysis was a gross simplification of the Indian community's class composition, though he would have been on surer ground if he had been referring to the class backgrounds of Indian political leaders, who largely were professionals and came from better-off families.

Lembede's stance towards Coloureds was more flexible. He recognised that Coloureds were an arbitrarily defined group with many divergent attitudes and positions. Therefore, he welcomed into the African national movement Coloureds who 'identified themselves and assimilated into African society', but he excluded those who classified themselves as a separate nation or as Europeans and those who shared the racist attitudes of Europeans towards Africans.

Lembede also argued that, in the hierarchy of segregation, Indians and Coloureds benefitted from an 'inequality of oppression' that accorded them slight privileges closed off to Africans. If Indian and Coloured leaders were put in a position to advance their own political and economic interests, Africans could not realistically expect them to side with African causes.

One of the likely sources for Lembede's attitude was the events surrounding the passage of Hertzog's Representation of Natives Act (1936), which abolished the Cape African vote. Although Coloured and Indian leaders had joined Africans in founding the All African Convention in 1935 to protest the law, a perception developed among some Africans that the commitment of Coloured and Indian political leaders had significantly diminished once the threat to their own status had eased. (44)

Despite Lembede's reservations about Non-European unity, he recognised that there were grievances such as voting rights on which African, Coloured and Indian political movements could find common ground. In those cases, he urged political movements to confer with each other and arrive at joint strategies for addressing issues. Thus, after being brought onto the ANC executive in 1946, he supported moves towards closer cooperation between the ANC and the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses.

Another Lembede tenet was that since Africans were discriminated against because they were Africans, preserving their national unity overrode any class divisions within the African community. Therefore, the handful of Africans who had acquired wealth were not excluded from the national struggle because they had not been co-opted 'into the ranks of and society of white capitalists'.

A corollary was that African workers should align their struggles with the ANC rather than pursuing an elusive class

unity with workers from other racial or ethnic groups. African workers were oppressed not as workers, but as a race, by an alliance of white capitalists and a white Parliament which had legislated a labour aristocracy for Europeans (and Indians and Coloureds to a lesser degree) who profited from higher wages and access to better jobs. (45)

Lembede viewed the struggles of African workers as legitimate in their own right and a vital component of ANC activities. The "A.N.C. without a workers organisation (like the I.C.U. [Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union])," he conceded, "is a motionless cripple." He backed the efforts of African workers to join trade unions and fight for higher wages and improved working conditions. However, he believed the aspirations of both black trade unions and the ANC were best served by forging a joint strategy, with trade unions dealing with economic issues and the ANC concentrating on political matters. His reference in the above quote to the ICU is significant because of the lesson he drew from the destructive rivalry of the ANC and the ICU in the 1920s - that their competition had led to the ICU's dramatic collapse and the precipitous decline of the ANC until its revitalisation during the Second World War. (46)

Throughout his career, Lembede was consistently hostile to the Communist Party on religious and racial grounds. As a devout Christian, he rejected Communism's materialist ideas as alien to the African experience. He had studied some of the classic works of Marxism while writing his M.A. thesis and he took issue with the materialist argument that advances in modern science and knowledge were antithetical to religious beliefs. Moreover, he questioned the materialist contention that Christianity lulled Africans into political passivity. Instead, he pointed to Christian ministers who had been fixtures in the ANC's leadership since its inception and he maintained that Christianity could be a spur to political action. Anticipating the liberation theologians, he interpreted the Christian message - especially the symbolism of Christ's crucifixion - as a revolutionary creed capable of mobilising people to action. 'The essence of Christianity', he maintained, 'is Calvary; or the Cross - the ready willingness to offer and sacrifice one's life at the altar of one's own convictions, for the benefit of one's followers'. (47)

As an African nationalist, Lembede was alarmed by the growing prominence of Communists in the ANC and other organizations. Like the ANC, the Communist Party had resurrected itself in the late 1930's and had rapidly expanded its membership by aligning itself with popular struggles in the black community, especially in the urban areas, organising trade unions, launching a national anti-pass campaign, and actively involving itself in ANC affairs. By 1945 the ANC national executive had three communists on it; and Lembede had concluded that Communists were the Youth League's most serious rival for the activist wing of the ANC.

That same year, Lembede and the Youth League pressed the Transvaal ANC to adopt a resolution stating that members of the ANC national or provincial executives could not belong to other political organizations. (48) The resolution, directed specifically at Communists on the ANC executive, was aimed at forcing them to declare their allegiance to the ANC or the Communist Party. The resolution passed thirty-one to twenty-four. But when it was considered by the national body, it was rejected. Although Dr. Xuma and other senior ANC leaders were clearly not wild-eyed radicals, they viewed the ANC as an umbrella group composed of many different constituencies and they objected to an ideological litmus test for ANC membership. (49)

Lembede was wary of African communists, but he was particularly suspicious of the motives of white Communists assuming leadership roles in African organizations, especially trade unions, because he believed their presence undermined African leaders and fragmented African unity. In 1945, Lembede's Transvaal Youth League turned down an invitation to affiliate with the Progressive Youth Council (linked to the Communist Party). Writing to Ruth First, the Council's secretary, the Youth League declared that it could not subordinate itself to any other youth organization, especially when there was 'a yawning gulf between your policy or philosophic outlook and ours'. (50)

Lembede was certainly an uncompromising foe of the Communist Party, but was he categorically opposed to all socialist ideas? In this area at least, his writings are open to debate as to where his thinking was headed. In one essay, he promoted a variant of African socialism, arguing that since pre-capitalist African societies held land communally, they were 'naturally socialistic as illustrated in their social practices and customs'. His ideas were in line with other advocates of African socialism who stressed the classless harmony and unity of African societies before Europeans came on the scene. There are only a few hints in his writings of a critical assessment of capitalism and its implications for African societies. However, in one essay, he noted that since African socialism was a 'legacy' to be tapped, 'our task is to develop this socialism by the infusion of new and modern socialistic ideas'. He did not define just what these ideas were, but he was very clear that national liberation had to precede any implementation of socialist ideas, however they were defined. (51)

LEMBEDE'S DEATH

By 1947, having completed his education and having settled into his law practise, Lembede was poised to further his professional and political ambitions. And, after many years of personal privation, he was finally in a position to look after his family's welfare. He began sending money to his widowed mother; he paid lobola for his brother Alpheus; and he promised his sister Cathrene and her husband, Alpheus Makhanya, that he would bring one of their children to Johannesburg and pay for his

education.

He was also re-establishing his roots in Umbumbulu. He built a four room house for himself at the Lembede homestead. He bought a Buick and instructed his family to begin building a road to his new home. (52) His last letter home read:

> Mame,
> Sengithenge imoto enowayilensi. Ngiyofika ngayo lapho ekhaya. Makumbiwe umgwaqo uze ungene ekhaya. Ngizothumela u L20 wokumba umgwaqo.
> [Mother,
> I have now bought a car with a wireless [radio]. I will be driving next time I come home. You must dig the road until it reaches home. I will be sending L20 for this purpose.] (53)

And he was finalising arrangements for marriage to 24-year old Cherry Mndaweni, a nurse training at McCord Hospital in Durban. The two had met on a bus going from Ladysmith to Doornfontein, where Lembede was handling a legal case. According to her, it was love at first sight, and when he returned to Johannesburg, he started writing letters. What made Lembede so appealing to her was his spiritual nature and his concern with family issues. Her membership in the Methodist church made no difference to him. After finishing her training at McCord, she moved to Germiston to be closer to him. He had commissioned several friends to visit her family to negotiate lobola (bride-wealth).

However, he postponed his own planned visit in order to serve as master of ceremonies at a reception on Sunday 26 July celebrating the awarding of a B.A. degree to his treasured friend, A.P. Mda. (54) Mda had decided to follow Lembede's footsteps and pursue a law career; he left the next day to return to his temporary teaching post at Pius XII College in Roma, Basutoland.

On the morning of 27 July, Lembede fell ill at his law office. Both Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu have claimed that they were passing by his law office and noticed Lembede doubled over in pain on his couch. (55) They and Lembede's clerk called on Dr. S. Molema for assistance, and Lembede was taken to Coronation Hospital where he died on Wednesday, 29 July 1947, at 5:30 a.m. The cause of death was listed as 'cardiac failure' with 'intestinal obstruction' a contributing factor. Lembede's abdominal complications were longstanding. He had nearly died from an operation in 1940 for abdominal problems and he had had a similar operation in 1941. (56)

Lembede's last words, taken down by his attending nurse Rabate, were characteristically directed to his family:

> All the money must be given to Nicholas, and he should use this money for going to school with. He should look well after my mother because I am taking the same path which my

> forefathers took. And the clothing should be given to my brother...and he should try and do all the good in order to lead the African nation. God bless you all. (57)

Lembede was laid to rest at Croesus cemetery on 3 August. (58) His pallbearers and speakers represented a broad spectrum of black political and educational leaders: Pixley ka Seme, Elias Moretsele, Oliver Tambo, Templeton Ntwasa, Hamilton Makhanya, Yusuf Dadoo, A.P. Mda, Obed Mooki, Sofasonke Mpanza, Jordan Ngubane, A.B. Xuma, William Nkomo, Paul Mosaka and B.W. Vilakazi. Lembede may have been an intense competitor in politics, but he rarely allowed that to stand in the way of developing strong friendships with his political rivals.

Following Lembede's death, Mda took over as acting president of the Youth League until he was formally elected president in early 1948. Although he and Lembede are often paired as the Romulus and Remus of African nationalism, they did have differing visions of nationalism. Mda's views were not as 'angular' as Lembede's; he was uncomfortable with some of Lembede's extreme stances. Although he agreed with Lembede that there was a major gulf between Africans, Coloureds and Indians that could not be bridged in the short run, he had long argued that African nationalism 'must not be the narrow kind, the unkind kind that discriminated against other racial groups'. He desired 'a broad nationalism, imbued with the spirit of Christ's philosophy of life and recognising the universal brotherhood of men'. (59)

In drafting the Youth League's Basic Policy, adopted in 1948, Mda took the occasion to incorporate these views as well as distance the Youth League from some of Lembede's radical positions. Mda inserted a section, 'Two Streams of African Nationalism', in which he rejected the one variant of African nationalism identified with

> Marcus Garvey's slogan - 'Africa for the Africans'. It is based on the 'Quit Africa' slogan and on the cry 'Hurl the Whiteman to the sea'. This brand of African Nationalism is extreme and ultra revolutionary. (60)

Because Lembede often referred to Garvey in his speeches, this was a subtle way for Mda to signal a departure from some of Lembede's positions.

Mda also moved to strengthen the organizational network of the Youth League by travelling to all the provinces to shore up existing chapters, start new ones, and cultivate established ANC leaders. By then Mda was operating from his birthplace, Herschel district, where he was teaching, so he developed his most extensive network in the eastern Cape. The Youth League's most energetic chapter was at Fort Hare, where there was already a group of students and staff receptive to the message of African nationalism.

In addition, Mda was a key figure in lobbying the ANC to adopt a militant Programme of Action. The impetus for the

Programme came in the aftermath of the Nationalist Party's election victory in May 1948. At its December conference later that year, the ANC passed a resolution supporting the drafting of a programme of action to combat the new government and its avowed apartheid policies. Over the next year, Mda and other Youth Leaguers worked with senior ANC leaders to fashion a statement that committed the ANC to combat apartheid with a range of weapons: boycotts, strikes, work stoppages, civil disobedience and non-cooperation. The ANC approved the Programme of Action at a tumultuous conference in December 1949.

At the same time as Mda was putting the Youth League on a different footing, he also tried to memorialise Lembede's ideas so that the nationalist position would continue to be promoted within the ANC and win new converts. Mda lectured on Lembede from time to time, but formal Lembede commemorations did not get off the ground until the mid-1950s. (61) Promoting Lembede's views became critical after 1949 as the ANC (and Youth Leaguers) began to split into two camps - those who retained their commitment to a 'pure' African nationalism and those who were prepared to forge alliances with political organizations representing other racial groups and the Communist Party. The former, clustered in a group named the "Africanists," were the nucleus of the faction that eventually broke away from the ANC to form the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1959. The Africanists also held Lembede memorials and used their journal, The Africanist, to reprint some of his essays as well as tributes to him and his ideas.

CONCLUSION

'No man outside the lunatic asylum can shamelessly maintain that present leaders are immortal. They must, when the hour strikes, inexorably bow down to fate and pass away, for: 'There is no armour against fate, Death lays his icy hand on Kings''. When Lembede penned these words in early 1947, he was not anticipating his own death seven months later, but the inevitable transfer of leadership from one generation to another. However, the fact that his life was cut short before he realised his full potential inevitably influences the way in which people view his contribution to South African political life.

A parallel that people often turn to is the Old Testament story of the Israelite search for the promised land. At a Lembede memorial held in mid-1955, a prominent African Methodist Episcopal minister, Nimrod Tantsi, compared Lembede to Moses who 'led the Israelites out of Egypt and died before reaching Canaan', and he appealed for new Joshuas to step forward to lead Africans to their freedom. (62) In 1992, when we asked A.P. Mda to reflect on Lembede's contributions, he used the analogy of Moses not only to describe Lembede, but also to reinforce a point that Lembede repeatedly stressed about the importance of African leadership in the freedom struggle.

> A leader of the African people must come from the Africans themselves. A true leader who's going to lead them to

> their freedom....Moses belonged to the Jewish people, the Israelites....He gave them the direction. They followed that path which he gave them. In this situation the road to salvation is this one. Let's be together, gather our forces, and then march forward and cross the Red Sea. There can be no freedom unless we cross the Red Sea. We can cross the Red Sea only if we, the Israelite leaders, lead you because we are part and parcel of you - we see the way as you see it. And we've got a clear vision of where we can go....Moses is part of you. He is yourselves. And he can lead you through the dangers of the Red Sea and the desert and march in unity...until we end up in the promised land.

Lembede may not have lived to see freedom in his lifetime, but he packed a full life into the roughly four years he was active on the political scene. At his death he was emerging as a major figure in the ANC, and one wonders what his impact on the course of African politics would have been if he had lived longer. Would the Youth League have put his name forward as their candidate to succeed Dr. Xuma as ANC president in 1949? If he had become ANC president, would he have moderated his strong views on African nationalism or would he have kept African nationalist ideas in the forefront in the ANC? Could he have defused the dissension in the ANC and staved off the breakaway of the PAC in the late 1950s?

Lembede was an incandescent figure whose diverse talents and educational and professional accomplishments marked him for distinction. A self-made man, he overcame his humble origins and devoted his meagre resources and his considerable energy to complete three university degrees. A gifted linguist, he communicated with ease in seven languages. A lawyer, he was the first of his contemporaries to qualify to practice. A committed Christian, he sought to translate his beliefs into political action. A political philosopher, he crafted an ideology of liberation centered around the corner stones of African unity and a spiritual Pan-Africanism. To his age-mates he was a standard-bearer for their aspirations. And his passing was deeply mourned by his friends and opponents alike. After his death, some African school teachers went so far as to hang his picture in their classrooms as an example to their pupils.

Lembede's achievements as a politician were more modest. Unseasoned politically when he moved to Johannesburg in 1943, he came under the tutelage of more experienced young politicians and he rapidly rose to leadership positions in the Youth League and the parent ANC. Impatient, zealous and uncompromising, he was a ferocious combatant who led the Youth League charge to shake up an ANC reluctant to adopt militant tactics. These qualities were both an asset and a liability when it came to practical politics. On the one hand, he was prepared to take up causes, however formidable the odds, and he was not daunted by the prospect of taking on the power elites of both the white government and the ANC. On the other hand, his brashness and intolerance of other people's views could lead him into blind

alleys such as his flirtation with fascism. Moreover, his attempts to pressure ANC leaders to boycott government bodies such as the NRC and expel Communists from the ANC executive were easily blocked by the ANC's Old Guard.

Lembede's temperament was more suited to the barricades than the backroom. His forte was as a polemicist, not as a tactician. Thus it is his ideas which are his primary legacy. His advocacy of an exclusive African nationalism, that Africans had to emancipate themselves psychologically and rely on their own leadership in order to challenge white domination, and that national liberation took primacy over class struggle provoked heated debate, even within Youth League circles. But his ideas struck a popular chord with many; and they fuelled debates on race, class and national identity that reverberate to this day.

ENDNOTES

1. The first serious scholarly assessment of Lembede is Gail Gerhart's Black Power in South Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). See also A.J.G.M. Saunders, "Anton Muziwakhe Lembede - Pioneer of African Nationalism," Codicillus, XXVII, 2 (1986): 11-17.

2. Martin and Martha Lembede were married in 1912. Besides Muziwakhe, the Lembedes had four sons, Nicholas, Alpheus, Elias, and Victor and two daughters, Cathrene and Evelyn. This information on the Lembedes is largely drawn from a family history collected by Sister M. Edista Lembede, a daughter of Nicholas Lembede. We thank the Lembede family for sharing this history with us. We have also been helped by interviews with Phillipine Lembede, wife of Nicholas Lembede; Emeline, wife of Alpheus Lembede; Alpheus Makhanya, husband of Cathrene Lembede; and Anna Lembede, wife of Anton's father's brother, Michael, Umbumbulu, 1 August 1992.

3. Letters from Sister Bernadette Sibeko to Robert Edgar; Interview with Sister Sibeko, Assisi Convent, Port Shepstone, August 1992.

4. We do not want to paint a one-dimensional portrait of a Lembede obsessed by his studies and work. His family and colleagues in the Youth League remember him as having a lively sense of humour.

5. For a description of life at Adams, see Tim Couzens, The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), 47-54. See also Edgar Brookes, A South African Pilgrimage (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1977), esp. chapters 4 and 5.

6. Jordan Ngubane, unpublished autobiography (Carter-Karis Collection).

7. Interview, Ellen Kuzwayo, August 1991.

8. Interview, Edna Bam, November 1984; Edwin Smith, Aggrey of Africa: A Study in Black and White (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1929), 169-70.

9. Anton Lembede, "Language Study and the Bantu Student," Iso Lomuzi, IV, 2 (1935). Published annually from 1931 to 1956, Iso Lomuzi (Eye of the Villager) chronicled life at Adams College and especially featured student essays, poems and dramas.

10. Lembede, "The Importance of Agriculture," Iso Lomuzi, IV, 1 (1934); "What Do We Understand by Economics," Iso Lomuzi, IV, 1 (1934).

11. Brookes, A South African Pilgrimage, 65.

12. Bantu World, 17 November 1945.

13. Interview, Ellen Kuzwayo, August 1991.

14. According to Joe Matthews, Lembede planned to write a doctoral dissertation on the "Jurisprudential Basis of African Law," but we have no corroborative evidence for this.

15. Ilanga lase Natal, 29 September 1945.

16. Interview, B.M. Khaketla, Maseru, 14 May 1985.

17. Interview, Victor Khomari, Mafeteng, 1985.

18. Seme certainly understood that his status as a lawyer meant that Africans expected him to carry himself in a dignified manner. A contemporary of Lembede expressed his disapproval of another African lawyer of that era by relating how the lawyer would eat "fish and chips" and sit on the streetcurbs with "ordinary" folk.

19. Native Affairs Commissioner, Johannesburg (KJB), Box 166, File 476/47, Central Archives, Pretoria. Lembede served his articles with Seme from January 1944 to January 1946 and qualified to practice as an attorney in February 1946. He qualified as a conveyancer in December 1946 after passing an exam. His qualification documents and conveyancer exam are found in the Transvaal Archives, Pretoria, in the files of the Transvaal Provincial Division (TPD) 137/1946, 506/1946, and 90/1947.

20. Interview, Ike Matlhare.

21. Jordan Ngubane, unpublished autobiography (Carter-Karis Collection).

22. Gerhart, Black Power, 54.

23. Interview, A.P. Mda, July 1992. Even after A.P. married in early 1947, his wife Rose remembered many an occasion where Lembede dropped by their home for marathon discussions with A.P.

that lasted through the night. Rose would retire and wake up the following morning to find A.P. and Lembede, still fully clothed, asleep on a bed. (Interview, Rose Mda, January 1995.)

24. Gerhart, Black Power, 53.

25. Bantu World, 8 January 1944.

26. Bantu World, 22 April 1944.

27. Jordan Ngubane, unpublished autobiography (Carter-Karis Collection).

28. Gwendolen Carter, interview with Congress Mbata, 19 February 1964, Carter-Karis Collection.

29. Minutes of ANC National Executive Meeting, February 1947, quoted in Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter, From Protest to Challenge, Vol. II, 266-72. Following Lembede's death, Youth Leaguers continued to press for a total boycott of the NRC. At the 1947 ANC conference Oliver Tambo's boycott resolution failed by 57 votes to 7. Eventually the government abolished the NRC in 1951 as it began constructing its apartheid structures.

30. Inkululeko, 9 September 1944.

31. Interview, Joe Matthews, August 1992.

32. "Africanism," T.A.S.A. Bulletin, I, 2 (July 1944); Lembede, "National Unity Among Africans," Ilanga lase Natal, 6 October 1945; Lembede, "Policy of the Congress Youth League," Inkundla ya Bantu, May 1946; Lembede, "National Units," Ilanga lase Natal, 18 May 1946.

33. Lembede, "Some Basic Principles of African Nationalism," Ilanga lase Natal, 24 February 1945.

34. Lembede, "The Conception of God as Expounded by, or as it Emerges from the Writings of Philosophers from Descartes to the Present Day (M.A. Thesis, University of South Africa, 1945), 40.

35. Diederichs, quoted in Dunbar Moodie, The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 159.

36. Mary Benson Papers, University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

37. Lembede, "African Nationalism and the New African Masses," Ilanga lase Natal, 21 June 1947; "Africanism," T.A.S.A.Bulletin, I, 2 (July 1944); "Know Thyself," Bantu World, 30 June 1945.

38. For an exposition of Blyden's ideas see Hollis Lynch, Edward Wilmot Blyden Pan-Negro Patriot 1832-1912 (London: Oxford University Press, 1967). On the impact of Garvey's ideas on Africans see Robert Hill's introduction to a new edition of

Philosophy and Opinions (New York: Atheneum, 1992), first published in 1923.

39. Lembede, "Policy of the Congress Youth League," Inkundla ya Bantu, May 1946.

40. Inkululeko, 23 September 1944. Lembede went on to add that that rejecting white leadership of African organizations was not the same as repudiating all forms of white assistance.

41. "Last Message of Late Mr. A.M. Lembede, M.A., LL.B.," African Advocate, August/September 1947.

42. Lembede, "Book Review of B. Wallet Vilakazi's Nje-Nempela," Teachers' Quarterly Review, I, 2 (1946), p. 81.

43. Lembede, "Fallacy of Non-European Unity Movement," Bantu World, 11 August 1945.

44. This argument appears in an article by Mda (using the pseudonym "umAfrika"). See "Anton Lembede - III," The Africanist (July/August 1955): 2-4.

45. Lembede, "African Trade Unions."

46. Lembede, "The I.C.U. and the A.N.C.," Ilanga lase Natal, 26 October 1946.

47. Lembede, "The Conception of God"; "African National Congress and Churches," Umteteli wa Bantu, 29 July 1945; "African Nationalism and the Christian Church," Ilanga lase Natal, 22 September 1945.

48. The full text of the resolution is contained in Inkululeko, 29 October 1945.

49. After Lembede's death, Youth Leaguers unsuccessfully pressed the Transvaal ANC to pass a resolution prohibiting ANC officials from belonging to other political organizations. The resolution narrowly failed thirty-two to thirty (Peter Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism, p. 357).

50. "Letter from the ANC Youth League (Transvaal) to the Secretary of the Progressive Youth Council, 16 March 1945," in Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter, From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964, vol. 2, (Hoover Institution Press, 1973), p. 316.) The Youth League letter writer is not identified, but the tone and style are unmistakably Lembede's.

51. Lembede, "Some Basic Principles of African Nationalism," Ilanga lase Natal, 24 February 1945; "Policy of the Congress Youth League," Inkundla ya Bantu, May 1946.

52. After Anton's death, the Buick conveyed Nicholas and his mother back to Umbumbulu and then was returned to Johannesburg

and sold.

53. Lembede family history collected by Sister Edista Lembede.

54. Interview, Lembede family, Umbumbulu, August 1992; Cherry Mndaweni, Ladysmith, January 1995. When Lembede died, Mndaweni was brought to the Lembede homestead for a month of mourning during which a goat was slaughtered.

55. Interview, Walter Sisulu, August 1992. Nelson Mandela and Lembede had served as best men at Walter's wedding. Walter remembered Lembede speaking at the wedding reception and telling his bride Albertina: "You have married a married man - he is married to the nation." (Interview, Walter Sisulu, Narch 1995.)

56. Several other explanations were offered for Lembede's sudden death. He had been romantically linked to several women, and one rumor that circulated immediately after his death was that he was poisoned by a jilted girl friend. Another explanation was raised in a column by "SPQR"in Inkundla ya Bantu (5 November 1947) following the death of Dr. B.W. Vilakazi. The writer plaintively asked, "Why do we die so young?" and suggested the deaths of Lembede and Vilakazi may have been due to stress. They had pursued their studies and work so single-mindedly that they did not look after their physical well-being. "Anton Lembede used to boast that he never had set his foot in a tennis court. And those who knew him well will aver that no man cared so little about his food." (We thank Gail Gerhart for referring this article to us.)

57. Lembede family history collected by Sister Edista Lembede.

58. Lembede's grave site at Croesus cemetery is number 12226.

59. Imvo Zabantsundu, 3 August 1940.

60. Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, II, 328.

61. See Mda's address at the 1955 Lembede Memorial Service in The Africanist (July/August 1955), 10.

62. Bantu World, 6 August 1955.