

'Let Down Your Bucket Where You Are': A Critique of the Curriculum at the University College of Fort Hare in its Pioneer Years

David Burchell

The originator of the scheme for an African university college, E.B. Sargant, educational adviser to Lord Milner, envisaged the South African Native College, as the University of Fort Hare was originally called, above all else as a central training school for African teachers (Houghton 3 January 1904). He was intent on Fort Hare providing a rather narrowly utilitarian education which would include industrial training as a compulsory component. His overall aim was to create a moderate African elite who would act as the junior partners of colonialism and who would largely fill subordinate positions in a class and race stratified society.

The envisaged curriculum at the College stressed the need for practicality and adaptation to African circumstances. One of the founders, Kenneth Hobart Houghton of Lovedale, openly proclaimed that at Fort Hare the intention was to carry on similar work to that done by Dr. Booker Washington at the African American College of Tuskegee. The only difference was that the new college hoped to provide opportunities for any African student wishing for and capable of profiting from a genuine university education (Houghton 9 November 1910).

The founders, who were mainly connected with the famous Scottish missionary institution of Lovedale, considered themselves realists who had to take into account the tremendous differences between the average European and African student in language, in inherited beliefs, prejudices and instincts, in environment and early upbringing, as well as the position Africans would occupy in society after college. The primary task of the new institution was the restricted one of producing African men, rather than women, of character 'trained to do useful work for their own people and themselves' (*Statement on the South African Native College* 1910). Africans were portrayed at this juncture as being in a transitional stage, caught between barbarism and civilisation, and desperately requiring leaders of their own

race who should be 'morally and mentally as well equipped as possible' (Houghton 12 October 1910). Such sentiments could have been borrowed directly from Booker Washington's educational ideals for African Americans in the U.S.A. They reflect the essentially conservative and evolutionary philosophy of education as well as the sexist bias of the founding fathers; but these men were, for their time, progressive educationalists holding views far in advance of the contemporary European stereotype of Africans. For example, the men who served on the South African Native Commission of 1903-1905 still considered that the main aim of Black education was simply to train Blacks to be useful in the economic expansion of the country. These men rejected missionary education as having made Blacks more aggressive and less docile and as having contributed to the shortage of African labour.

The influence of Booker Washington was clearly evident when Hobart Houghton described the main work of the new college as the training of higher grade teachers not only equipped in the normal professional subjects 'but also in industrial or agricultural work' (Houghton 9 November 1910). This adaptationist ideology was evident in the original intention of the founders to make full use of the land that the Scottish church had granted at Fort Hare for the purposes of an agricultural school where, it was hoped, 'the sons of chiefs and native landowners may get a thorough training in elementary agricultural science' (Houghton 9 November 1910). Booker Washington's aim at Tuskegee was also to train a large proportion of his Black students as teachers so that they could return to the rural areas and show 'the people there how to put new energy and new ideas into farming, as well as into the intellectual and moral and religious life of the people' (Washington 1967:83). As with African Americans, the underlying assumption behind the college's educational objectives was clearly that Africans were agricultural people. Confronted by an expanding population and diminishing land resources, they urgently required more modern but largely rudimentary instruction in farming otherwise they would, it was feared, become an impoverished race (Houghton 12 October 1910).

The founders were acutely aware that a new and 'highly developed' civilisation had impacted upon rural African society with tremendous force and rapidity. Yet Houghton remained confident that Africans had 'sufficient strength to assimilate' the new civilisation in the dangerous period of transition when the two races, Black and White, were being drawn 'nearer to one another before a mutual sympathy and understanding are sufficiently assured' (Houghton 12 October 1910). In such a crucial situation Fort Hare's vital role was to train as leaders African men of wide sympathies, who understood 'European modes of thought' and clearly recognised 'that the interests of either race are inextricably bound up with those of the other' (Houghton 12 October 1910). In this regard he was optimistic that the college would play a unique role in shaping the destiny of the country. Booker

Washington's Tuskegee was pictured as having pointed to the 'solution of the Negro problem there,' and it remained for Fort Hare to perform the same function in Southern Africa even though, he conceded, the problem was 'different and more complicated' (Houghton 1905). Thus at its founding, the movement for a state-controlled African college was explicitly linked to the wider welfare of South Africa and the solution of the racial issue.

As regards the curriculum, the founders were not simply narrowly present minded but envisaged a higher education for Africans which would also assist them in meeting future needs. Moreover, although some differentiation and adaptation was advocated in the early stages, the promoters were convinced that the ultimate standard and aim of African education would be the same as that for Europeans. It was fervently believed that in a multi-racial country 'there cannot with any safety exist two ideals of civilization' (Houghton 1905) as sooner or later they would be bound to clash. As Houghton pointed out, the educational journeys of Black and White must converge in the end and could never remain parallel.

The strong influence of Tuskegee was also evident in the beliefs of the founders that really educated men, if they were to be equipped for their duties as leaders of people regarded as 'a race emerging from barbarism' and if they were to achieve the highest level of usefulness for their people, must be given a carefully planned and progressive course of manual instruction in conjunction with their more literary and academic studies. Reflecting the sentiments of Booker Washington, Houghton spoke of the necessity of training for the hand and eye. The effect of such instruction would, he was adamant, create and strengthen moral character. The promoters were therefore of the opinion that there were certain avenues of study which were of far greater importance in the education of Africans than in that of Europeans. In line with the Tuskegee philosophy of education, the infant college would set out to produce an educated elite who could turn their education to practical use in the daunting task of uplifting their own people. As James Henderson, Lovedale's principal between 1906 and 1930, succinctly stated, they planned an African College of recognised university standing adapted to the special needs of Africans and providing for religious instruction in an interdenominational environment combined with a strong emphasis on industrial training. The college would, he pointed out, possess the right to close its doors to unsuitable applicants. Moreover, the college would enjoy the advantage of being situated in close proximity to Lovedale, a missionary institution which he proudly asserted had 'shaped the ideals of Native education and led in their realization for the last sixty years' (Henderson 14 October 1907).

What the promoters of the college envisaged by 'adapted' education was to provide for existing capacities under existing circumstances with, consequently, more

emphasis on African studies. They considered that this could be achieved if the institution was created along experimental lines. Houghton summed up the situation: While in most countries it is accepted as a guiding principle that education should be framed to meet the social and economic requirements of the people for whom it is intended, Native education in South Africa has not been so dealt with. The same course of instruction, the same system of examination, is devised for both black and white. No account is taken of the difference of language, of environment; of future position in the country. (Christian Express August 1906:174)

The college was launched at a time when a strong segregationist or differentiationist school of thought was maintaining that Africans had mental characteristics which put them apart from Europeans and that therefore the African should be given a totally different education. There was growing support for the theory that the African suffered from 'arrested development' which set in at puberty and was possibly caused by the premature closure of the suture of the skull. Therefore it was contended that at an early age Africans ceased to be educable.

The leading adaptationist at this time, Dr. Charles Loram, did not subscribe to the current theory of 'arrested development', but he warned against forcing the pace in African education. In his work on the education of Black South Africans he spoke of the African as the slower race and cautioned educationists about the dangers of African retrogression. He supported an adapted curriculum for African students, different from Europeans', and stated that in cases where the subjects were the same 'considerably less in the way of achievement must be expected from the slower race' (Loram 1917: 192).

Fortunately, the promoters of the college, with the possible exception of E.B. Sargent, had a more sanguine view of African capabilities. Henderson dismissed distinctions in the performance of Black and White as the result of differences 'in experience, in training and in environment' (Christian Express August 1908:124). He was an optimist and fervently believed that Africans were as capable as Whites provided they were not encumbered with learning through a foreign language. His more progressive educational philosophy required only some adaptation and modification in order to make the educational process more relevant to Africans. He advocated a broadly 'liberal' curriculum for Africans with more emphasis on African languages and cultural values and a syllabus more closely geared to their future in a White-dominated society.

There were significant reasons why the new college had to proceed in small steps and not attract too much attention through spectacular and grandiose visions and demands. The African intellectual was really on trial as the climate of European opinion was not propitious, doubtful as it was about the ability of Africans to undertake any more than elementary studies. Moreover, the government itself was slow in appreciating the social need of the majority of the inhabitants of the country

for an education beyond the mere rudiments. There was in the mind of the European public, Fort Hare's pioneer Principal Dr. Kerr remarked, 'only a limited sense of the duty of the more advanced group in the state to foster the development of the underprivileged' (Kerr September 1961). Apart from the educated elite, Africans as a whole did not at this juncture fully understand the changes in their environment which made customary ideas about the training of the young hopelessly out of date.

As was the case with Booker Washington's Tuskegee College, Fort Hare's founding took place amidst scepticism, pessimism and antagonism. A promising feature, though, was the financial support forthcoming from both the Union government and the British administration of Basutoland, though this was small in comparison to that provided to European tertiary institutions.

The first entrance qualifications for African students were of necessity extremely low. Apart from the matriculated and senior leaving certificate students of the University of the Cape of Good Hope, Fort Hare was also prepared to accept junior school leaving certificates for a period of 5 years, as well as the T3 junior certificate of the Cape education department or a similar certificate (Fort Hare n.d.). Only a few of the first students produced certificates demonstrating two years of secondary instruction. These students were placed in classes preparing for university entrance, while the others set about catching up on the deficiencies in their post primary education or were enrolled for college diplomas in business procedure and agriculture.

In line with the famous motto of Tuskegee, it was very much a case of 'let down your bucket where you are'. As Lennox pointed out, there was an urgent necessity to synchronise the stage of university development with the stage reached by the secondary education system. Moreover, missionary educators had insisted that 'a condition of their approval of the scheme would be that work that could be done at their schools should not be undertaken at the College' (Lennox 7 May 1915).

Fort Hare also had to overcome a fairly prevalent belief that it was a college simply for Cape Africans. Certainly it started out as primarily an eastern Cape college with a strong bias towards the missionary institutions in the region. Of its students in 1919, 18 came from neighbouring Lovedale, 9 from Healdtown, a Methodist institution a short distance away, and 2 from Emgwali institution. Only 2 came from Morija in Lesotho as well as 8 from elsewhere, some of whom may also have been educated in the eastern Cape. Ethnic affiliation also reflected the predominance of the region with 21 students considered 'Fingo', 6 'Coloured', 2 Xhosa, 5 Sotho and only 2 considered Zulu, 2 from Bechuanaland and 1 Indian (Christian Express March 1919:41). So strong was the eastern Cape bias that Africans from Natal actually had to be reassured by government officials that the college did not debar Africans from elsewhere and that, in fact, its facilities were open to all Africans (Secretary of Native Affairs 21 June 1922).

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James Henderson, speaking in 1925 at the second graduation ceremony of Fort Hare, said that it continued to develop on a truly African basis, 'wisely adapting its discipline, its methods, its courses to Native circumstances, in level-headed recognition of the social, racial and industrial facts, disagreeable though many of them are, that at present govern our common life' (The South African Outlook June 1925:129). So there was obvious recognition from the outset of the harsh racial stratification in South Africa. The young college was compelled to accept these racial realities if it wished to survive in a difficult and hostile environment.

The education system in any society can perform either a conservative or a progressive function. It can act as the custodian of societal values with the main aim of transmitting traditional values and function therefore as a means through which the political goals and objectives of the ruling class are induced and the educated are domesticated and socialized into acceptance of the dominant norms, or 'it can have the effect of challenging and questioning generally accepted values and lead to contemplation of alternatives and the means to achieve them' (Adam 1971:197). Despite the severe constraints of the time, Fort Hare in its first decades did attempt to create the impetus for reform in a fairly creative, albeit conservative way. The isolation of the college, coupled with the lack of committed involvement from capitalism and, to a large extent, government, actually enabled it to pursue its own line of development.

One of the main educational innovators who influenced Fort Hare's progress at the outset was C.T. Loram who, as already mentioned, was a leading figure in the 'adaptationist' school and a rather inconsistent liberal. In 1917 he remarked that there was 'nothing to prevent the South African Native College from offering courses in higher education other than those examined by the university' (Loram 1917: 305). In fact, he argued that in view of what he termed the agreed unsuitability of the university courses for African students, it should be the aim of the college to avoid the university courses as far as possible until the university system itself embarked on adaptation. He was, however, aware that it was unrealistic to abandon external university control altogether as 'the glamour of the university's certificate had dazzled the African'. His philosophy of education also contained an element of elitism as he remarked that it was important not to follow up the current educational trend and neglect the gifted student in favour of children of average attainments. He was quite convinced that the progress of the African people was largely due to the efforts of their leaders. In fact, he hoped that the talented few would transfer 'the results of European civilisation' to the African masses and help to produce a rapid upliftment of the people (Loram 1917:306).

Loram's concept of African education contained certain progressive elements and his vision was not a static one, as he believed the curriculum should be transformed with the advance and acculturation of Africans. But implicit in his rather

conservative aims was the belief that the education of Africans was not an end in itself but a means to maintain a segregated society. Moreover, his assumptions were affected by his belief that Africans were, and would remain, an almost entirely rural people, despite the fact that, through the destructive impact with Europeans, they had lost the chance for autonomous development. As he perceived matters, because Whites would not willingly abdicate their position of supremacy, Africans were compelled to accept a subordinate role and status (Shingler 1973: 195-7).

Loram was deeply committed to the philosophy of Jesse Jones and the American school regarding adaptation, 'education for life' and the relevance of Black American education for African schooling. His major contribution to Fort Hare's progress was that he helped to focus the attention of the pioneer college upon the realities of the African situation and to relate his efforts to the needs of the people it aimed to serve. Furthermore, his membership of the Native Affairs Commission gave him access to government and other bodies of authority and influence. Consequently 'he was often in a position to present the viewpoint of the College Council in such a way as to gain its acceptance' (Governing Council Minutes 4 November 1931).

Loram backed any attempts to reform African tertiary education at Fort Hare as he cherished grandiose visions of the college becoming a great Pan-African university destined to influence profoundly the future of the entire continent. He saw an urgent need to transform the pioneer institution into the central focus of African higher education. To achieve this, he wanted to force and mould African higher education into a single pattern of adapted education. This was why he supported Fort Hare's efforts to institute a special college matriculation examination as a purely internal examination designed to meet the special needs of future ministers of religion, headmen and chiefs. This course recognised both the limits of the formal education of many of Fort Hare's older students as well as their more mature outlook on life. However the course, which he praised as setting the scene for further adaptation, was actually one which functioned as a substitute in embryo for a liberal arts course as it included subjects such as elementary logic, ethics, psychology and economics. Loram's agitation for an adapted college junior certificate to provide 'focus and objective to the work of African secondary schools' (Loram 7 August 1921) failed to achieve the support of the Fort Hare authorities.

In the 1930s Fort Hare's curriculum and methods were scrutinised in a fairly revolutionary way by Loram and another adaptationist convert, Mary Dick, who was a lecturer at the college. Loram had gained a reputation as a so-called 'native expert' and he was now at Yale University. Dick was considerably influenced by his ideas while completing her bachelor of education thesis on the effect of higher education on race adjustment and race relations in South Africa, with particular reference to the prevailing dilemmas facing the African elite of the college regarding their curriculum and careers.

Mary Dick, like many of the adaptationist converts of that time, considered that the Black American institutions of Hampton, Tuskegee and Penn were of immense interest and importance to educators in South Africa who were dealing with 'the agricultural education of a rural population whether Black or White' (Dick 1934:54). She was of the opinion that Tuskegee and Hampton had the right point of departure as both had focused initially on agricultural and industrial training and only later taken up literary education. But these American colleges had developed in an evolutionary way and she pointed to the need for Fort Hare to offer a bachelor of science degree as Tuskegee was then doing. She also argued for Fort Hare to establish more significant outreach through travelling demonstrators who would venture into the rural areas to provide instruction in what she termed 'practical arts' (Dick 1934:56).

Her overarching critique of the college was that the governing body and the Union government did not have 'any very clear idea of where they are taking the Bantu people' (Dick 1934:38). Instead, Fort Hare was described as being willing to play safe in a quiet backwater of time rather than burning with the fire of a pioneer enterprise. She was convinced the curriculum was not well related to the problem of a nation which she characterised as emerging from dark centuries, 'a bewildered people struggling into all the confusions of our modern life of thought and action'. She castigated the Fort Hare staff for producing the right type of student but with the wrong type of tools to survive in the modern world and, moreover, of failing to give them a clear-cut idea of what it was trying to do for them 'beyond the somewhat vague offer of providing a liberal education of university standing' (Dick 1934:38-39).

Mary Dick's views reflect in the main Loram's critique of Fort Hare. He, too, had on many occasions admonished Kerr for not doing more to adapt education to the current requirements of Africans. Furthermore, by the 1930s he was keen that Fort Hare should also become a fully-fledged autonomous university, as this would hasten the chances of full-scale reform. Though he recognised advantages in the connection with the University of South Africa, he was convinced that the pioneer college was hampered by the examination requirements of external examiners who were, he felt, not as competent as Fort Hare was 'to say which of your people should be given degrees' (Loram 16 March 1934). He considered that Fort Hare should grant its own degrees but still continue to make use of UNISA for exams in such subjects as mathematics and Latin, where the need for adaptation to the needs of the students was not so pressing.

Loram was convinced that there were pitfalls in terms of Fort Hare's stress on examination passes and degrees as an index of achievement. He spoke of the dangers of making Africans 'degree hunters' when the real test of the training given was in the work that the students would pursue after graduation. This concept was

taken further by Mary Dick who spoke of examinations as 'a waste' and to 'no purpose' as well as a 'fetish'. She felt strongly that examinations treat students 'like herds of cattle and don't let them do any individual work', though she conceded that Fort Hare's students would struggle to motivate themselves in a freer environment as they relied at present too heavily on their lecturers as their 'guiding stars' (Dick 21 November 1933). Kerr, fortunately, did not accede to their demands as he believed that, though examinations had deficiencies, 'some kind of test must be maintained or both teachers and taught will sail along on halcyon seas, imagining that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds' (Kerr 1968: 62). In addition, when one considers that Fort Hare was still under fire from prejudiced Whites who supported theories of 'arrested development' or from those who simply viewed the college as a dangerous and futile experiment, there was a great urgency to demonstrate unequivocally that Africans could reach a competitive level in terms of examination successes.

In later years, Loram went further than mere curriculum adaptation and there were hints that he advocated more Africanisation of the staff of Fort Hare. Certainly in the mid 1930s he envisaged Adams College in Natal with an all-African staff and with Fort Hare's first graduate Professor Z.K. Matthews as its first African head. Loram's rationale behind such a vision was that South Africa needed to learn 'by actual demonstration' that an African could run a collegiate institution (Loram 20 June 1935). Matthews was originally sceptical of Loram's 'vague scheme' and doubted whether he was really sympathetic towards the work of Fort Hare (Matthews 29 January 1934). However, Matthews himself later embraced Africanisation with more positive intent than Loram when he spoke of his vision of the college with an all-Black staff dedicated to the cause of the development of African culture in all its forms and engaged in transforming Fort Hare into the repository of the best in African life (Matthews n.d.).

Kerr and Fort Hare were able to achieve certain modifications to their curriculum from the beginning. For example, an early deputation to the Joint Matriculation Board was able to extract an undertaking that the four main African languages spoken by the students would be retained in the matriculation syllabus (Kerr 1956). Later the college was largely instrumental in obtaining the recognition by UNISA of African languages as legitimate subjects for the B.A. degree. In this regard, once Fort Hare obtained representation on the senate of UNISA, it was able to direct attention to African needs and courses of study. Subjects such as African languages, social anthropology, comparative philology and African studies consequently received greater attention. By the 1940s, UNISA offered an M.A. course in African linguistics, African education and African administration. Fort Hare also received recognition as a centre for the training of teachers for the higher education diploma, a certificate for teachers at secondary schools (Matthews n.d.).

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The college was not at the outset represented on the committees of UNISA and so the interests of its students were not originally catered for. Fort Hare students were actually denied the advantage of their college record in the determination of their results. In addition, they were forced to accept arrangements that were of little relevance to them. For example, a course in Anglo-Saxon in the third year English syllabus became a totally unnecessary load and reduced the work to a dull grind. In condemning such an arrangement, D.J. Darlow, head of Fort Hare's English department in the pioneer phase, remarked that the whole aim of the course was 'to develop powers of appreciation and understanding rather than the amassing of knowledge for purposes of examination' (South African Native College Calendar 1927:27), but it was some time before any special concessions were granted to African students in languages.

However, the main thrust of the curriculum in the pioneer phase was towards a traditional 'liberal' orientation. Matthews described the curriculum which he encountered as parochial and not radically different from that of missionary and European high schools (Matthews 1981:71). Contentious subjects such as history were tackled from a Eurocentric perspective and in the 1920s the pro-White bias of the lecturer in South African history obviously disturbed the students, though in this subject as well as geography and botany data from the immediate environment was also included (Kerr 61).

There were a number of constraints on the degree of adaptation that could be attempted. One factor was obviously the subordinate and rather neocolonial relationship with UNISA. In its pioneer days the courses pursued by the students at Fort Hare were determined by lecturers engaged in primarily Euro-centred work with White university students. The external examination system was also far from satisfactory. Consequently, by the 1930s there were those who advocated that the institution should free itself from the yoke of external control in order to develop more fully African educational needs which, according to European stereotyping, were considered to be essentially rural and agricultural (Dick 1934:75).

But apart from the restrictions of its relationship with UNISA, the college authorities were hindered in their innovations by the deep distrust felt by Africans towards any courses especially adapted by Europeans for what they considered were the special circumstances of Africans. Furthermore, there were even prejudices in certain African quarters against African studies. This was evident in the mid-1930s when the Fort Hare department of African studies was founded with Matthews as its first head. At the outset Kerr hoped that the new department would attract both Black and White support, but he was aware of the need to 'strenuously justify its right to existence in the eyes of the African masses' (Kerr 25 July 1935). Matthews himself had no doubts that one of the positive benefits of African higher education was the preservation and development of African culture. He, too, was conscious of the fact

that certain less educated Africans viewed African culture as a myth that existed 'only in the mind of the European who wants to exploit the Bantu for his own benefit' (Matthews n.d.).

Kerr himself, despite his European background, looked forward in the 1930s to a time when Africans would actually demand 'research into Native custom and language, as well as the creation of indigenous prose, literature, poetry, drama, music and art' (Kerr 1935: 14-15). The college considered it of the highest importance that African students should be trained in the scientific observation and reasoned knowledge of their own languages, laws and customs and fervently believed that Fort Hare should be the centre of an African studies museum and library for registering and preserving the results of African research. Unfortunately, by the 1930s African studies was not strong enough at Fort Hare to claim the support of government to the same extent as departments at Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Witwatersrand universities. As Kerr openly admitted, the struggling college lacked the means to advance rapidly towards a more complete Africanisation of the curriculum. He conceded that the slender resources at the disposal of the college did not 'at present allow of any but voluntary and gratuitous service of these higher aims' (Kerr 1935:14-15). Though he believed that there should be no real divorce between students and their traditional culture in the educational process, Kerr was not convinced of the need to adapt the curriculum comprehensively at the tertiary level. He advocated new topics and extensive adaptation only at the primary school level where he felt it was unnecessary to drag African pupils through such history as accounts of the American and French revolutions and narratives of the Napoleonic wars (Kerr 7 July 1938).

The accent on the practical subject of agriculture was seriously hampered by the preconceptions and prejudices of rural students who, like their White counterparts, were seldom very keen on agricultural colleges. They felt that there was 'nothing new and romantic in life on a farm for them', and farm work, Kerr realised, was seen as 'the lot of the rustic' (Department of Agriculture at Fort Hare n.d.).

A further factor retarding curriculum reform was that the changeover to science, agriculture and sociology could not easily be embarked upon while the students who came to the college had been 'grinding away for the past four or five years on such subjects as algebra, latin and others for the matriculation' (Dick 1934:26). Therefore, if a real transformation was to be achieved in the 1930s, adaptationists such as Mary Dick were adamant that change had to originate not at the apex of the education structure, but at high school level. In reality, the period of limited adaptation in the matriculation and school leaving examinations came to an end because, as Kerr pointed out, Africans wished to compete on an equal footing with Whites and even if the curriculum was weighted against them by the language

requirements 'they prefer to have it so rather than to feel that concessions have been made to them on the ground of race' (Kerr 1935:7-8).

Adaptation certainly had limitations and tended to lead to an inferior quality of education for Blacks. As Professor Wandira has commented, it assumed that 'Western concepts of education had to be adapted and therefore it left no room for other choices' (Wandira 1977:19). Adaptation was often imposed by Europeans on Africans according to what they thought was relevant and useful for Blacks. African educationists would soon define other starting points for themselves.

The deficiencies of Fort Hare in meeting the demands for higher status education and the pressure from outside forces such as the government, together with African aspirations and goals, were brought into sharp focus by the failure to create a full medical course in the 1920s and by the suspicion engendered by the introduction of a less ambitious medical aid course in 1934.

In the run-up to the establishment of the college, there had been African agitation for access to the higher status professions of law and medicine. Although at least one of the founders, Henderson, was opposed to the training of African lawyers on the grounds that Africans were generally too litigious, there seems to have been some limited support for a course in medicine 'adapted to native needs and means' (Henderson 1 May 1908). The college promoters were actually enjoined to take steps to secure government recognition for the qualifications of African medical practitioners who should be able to work among their own people.

Later in the 1920s Fort Hare was able to motivate for overseas scholarships for college students to study medicine on the grounds that there was an urgency in satisfying the medical needs of rural Africans in the light of the high infant mortality rates and the prevalence of typhus and enteric which were almost endemic in the Ciskei. They referred to 'a growing desire on the part of Natives to have Native doctors' and that many African young men wished to enter the profession (Overseas Scholarships for former SANC students for medicine and a preliminary medical course at SANC 1921). The Fort Hare community agitated for a full medical school at the college which, they felt, must sooner or later be established. This demonstrated again that Fort Hare's vision of the future went beyond that of the Tuskegee model of low level instruction and utility.

Although full medical training for Africans was first proposed by Dr. James McCord, founder and head of the McCord Zulu hospital in Durban, Fort Hare was instrumental in bringing the whole issue of medical training before the government. What, in fact, brought matters to a head was the application by a Fort Hare student, one Mtimkulu, whose father was a Wesleyan minister, for admission to Cape Town University's medical school (Henderson 30 March 1923). Fort Hare used the racial dilemma to attempt to boost its own status through the creation of a full medical course for Africans. However, the college's agitation for a medical school also

brought into focus its rather isolated and unsuitable environment as a centre for this purpose. It soon became clear that Fort Hare's desire for increased status was nothing but a forlorn hope. It was Dr. Carter of the Rockefeller Foundation who seems to have put an end to the rather naive ambitions of the college when he argued that an efficient medical school must be located at a centre affording good clinical opportunities. The rural environment of the college therefore made it unsuitable for all but the preliminary year (Lennox 19 November 1924). Both Loram and McCord felt that it was premature to think about full medical training for Africans at Fort Hare when there were not more than a dozen matriculants. Loram, in fact, supported the creation of overseas scholarships for medicine (Loram 25 August 1924).

By 1930 the dream of an African medical school at Fort Hare had been abandoned in part as a result of the lack of government support and in part because of its unsuitable locality. However, a golden opportunity had been passed over to have a school either at the college or in Durban as the Rockefeller Foundation had actually agreed to give £70 000 for the project on condition that the Union government provided the funds for its maintenance. The conservative sentiments of the Minister of Native Affairs was that the time had not yet arrived to establish a medical school for Africans (Governing Council Minutes June 1930).

Instead of a medical school, Fort Hare was approached in 1934 by the Union Education Department regarding the creation of a scheme similar to those that had been instituted elsewhere in Africa for training and using subordinate medical assistants (Kerr November 1961). Big business also became involved, with the Chamber of Mines and the Rhodes Trust agreeing to provide finance on the understanding that qualified Africans could be used to their advantage in maintaining the health of African migrants in the mining compounds.

Fort Hare also supported the venture as it hoped to use the new situation to press for expansion in the form of science laboratories, staff and student scholarships. Moreover, Kerr's approval of the medical aid scheme was conditional upon it being accompanied by a government scholarship scheme for the overseas training of students as full practitioners. Kerr was in touch with the aspirations of the African people and was aware that they would not be satisfied with purely second rate medical training. He also backed the scheme because he hoped that it would be a step in the direction of a fully fledged health service for Africans. He was of the opinion that this was not taking place at that juncture because African doctors were not settling down in rural service but preferred opening practices in the crowded locations.

The medical aid course, though it seemed on the surface to be a realistic adaptation to African needs and an attempt to grapple with the problem of creating an effective health service for the more disadvantaged rural areas, enjoyed only lukewarm support from African students. It did not lead to any qualification which

would have enabled them to be placed on the medical register nor did it lead to a degree after four years of study. It therefore failed to carry the prestige attached to other less lengthy courses of study. Facts and figures show clearly that it failed to plug the gap in rural health. Of the 10 who started off the course only 4 qualified in 1939, a further 4 in 1940, 11 in 1941 and 5 in 1942 (Kerr 29 May 1963).

Kerr's original aim in supporting the medical aid course was that Africans could commence medical instruction at a low level and then expand their aspirations and needs so that eventually, in several decades, the small beginnings would have been transformed into 'something equivalent to the usual G.P. course but adapted to our rural conditions' (Kerr 1968:188-189). This again demonstrates the slow, gradualist theory of African development which missionary liberals supported in the inter-war years. Africans had preferably to 'earn their spurs' before they would be allowed to progress to higher status training.

As the college council considered the initial qualification for entry to the course, namely the junior certificate, too low, the course was lengthened. This further damaged the status of medical aid as it 'detracted from the inducement to enrol', and the length of the course now compared unfavourably with the teacher's course in which degrees could be obtained (Kerr 5 January 1969). Because Fort Hare continued to press for a more speedy increase in the number of qualified men and women in order to bring medical help within the reach of the widely scattered rural areas, renewed approaches were made to the Union government and public spirited corporations abroad to interest them in the establishment of a Black medical school in South Africa. Sadly these efforts also proved futile (Kerr November 1961).

The medical aid scheme was castigated by its students as disregarding African aspirations, depriving them of qualified people and as an attempt by the government to protect European doctors. Above all the scheme was attacked as 'a special line' for Africans, and the African public was urged not to support 'differential educational schemes for they invariably mean valueless contrivances for Natives' (*Ilanga lase Natal* 5 June 1937).

The well-known African doctor, Dr. R.T. Bokwe, spoke in similar vein of the fears and suspicions of Africans that a second-rate service was being foisted upon them, though he conceded that by the 1940s African suspicions had been partially allayed by the actions of Witwatersrand University in sanctioning the full medical training of Africans at that institution. Bokwe was convinced that the medical aid scheme for rural health would only afford limited relief and that sooner or later it would be scrapped. He considered that such a scheme lost sight of the whole trend of medicine in contemporary times which laid greater emphasis on preventive medicine than had been the case in the past. He was adamant that the status of trained medical aids would remain dubious and their careers would be a *cul de sac* unless the training led to a full medical course after further study and experience or unless successful

candidates could secure a degree. He concluded that the scheme should be modified into one for training preventive health officers at Fort Hare coupled with the policy of Wits University which was to promote full medical training (Bokwe n.d.).

As an attempt to adapt education to African needs, the medical aid scheme proved a dismal failure. Fort Hare's authorities seemed rather too willing to simply accept what was thrust upon them by the government. As Dr. Gale, the first head of the new department, pointed out, the content of the syllabus should have been 'considerably revised if it was to produce medical aids who would be really effective in advancing Native health' (Gale 21 October 1963). Instead of modifying the content of the course or calling for legislation that would have remedied the situation, the college staff undermined the morale of the medical aid department by openly ascribing the impasse to the prejudice of the medical profession against the professional training and use of Africans. Students, in fact, felt that they had been 'sold down the river' by those whose seniority and greater experience should have caused them to reject the scheme (Gale 21 October 1963).

As Dr. Gale of Fort Hare recollected, there were additional problems facing the qualified medical aids whose certificate entitled them only to enter government employment and restricted them to South Africa. In addition, they could not practise privately as nurses and midwives if they were made redundant or retired. A further restriction in South Africa made it illegal for any unregistered person to perform, for gain, any act which pertained specifically to the work of a medical practitioner. This even included such basic functions as giving injections and using a stethoscope. The upshot was that medical aids had no real status in society and were forbidden to do the very things which in their own and other Africans' eyes 'would have given them at least a quasi-professional status' (Gale 21 October 1963). Instead, they were humiliated and frustrated in their role as doctor's stooges or male nurse aids.

The medical aid controversy is significant in that it further highlighted student perceptions against labouring in remote rural areas under the control of district surgeons who might have been difficult to work with. Fort Harians apparently preferred teaching as they felt that they had more opportunity of being under the immediate control of either other Africans as headmasters or missionary-minded European principals. Graduate teachers also chose high schools in or near large towns. Medical aids thinly distributed over South Africa's so-called African areas would have had only minimal opportunities for meeting together and forming an effective professional association (Gale 21 October 1963).

The secretary of the medical association at the time, Louis Leipoldt, a 'liberal', spoke of the scheme as 'a compromising, humbugging' one (Gale 21 October 1963). Moreover, the whole fiasco exposed government thinking on the educability of Africans. Dr. Thornton of the public health department, the instigator of the scheme, was convinced that it was 'impossible to teach any African even a

matriculated one, in four or five years enough clinical medicine to bring him into conflict with the law' (Gale 21 October 1963). Thornton also subscribed to the old European stereotype that because of 'arrested development' Africans could only learn at half the rate of Europeans. He had been apparently informed that all African doctors in South Africa had taken twice the normal time to qualify. With these preconceptions and prejudices Thornton had intended the medical aids to do only the clinical work which a good nurse could do (Gale 21 October 1963).

As the failure of the scheme became more apparent, there were moves in the late 1930s to restart the whole scheme in Durban. McCord, however, was not keen to duplicate Fort Hare's scheme. There were also suggestions that the course should be shortened to a pre-professional year and three professional years (McCord 5 January 1937). Ultimately, the original course was reviewed by a government commission of enquiry under Dr. D.L. Smit who realised that there was no hope of the law being amended to accommodate the scheme. Consequently it was recommended that the scheme be replaced by one leading to the bachelor of science degree in hygiene to be followed by a year's work in Durban under the department of health (Gale 21 October 1963). It was at this juncture that Principal Raikes of Wits took the revolutionary step, in the context of the time, of admitting a limited number of Africans to their medical school. The effort was backed by the Native Trust, which agreed to provide five scholarships. These proved a great attraction for those Fort Harians who desired free medical education (Kerr November 1961).

There are certainly inherent dangers in a rural university becoming immersed in its own way of living. Ideally a university should be in touch with a large centre of population with its vibrant industrial, commercial, artistic and practical life. Critics like Mary Dick considered that the college was rather introverted and that it had comparatively little influence on the lives of the Africans living in the immediate surrounding (Dick 1934: 60). Moreover, she felt that the college should rectify this by training social and community workers for the rural areas so that African upliftment in health, morality and recreation could be generated by the presence of Fort Hare in their midst. But in reality Dick's accusations regarding Fort Hare's outreach were not entirely well founded. There were various initiatives from the outset to overcome the relative isolation of the college and to transform it from a rather elitist ivory tower into an instrument that could serve the mass of the people. As has been recently pointed out, the greatest modern challenge of the university in contemporary Africa is 'not how to produce expertise for the urban industrial sector, but how best to accelerate the development of the rural sector, the other 80 percent of the nation' (Porter 1973:82).

In 1919 the Fort Hare council appointed a demonstrator in agriculture, the Reverend J.E. East, an African American Baptist missionary, to travel among African farmers in the neighbouring villages to assist in improving their agricultural methods

and stimulate production. He established a Farmers' Association for the encouragement and promotion of mutual aid among the African agriculturalists and stock farmers of the Ciskei. The salary of this agricultural demonstrator was made possible through a grant from the Department of Native Affairs and Agriculture. It was also East who encouraged D.D.T. Jabavu, Fort Hare's famous professor of African languages, to establish a number of African Farmers' Associations. It should also be mentioned that a further point of contact between Fort Hare and a considerable section of the rural population of the Ciskei region was the annual agricultural show, with the local inhabitants actively involved in exhibiting their livestock (Kerr :48, 69-70, 265-266).

In the 1920s Fort Hare organised small groups of European students to pay weekend visits to the college in order to get to know African university students at first hand and to ascertain ways to cement permanent student relationships across the colour line. Kerr promoted these visits because he believed that they would increase understanding between different races in one country and improve race relations. One of the major spin-offs of the contacts was the epoch making European-Bantu conference of 1930, a Christian conference which set out to bring together students and more senior people of both Black and White groups, to confront together through Christian brotherhood 'the needs and facts of our common life and together seek a way out of our difficulties' (Kerr September 1961; Yergan 1930:1).

Kerr showed his progressive educational vision of wider outreach for Fort Hare in 1922 when he spoke of his support for a system of continuing adult education. He referred to a curriculum which would enable those who left without completing their course to return for short terms to the college at intervals or even to study privately or by correspondence in order to make up units in the curriculum which they may not have been able to take during their time at the college (*Imvo Zabantsundu* 14 November 1922:5). This was another instance of the growing sensitivity of the authorities to the special dilemmas facing African students.

Moreover, Fort Hare's Principal felt strongly about the need for universities and colleges to utilise their facilities for the full year and for this reason he initiated a series of vacation schools as a practical experiment in adult education where members of the general public could share in the advantages of the university through extension courses. Many of Fort Hare's vacation schools had an African emphasis and were attempts to interest the public beyond the walls of the college in African studies, which in the 1920s was still in its infancy in tertiary institutions (Kerr March 1961).

What critics of Fort Hare in its pioneer phase tended to overlook were the factors beyond the control of the college which hampered progress. Fort Hare was painfully aware that there was a bottleneck in African secondary education with only a tiny percentage of Africans in any form of secondary schooling. African higher education remained very much a minority problem with the educational apex having

to be created on a very shaky and incomplete foundation. Moreover, government and large corporations had little use for an educated African middle class and as a result Fort Hare was financially starved. Fort Hare graduates themselves faced a very restricted and bleak future in a racially discriminatory society which largely limited African advancement to service amongst rural Africans in the reserves.

The problem of adaptation of the curriculum is that it can easily degenerate into education 'along their own lines' being recommended on the grounds that Africans cannot cope with a full 'White' education, or being justified because it is considered relevant to the needs and interests of the agricultural masses. As Edgar Brookes (1930:44f) remarked, there is the ever-present danger of making 'utility' the test of African education and 'culture' the test of White education.

Fort Hare's students, although supportive of curriculum identity with European colleges, were increasingly critical of certain liberal courses. In the 1930s, for example, there was agitation amongst the student body for a curriculum which was more geared to greater community consciousness, one which would involve the institution more deeply in the social and political issues that affected the exploited of South Africa. As veteran ANC activist Govan Mbeki has related, by 1933 the students had launched a campaign to encourage other students to major in such courses as history, political science and geography as it was generally felt that these subjects had definite activist elements. The majority of students had apparently previously been content to major in courses such as English, psychology and logic and consequently the accusation was made by student leaders that Fort Hare was simply producing 'Black Englishmen' who were rather isolated from the real struggles of the people (Mbeki 1996:1).

Fort Hare in its pioneer phase had avoided the temptation to reduce 'adaptation' to African needs to an easy formula which could be applied to every subject and situation in African education. The institution had progressed further than the Booker Washington ideals in order to provide a broad, liberal education which would ensure its graduates access to the wider dimensions of education in a South African society which was gradually broadening its opportunities for educated men and women. In this regard, one can argue that Fort Hare, though not in the vanguard of progress in the struggle for relevance, did in fact offer a curriculum which embraced a broad spectrum of disciplines, including the more socially pertinent newly emerging disciplines of sociology, social anthropology and psychology (Kerr 1935). What remained a severe constraint on its reform programmes was that as the only African university college in a racially stratified and segregated society it did not enjoy the preferential treatment regarding resources and staff which it so richly deserved.

School of Social Sciences and Development Studies
University of Durban-Westville

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