

*Ex Africa semper aliquid Novi!*¹

Pixley ka Isaka Seme, the African Renaissance and the Empire in Contemporary South Africa

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Abstract

Since the 2000s, Africa has carried out a project of its regeneration, popularly known as the African Renaissance. This vision of a self-reliant and developed continent is embodied in the figure of Pixley ka Isaka Seme. Seme had first eloquently articulated this vision in 1906 in an award-winning speech titled the Regeneration of Africa. He had implemented its fundamental ideas of uniting African tribes in 1912 when he facilitated the founding of the oldest political movement in the continent - the South African Native National Congress (SNNC) - the precursor of the African National Congress (ANC). The traces of Seme and the African Renaissance are not obvious in the projects of NEPAD, the African Parliament and so on. They rather remain buried in the archives of the history of the ANC, and the social history of South Africa - but also in the dreams, aspirations and imagination of patriotic Africans. The aim of this article is to explore how and why a shared memory of Seme has to be built; to contribute to the construction of an ideology that will be instrumental in underpinning the work of resisting the negative effects of the empire or globalization.

¹ Latin saying written by Pliny, meaning something new always comes out of Africa. Quoted in Thabo Mbeki 1998. *Africa: The Time Has Come*. Cape Town: Tafelberg (p. 239).

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Keywords: Seme, Pixley ka Isaka, South Africa, Africa, Regeneration, Renaissance, empire, citizenship

I am an African, I set my pride in my race over against a hostile public opinion... I would ask you not to compare Africa to Europe or to any other continent. I make this request not from any fear that such comparison might bring humiliation upon Africa. The reason I have stated - a common standard is impossible! (Seme 1906:1)

Introduction

In 1906 whilst in Columbia University, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, a 26 year old relatively unknown African law graduate student from Inanda South Africa, delivered his award winning speech titled ‘The Regeneration of Africa’. In this speech he dreamt of the revival or renaissance of Africa. As Richard Rive and Tim Couzens have noted, ‘it was largely through his ideas and inspiration that the African National Congress (Africa’s oldest liberation movement and South Africa’s ruling party) was founded’ (Couzens & Rive 1993:1).

This speech became the foundation of the African Renaissance. When other African leaders called for the liberation of their people, they built their speeches and ideas on this speech. Seme’s speech was quoted in its entirety by Kwameh Nkrumah in his speeches when he called for the regeneration of Africa (Nkrumah 1973:212; Muendane 2008). It was also used by Thabo Mbeki as a template in his groundbreaking speech the Regeneration of Africa (Gevisser 2007:326). Seme held the view that ‘regional and tribal differences among Africans had to be overcome by promoting a spirit of African nationalism’ (Karter & Carter 1989:62). It is through these ideas that Africa’s unity of purpose and the quest to develop its own reliance and sustain its mark amongst continents in the world has been built. It is now 63 years since Seme died, but Africa is still struggling to make a case for a prominent position in the world. It continues to fight the onslaught brought by the invasion of the empire, manifesting itself through economic exploitation, through multi-nationals and unfair international trade agreements that benefit the so-called first world at the expense of Africa. After Seme’s death in June 1951, there was a removal of his contribution and

legacy from memory, when he was associated with the failure of the cautious gradualist and peaceful non-violent approach to the struggle for the liberation of Africa. It was only during the adoption of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill in 1996 that Seme's sentiments were echoed by President Thabo Mbeki, though implicitly, when he delivered his historic speech 'I am an African' at the Constitutional Assembly (Mbeki 2007:325). The same sentiments were echoed during the launch of the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Mbeki 2001:16). Again this was done implicitly because Seme was not quoted directly. However one can note that under the leadership of President Thabo Mbeki and his African Renaissance projects, Seme was gradually brought back to memory. The radical advocate of the regeneration of Africa was cautiously brought back onto the scene and was brandished as the father of the African Renaissance and the African National Congress. Academics and politicians, especially those from the ruling party, were instrumental in the revitalization of Seme's memory with the aim of reconstructing a sense of African pride and patriotism, and justification of the domination of the ruling party. Moss Mashamaite has observed the significance of Seme's legacy that towers behind the ANC and the democratic South Africa. He wrote:

If you remove Seme from the history of the African National Congress it remains hollow and a lie. When you remove him you forget your pure African nationalism and with that you also forget the land issue which surprisingly still remains a struggle, even though four black men have ruled in the Union building so far³.

Invoking the ideas of Pixley Seme was intensified by the centenary celebrations of the ANC in 2012, where the party, in its attempt to rebuild its image which has been damaged by infighting, corruption and breakaways under the leadership of President Jacob Zuma, claimed it was still walking in Seme's footsteps. Current political discussions in the country have been around issues that include the growing gap between the haves and have not, religious, ethnic and political divides. Xenophobia and the loss of a spirit of patriotism among political leaders has led to the revitalization of a nostalgic,

³ Mashamaite, M. 2011. *The Second Coming: The Life and Times of Pixley ka Isaka Seme, the Founder of the ANC*. Cape Town: Chartsworld Publishers.

almost heroic, image of Seme. In spite of the provocation of Seme's spirit now and again when faced with leadership challenges, South Africans have not fully explored the relevance of his contribution to the negative impact of the new dynamics of the empire to the country and the rest of the continent. Although his ideas are still relevant for a continent still struggling to build a positive image of itself, Seme has remained relatively unknown and on the margins even within the ANC. He has remained a figure who is only invoked when remembering him would add value to the agenda of those who use his name. With the exception of a street named after him in Durban, there is no institution, building or even national monument that has been built in his name and honor. There is also no monument on the African continent that has been named after the father of the African Renaissance. Moss Mashamite was quite vociferous in his criticism of the ANC for marginalizing Seme's legacy.

However, the marginalization and relegation to the periphery, there are still traces of Seme and his ideas on the regeneration of Africa in the postcolonial context. These needs to be appropriated to the current context so that his legacy is more prevalent when one follows what Paul Ricoeur (2000), terms a narrative 'reconfiguration'. In this approach, contemporary narratives of Seme are politicized. In the words of Marie-Aude Fouré this means that they do not necessarily translate into actual political practices or economic measures enforced by the state, but rather constitute a shared political language employed in collective debates and controversies about politics, morality and national consciousness - a language intended, in short, to shape contemporary images of the nation (Marie-Aude Fouré 2014:1).

The question that may be asked is who was Pixley ka Isaka Seme? What makes him important for us to invoke his name, ideas and political theology in a democratic South Africa, a century after his work? An attempt to write about Seme must be welcomed because despite the brilliance of his career and enormous contribution to the struggle, not a lot of work has been written on him. In their book *Seme: Founder of the ANC*, Richard Rive and Tim Couzens lament the lack of written material on Seme in spite of the tremendous contribution he made in the political developments of South Africa. Other than Rive and Couzens's foundational work, there is only a biographical article by Selope Tema (the then editor of *Drum Magazine*) published in July 1953 two years after Seme's death. At least two prominent people have written doctoral theses on Seme's 'Regeneration of Africa'. One was Kwame Toure or Stockley Carmichael, the founder of the All African

Revolutionary Party (AAPRP) in the US and, Morris Bishop the former Prime minister of Grenada. In 2012, Moss Mashamaite wrote a biography of Seme, where he highlighted Seme's pioneering work in the formation of the ANC, and the idea of an African renaissance⁴. Seme's name is certainly mentioned in a number of historical documents in passing and also in the papers and speeches that he delivered, but as noted, not much scholarly work has focused on his ideas and the empire. Furthermore, there is a clear gap concerning Seme's formative years in the 1880-1900s, leading to a misunderstanding of his work and ultimately of his contribution. Two reasons account for the lack of information on Seme's life and legacy. One relates to the fact that he himself did not write his autobiography, claiming that he did not have time to do that (Seme 2006). This is most probably because his Zulu culture did not encourage anyone to write about himself, for that is seen as beating your own drum. The second reason was Seme's fall from the leadership of the ANC in 1937, after an unsuccessful term which almost led to the collapse of the movement, because of bad leadership characterized by bad financial management and authoritarianism. This culminated with his gradual withdrawal from the leadership of the ANC to concentrate on other ventures, especially with traditional leaders and black farmers, and ultimately his death in June 1951, before the full impact of apartheid legislation. However those who had followed his work could see that history would remember his contribution. For instance renowned journalist of *Drum Magazine* observed that:

... Pixley ka I Seme has made a notable contribution for the development of our consciousness and national spirit both as a creative and driving force in our forward march. He has thus left his mark on our human history, and when that history comes to be written by African historians his name will certainly find a place of honor among the great men of our race (Tema 1953:12).

This article therefore explores how and why a shared memory of Seme, in association with a reconfigured African Renaissance political language, can be built and used to define and construct Africa's conception of renaissance,

⁴ Mashamaite, *The second coming: The life and times of Pixley ka Isaka Seme, the founder of the ANC*. Cape Town: Chartsworld Publishers, 2011).

liberation and citizenship today. It also seeks to make a contribution on how Seme's insights can be used to inspire patriotism and consciousness amongst its leaders to counter the negative impressions about the continent by the rest of the world.

Pixley ka Isaka Seme: The Making of Africa's Renaissance Man

The best way to understand Seme's ideological orientation on the regeneration of Africa is to see how it is firmly rooted in his development from boyhood to adulthood. Pixley ka Isaka Seme was born on the 1st October 1881 at Inanda Mission Reserve outside the coastal city of Durban. He was the son of Isaka and Sarah (nee Mseleku), who were committed members and leaders in the American Board Mission of the Congregational Church (Seme 2006)⁵. His father was a missionary worker and interpreter to the Rev. S.C. Pixley and his mother a devoted woman of the church. Seme's real name is not known even by his closest family members. He called himself by his father's name Isaac or Isaka in Zulu and Rev. Pixley's surname (Couzens & Rive 1993: 21). That is why he is known as Pixley ka Isaka Seme which can be translated as Pixley the son of Seme (Vezi 2008)⁶. He obtained his primary education at the local mission school run by the American Board Mission. He grew up under the watchful eye of the Rev. S.C. Pixley who took special interest in him. In 1895 at the age of fourteen he went to Adams Training School for Boys, where he studied and also helped by looking after Rev. Pixley's cattle (Tema 1953:11). Determined to get a better education for himself, in 1898 at the age of sixteen, he travelled to Brooklyn in the US to join John Dube who was doing his second year of ministerial education. At the same time, Rev. Pixley was also in the US at Boston, and through Dube and Pixley's financial support he started improving his English language in preparation for enrolment at Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts. This was a boy's school founded by the

⁵ Interview with Ellen Seme (Seme's daughter) 18 February 2009, Number C 1348 Ulundi conducted by Simanga Kumalo.

⁶ Interview with Vezi Seme (grandson) on 21st October 2008 at Inanda Seme's birth place, conducted by Simanga Kumalo.

well-known American Evangelist Dwight Moody, whose aim was to found an institution where boys would get a Christian education so that they could serve God in the world. His studies at Mount Hermon included studies in Theology.

At first Seme was not clear on what course of study he wanted to follow; he considered law, medicine or ministry. After completing his studies at Mount Hermon School in Boston, Seme was admitted to Columbia University in New York City where he read for a law degree with the intention of becoming a lawyer. In 1906 he went to Oxford University where he registered for a Bachelor of Civil Law and was a member of Jesus College. He came back to South Africa in 1910 and first settled in the Cape, where he worked as a lawyer. He married Miss Xiniwe in a Christian wedding service. They had a son named Quinton who later became a musician (Ellen Seme 2006).

After the death of his first wife, Seme moved to Johannesburg where he opened his law offices at number 54/5 Rosenberg Arcade on Prichard Street with Mr. Alfred Mangena (Ellen Seme 2006). These offices would soon serve as the founding base for the ANC because it was in them that he would run the movement. He was also working with Mr. Richard Msimang who was another lawyer and would also become one of the key founding members of the ANC. They also worked in close contact with D Montsioa, the only other African lawyer. So at the time there were four qualified lawyers in South Africa; these were PI Seme, A Mangena, R Msimang and D Montsioa. These were the same lawyers who conceived the idea of forming the Congress under Seme's leadership. Seme then married Princess Phikisinkosi (popularly known as Princess Phikisile) Zulu, the eldest daughter of king Dinuzulu, king of the Zulus⁷. They had three children, two

⁷ She was named Phikisinkosi because she had defied the king who had hoped to get a son as a first-born who would then take over from him. When he got a girl he named her Phikisile meaning she had defied the king, because she was a woman but could not be crowned as king as per the culture of the Zulu people at the time. Then she, in Zulu culture, became 'Iphosakubekwa' one who nearly became king. It is also important to note that Phikisinkosi was the elder sister to Princess Magogo Zulu who is Chief Mangosuthu's mother.

boys and a girl⁸. He bought a palatial house for himself in Sophiatown at 111 Bertha Street where he settled with his family.

In 1912 he pioneered the founding of the African National Congress, for which he was elected Treasurer General. He also raised money from the Queen of Swaziland which he used to start the organization's first newspaper Batho-Abantu. The aim of the newspaper was to document and disseminate the experiences of the African people in the Union of South Africa and to propagate the objectives and teachings of the Congress.

In 1911 Seme pioneered the African Farmer's Association, which mobilized black people to pool together their resources to buy fertile land for farming. This scheme led to the establishment of Daggakrall which was a settlement of, and initiated by black people, precipitating the enactment of the Natives Land Act in 1913 as government's response to stopping black people from buying land for themselves (1953:21). In 1928 Seme was honored by his *alma mater*, Columbia University, with an Honorary Doctorate of Law (LLD)⁹. In 1930 he was elected president of the ANC, a position he held till 1937. Unfortunately his 'conservative leadership style coupled with a lack-luster and autocratic attitude' (Couzens & Rive 1993:22) did not help the organization. By the time he was voted out in 1937, the Congress was almost defunct with no clear membership and bankrupt. He then concentrated on helping the Kingdom of Swaziland and Lesotho to gain their independence from Britain as well as running his law firm, which focused on representing black people who were suffering exploitation and oppression at the hands of white farmers, employers and police.

Seme died on 7 June 1951, at the age of 70, in Johannesburg. He belonged to the Anglican Church in Braamfontein and was buried at a funeral

⁸ The names of the children were Godfrey Silosentaba, Douglas Pilidi, Ellen, and Mamama. When he was a lawyer in Swaziland he had a relationship with Princesses Lozinja Dlamini and they had a son George Zwangendaba Seme. Seme gave him the name Zwangendaba because when he was born, Seme was not in Swaziland but overseas; he heard through messages that he had been born. When Seme was in Daggakraal he also had a relationship with another women and a son was born out of that relationship who was named 'Dumakude' (popular) which probably referred to Seme's popularity.

⁹ Presidents of the African National Congress: 1912-2012. Pretoria: Department of Arts and Culture, p. 79.

conducted by Bishop Ambrose Reeves at Croesus Cemetery (Ellen Seme same interview).

Founding of the African National Congress

In spite of the fact that Seme's name is not the most celebrated one in the contemporary political arena, even within the ANC, there is general agreement that the existence of the organization is attributable to the genius of Pixley ka Isaka Seme¹⁰. The ANC was Seme's brainchild whose roots can be traced to the speech that he made at Columbia University in 1906, where he spoke of the regeneration of Africa¹¹. In his speech, Seme affirmed Africa to be a civilized continent in its own right that should not be judged in comparison with other continents. He viewed comparison to be impossible because Africa was civilized and developed in its own unique way, not one that followed the script of the west. For him this is what makes the comparison impossible or even unjustifiable. He argued that Africa would not fail to measure up to the other continents if it was to be compared to them; it is just that the yardstick used would not be adequate to do such measuring. The speech that he delivered in Bloemfontein in 1912 six years later was a culmination of the Columbia one. In Bloemfontein, it became a call to action for the African leaders to work together for the regeneration of their continent so that they could resist the domination by other nations (2012:82)¹². The formation of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) (as the organization was known before the name was changed to the African National Congress (ANC) in the 1920s) was so that such an organization would mobilize against the negative influences and oppression by servants of the European empire, e.g. the Boers and the British, who had united to form the government of the Union of South Africa which excluded the Africans. So the speech was used as a tool of conscientization.

¹⁰ The highest honour bestowed on Seme is the building of a statue in his honour in Daggakraal in Mpumalanga, the community that he established in the early 1900s.

¹¹ See http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/pdf_extract/5/XX/404, 2009/08/20

¹² For more see 'Presidents of the African National Congress': 1912-2012, 82.

There are five characteristics that made Seme's movement stand out from others that had been established earlier. They are as follows.

First, it drew its membership from black people only, irking people like Jabavu who adopted a moderate approach which accommodated sympathetic whites. Seme realized that Africans had to fight our own battles and liberate ourselves instead of waiting behind whites and depending on their paternalistic attitudes. He was of the attitude that African people had to do it for and by themselves, to demonstrate that they had come of age.

Second, the ANC was a coalition of black organizations from all over the country including the three British protectorates Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. It was a *broad-church*¹³, which although had its clear agenda, was also committed to support the political work carried out by different regional organizations at the local level. It had a clear mandate and focus which was not narrowed to responding to provincial governmental issues, but was concerned about the state of Africans in the union as a whole. The underlying ideology was concerned with the re-building of Africa as a whole. In his speech he said that:

Chiefs of royal blood and gentlemen of our race. We have gathered here to consider and discuss a scheme which my colleagues and I have decided to place before you. We have discovered that in the land of their birth, Africans are treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water. The white people of this country have formed what is known as the union of South Africa - a union which we have no voice in the making of the laws and no part in the administration. We have called you therefore, to this conference so that we can together devise ways and means of forming our national union for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges (Couzens & Rive 1993:89).

Third, unlike the Bambatha rebellion (Guy 2006) which was led by traditional uneducated warriors using a violent confrontation, the SANNC was pioneered and led by graduates of mission schools, so its foundations

¹³ This term has been used to describe the coalition nature of the ANC which includes a number of groups with diverse and sometimes conflicting ideas.

were built on Christian principles and involved a commitment to a non-violent approach (J.L. Dube in Thabo Tshehloane 2008:92). In its ranks were clergy, teachers, doctors and lawyers. Seme's call was different from the call that had been made by earlier leaders of African nationalism, who had been mobilizing their people to engage in wars and fight the oppressive settlers using spears and warriors. He was calling for a different strategy which was to unite the people and fight the enemy, first as a united force and second by adopting non-violent and extra-parliamentary methods. People were now going to use the pen to fight for their freedom instead of guns.

Fourth, it was committed to the unity of African tribes and the promotion of unity in action amongst the oppressed people of the country. In the subcontinent people had divided themselves according to warring ethnic groups, and not even the culture of *Ubuntu* could stop them from fighting both the white invaders and each other for sovereignty and domination. Each ethnic group wanted to dominate and rule the other. It is in this context that Seme realized the need for unity across ethnic boundaries, saying 'All the dark races of the subcontinent' should come together to discuss their issues in a 'Native Parliament'. He said that:

The demon of racialism, the aberration of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basutos and every other native must be buried and forgotten We are one people (Joyce 2007:42).

For Seme and his colleagues, the time had come for the African people from different ethnic backgrounds to stop fighting amongst themselves had come. He stated bluntly that 'internal squabbles had already shed amongst us sufficient blood These divisions, these petty jealousies, are the cause of all our woes and all our backwardness and ignorance today' (Joyce 2007:42). He called them to unite and be committed to common nationhood (Walshe 1971:33).

Fifth, although with time it was later dropped, the idea of regarding traditional leaders as part of the African system of governance was a credible one. To some extent his commitment to African traditional leaders might have been motivated by the fact that he was married to a Zulu princess. This may have played a role in his own sense of being part of not just the educated

elite, but also the traditional elite¹⁴. In Seme's vision, the ANC built on the existing structures of African leadership, which people were attached to. He would later call upon the young educated Africans to cooperate with traditional leadership for the purpose of promoting education amongst the Africans. He said that:

I wish to urge our educated young men and women not to lose contact with your own chiefs. You make your chiefs and your tribal councils feel that education is a really good thing. It does not spoil nor detribalize them. Most of the misery which our people suffer in the town and the country today is due to this one factor, no confidence between the educated classes and the uneducated people ... (Holland 1989:34).

This was to encourage cooperation between the African traditional systems of leadership and the western models, so that the two can enrich one another and improve the rights and lives of the African people including those who live in rural areas. Here you see a Seme who is affirming the African models of governance and being critical of those who discarded such models in favor of the western form of democracy. Seme's belief in the African models has been vindicated by the ANC's elevation of the role traditional leaders in a democratic South Africa. In the current dispensation the traditional system of leadership is used alongside the democratic system and the two have been given the space to complement one another.

Seme's Pan-Africanist Ideas

Seme's ideas were not just limited to South Africa, they extended to the rest of the African continent. Therefore, keeping his memory alive and nurturing his ideas in the contemporary context of globalization would not only benefit him and his legacy but would serve South Africa and the rest of the continent's development and pride. This is because Seme believed in the

¹⁴ Whilst working with the royal family of Swaziland he also married a Swazi princess named Lozinja Dlamini.

continent and its people's capabilities. In his speech he made a passionate plea to the leaders of the African people to unite across ethnic divides to work and struggle for their liberation, recognizing the intellectual, artistic and natural beauty and capabilities of its people to build and run their own societies. His call was an affirming attitude towards Africa which had always been referred to as a dark continent by its detractors (Richburg 1998: xiv). He asserted that 'I set my pride in my race over and against public opinion' (1912:82). In this speech he had invoked not only the scientific and intellectual abilities of Africa and its people but also its rich culture and religion which were rich and commendable to those outside the continent. Seme's positive views on African culture and religion have been confirmed in the new dispensation by the current South Africa constitution which explicitly protects the cultures and religions of people and has even led to the formation of a section 9 institution whose main objective is to protect people's cultures and religions against any form of onslaught.¹⁵ Whilst the dominant tendency of colonial and settler policy was to undermine Africa and its people, Seme's point of departure was to affirm Africa and its leaders as entrepreneurs, philosophers and able leaders of their people who were being subjugated by the colonial powers. They needed to free themselves by organizing their people under one broad-based party that would champion their cause. It is with this in mind that we should not separate Seme's work of liberation of the South Africans from that of the continent as an s whole. Mike Muendane noted that:

The contribution of Pixley ka Isaka Seme is immeasurable. To start with, there would never have been any organization such as the African National Congress at the time it was created and in the form that it was; this would probably even have delayed the attainment of our freedom and indeed the freedom of the rest of the continent, not least because the ANC was the first liberation movement on the continent of Africa (Muendane 2008:2).

So, like his ideas, his work was for the liberation of the whole of the African continent. It was Pan-Africanist.

¹⁵ Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

Community Development

Another contribution that Seme made was to see the connection between politics, law, land ownership and economic empowerment. This was demonstrated when he formed the African Farmers Association through which he mobilized marginalized black people, who were cramped and abused in farms, and encouraged them to buy fertile land, build their own settlements and do business farming. Through this association he bought large tracts of fertile land for Africans. A case in hand is the Daggakraal settlement in Mpumalanga. Selope Tema (1953: 12) records that:

He set up African Farmers Associations and an African settlement in Daggakraal in the Eastern Transvaal which gave impetus to the buying of land by Africans in the Transvaal. The Daggakraal settlement caused consternation among neighboring farmers, who declared that unless the buying of land by natives was restricted South Africa would never be a white men's country. Indeed it was not exaggeration that it was the Daggakraal settlement which precipitated the Native Land Act of 1913.

The issue of land is still a bone of contention in the democratic South Africa. The government, through the Department of Land Affairs has been trying to redistribute land amongst South Africa, to reverse the legacy of apartheid where 80% of the land was given to white minority, whilst leaving the black majority stuck in a small portion of land. The fact that even today over seven decades after Seme's death the land is still a thorny issue in South Africa proves, the visionary leader that Seme was. In the words of Tim Couzens,

The voice of Seme, the pioneer, newsman, the guardian of land tenure, the founder of African attorneys, the founder of the South African liberation movement, should speak to us even alter a century and his hand should reach out to nudge our memories, lest we forget again! (Couzens & Rive 1993:7).

From this we can see Seme as a man of vision and energy dedicated to the liberation of his people not only politically but also economically. The fact that his activities led to the enactment of new laws to prevent Africans from

buying land reveals the collusion between law and politics which ultimately lead to the oppression or disempowerment of people.

Seme and the Mentoring of the Youth for Leadership

Seme had confidence in the youth, which he demonstrated by mentoring Lembede and launching him onto legal and political platforms. Mike Muendane has noted that:

When this noble Seme could not continue to wield influence on his contemporaries because some of them could not fully understand, appreciate or fathom his vision of an Africa that was free, united and the centre of art and science, he realized that the best option was to approach it through the youth. The youth had nothing to unlearn, while Seme's contemporaries had to unlearn the colonial mentality that drives darkness from the land (2008:3).

His last significant contribution was when he took Anton Muziwakhe Lembede (1914-1947) under his wing so that he could do his law articles, and then relinquished the ownership of his law firm to him. Lembede is credited with being the father of Black consciousness in South Africa. Holland notes that Lembede was 'hostile to whites, despising the eagerness with which blacks tried to emulate them'. He was not 'himself preying to the temptations of smart clothing and material status symbols, which he identified as the root cause of the black people's sense of inadequacy' (in Holland 1998:42). Lembede would advocate black pride. He would say, 'Look at my skin, It is black like the soil of mother Africa. It is the black man's duty not to allow himself to be swamped by the doctrines of inferiority' (Holland 1998:42). Seme's protégé advocated a philosophy of African exclusivism. He argued that, 'Africa is a black man's country, Africans are the natives of Africa, and they have inhabited Africa, their Motherland, from time immemorial: Africa belongs to them' (in Holland 1998:42).

Lembede would go on to work with Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo to form the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) for which he was president. Although Seme was more conservative and

accommodative of whites compared to his younger colleague Lembede, he marvelled at his intelligence to a point of selling his law firm to him as one who would run with the baton of the freedom of his people and the project of the regeneration of the African continent. Unfortunately Lembede died at the relatively young age of 33. Like Lembede, Seme had been a committed Africanist. He once observed 'I yearn for the glory of Africa that is lost and I shall strive to restore it with what remains of my life' (Muendane 2008: 4).

Facilitation of Independence of Other African Countries

Another contribution that Seme made, which has been underplayed, is the role he played as advisor to the British protectorates of Lesotho and Swaziland, helping them to negotiate their concessions, the return of their land from white settlers and finally in gaining their independence. Seme worked hard as the advisor to King Moshoeshoe of Lesotho, helping him to draft documents and appeals on how he could gain power over his people and undermine the British high commissioner who ruled the country on behalf of the British Empire. His other commitment was in Swaziland, where he became legal advisor first to the Regent Prince Malunge ka Mbandzeni, then to the Queen mother Labotsibeni (after Malunge died) and later to the young king Sobhuza (Matsebula 1988:204). Unlike the monarchies from the other protectorates, Seme became very close to the Swazi royal house, advising the king and helping him to write petitions to the British leaders, and ended up by accompanying the Swazi delegation to England to negotiate the independence of the country (Matsebula 1988:231). Seme became the glue that brought together the traditional leaders of the South African tribes and the ANC. Therefore it is not surprising that when he needed funds to establish the ANC newspaper *Abantu/Batho* he spoke to the Queen Regent of Swaziland Labotsibeni Nxumalo who donated an amount of \$3,000. Seme used this paper to highlight the plight of the black people so that they could receive sympathy from those who could help. An example of this was the Swazi situation where he began to write about their issues in the paper, building a case for their concessions that had been taken over by the British. Hildah Kuper puts it this way, 'In it (*Abantu/Batho*) he gave *inter alia* publicity to the Swazi grievances against concessionaires and steadily helped build up a

case that Sobhuza would eventually present before the courts' (1978: 46).

In 1922 and 1924, in his capacity as the Swazi nation's attorney and legal advisor to the royal family, he accompanied the then Paramount chief of Swaziland King Sobhuza to England to present the grievances of the Swazi people to the High Commissioner. He was responsible for drafting the petition, an eighteen page document, where the royal family raised their grievances against the way the empire was treating them and started calling for independence. His contribution to the liberation of these African countries was not forgotten. This was confirmed by his daughter who said:

My father died in June 1951; nineteen years later in 1968 Swaziland gained its independence. The king of Swaziland, Sobhuza, invited me to be part of the independence celebrations, to witness when the British government handed the country back to its rightful owners arguing that my father had made the independence possible. Unfortunately he had died without witnessing that day. I was treated with respect and I felt proud of the work that he had done for the Swazi people (Ellen Seme, same interview).

As if that was not enough, Seme, on behalf of Sobhuza, bought a six-stand plot at Sophiatown, where a big house was built to accommodate the Swaziland Branch of the African National Congress. Sobhuza himself used to come to this house once a year (Kuper 1978:101). The house was adjacent to one that was owned by King Dinuzulu ka Solomon, king of the Zulus. Seme also worked for Tswana chiefs, representing them in their own case of working for their liberation and constituting their own governing structures (Kuper 1978:176). His work in Swaziland affirms Seme's commitment to the liberation not only of the black people within the South Africa borders, but rather of the African people as a whole. He is seen as someone who reached out to other African ethnic groups and labored for their freedom. His view of the liberation of the African people went beyond the South Africa borders, a point further illustrated by the way in which his speeches and dreams were later invoked by leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah and others when they embarked in the liberation project of the African people. This presents us with evidence that Seme's broader vision and work was the freedom of the African continent against the oppression and negative impact of the empire.

Lessons from Seme's Legacy

There are a number of lessons that can be picked up from Seme's legacy that would benefit not only the South African society but the continent of Africa as a whole as it seeks to liberate itself from the trappings of bad governance, dictatorship, ethnic wars, poverty and economic disempowerment by the West. Democracy as it is in the west has struggled to adapt in the South and it is possible that a new form of democracy that takes into account traditional forms of leadership can provide a solution if we accommodate some of the forms of African traditional leadership as Seme did. Ethnicity is one of the problems facing not only the continent, but here in South Africa we have recently witnessed xenophobic attacks and we constantly live in fear that they might come back to haunt us. Seme's teaching was that such ethnic violence was bound not only to destroy those who are the immediate victims, but Africa as a whole. Seme held together politics and religion in a creative tension. The same religion that had been used to colonize Africa was turned around and used for his advantage. Seme made use of these connections to go to the US and Oxford where he got the best education, making him one of the finest African lawyers in South Africa. Education is liberation and religious communities need to contribute to the education of the poor and marginalized people of Africa so that they can reach their fullest potential and ultimately contribute to the liberation of us all. Seme teaches us that religion can be used for liberation and empowerment of the people. Politics and religion in creative tension contribute to the development of democracy and human progress.

Seme's Weaknesses

Uncritical Acceptance of African Traditional Leaders

Seme emerged at a period when the collaboration between the magistrate's office, the merchant's business and the missionary's stations had made its appearance in black communities and had eroded the traditional powers of chiefs and traditional system of leadership. He was convinced that Africa could make a contribution in the development of the world meant that he invested a lot of effort in involving the traditional leadership structures and systems in the ANC and also in work that he was doing. For him African systems of governance needed to be retrieved as assets that could add value

in the development of a democratic society. Therefore it is not surprising that he invited chiefs to the Bloemfontein conference and even his address started by saluting them. Some African intellectuals have criticized Seme that by choosing to work with through traditional leaders he was shortsighted about the kind of leadership needed to take the African struggle forward which would better be carried through intellectuals than traditional chiefs (Masilela 2003:14).

Exclusion of Women's Issues in the Struggle

Another weakness in Seme's legacy is the fact that he does not seem to have appreciated the oppression suffered by African women, nor did he appreciate the contribution they had made in the development of Africa. In all his speeches starting with the 'The Regeneration of Africa' for which he got an award, to the one he delivered during the inauguration of the ANC, there is no mention of women. Therefore it is not surprising that when the ANC was formed in 1912, women were excluded from membership until the following year. This is in spite of the fact that there were women of impeccable credentials such as Nokuthela Dube, Charlotte Maxeke and others who deserved membership because of their contribution to the struggle for the rights of the Africans.¹⁶ Charlotte Maxeke was the first African women to qualify with a Bachelor of Science degree from an American University, had been the key person in the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Africa, and had started a number of schools including the Wilberforce Institution at Sharpeville in the Transvaal. Seme and his colleagues were trapped in the patriarchal tendencies of their culture which ignored women's experience of triple-oppression and their ability to contribution in the liberation of the African people. It can be said that Seme was a child of his own time when it comes to issues of gender equality.

However there is a need for us to build on his ideas in spite of the fact that there are weaknesses that we can see. We cannot of course build on his ideas and complete his dream unless we stick assiduously to the foundation he left for us. We may of course differ on the methods but not on the fundamentals. These fundamentals are consciousness of self as Africans,

¹⁶ See also R. Simangaliso Kumalo 2012. *Pastor and Politician*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, p. 61.

instead of according to colour, self-determination of the African people, the restoration of land, unity of tribes into nationhood and the unity of the continent. We must identify the progressive forces associated with Seme's dream and work towards unity of purpose. To unite with the enemies of Seme's ideals to fight other progressive forces is treachery and will destroy the gains of the liberation struggle that Pixley ka Isaka Seme envisioned and committed to.

Conclusion

Unlike many of the leaders of the ANC and the struggle for liberation in South Africa who have been commemorated through the use of their names in naming roads, public buildings and institutions but very people hold Pixley ka Isaka Seme's name in high esteem. This article has highlighted the need for Seme's legacy to be celebrated and his name to be honored. In spite of the shortcomings that Seme might have had in his career, this article has demonstrated that he made a tremendous contribution to the liberation of South Africa. It has also demonstrated that his ideas focused not just on South African society but on the continent and the world as a whole. It brings our attention to the fact that Seme is one of the earliest African leaders to work for the regeneration of Africa, which is now popularly known as the 'African Renaissance'. It also adds value to the debate on land redistribution and development in South Africa as it retrieves knowledge about how Seme sought to address these critical issues in the early days of the ANC. This article is just a small limited contribution to the legacy of Pixely ka Isaka Seme.

Indeed this article attempts to create a place of honor for Seme's name in the history of South Africa, for the rest of the continent, as well as for present and future generations who will have to tell the story of liberation and the heroes who were behind it. Future leaders needs to be reminded that Seme stood for a unique civilization which has its roots, aspirations and bias towards Africa and the development of its people. Remembering Seme must enable a the development of a new narrative that encourages the building of a new nation, one that is founded on the cultural and intellectual assets that Africa possesses, that were articulate in Seme's award winning speech on the regeneration of Africa. This must be so, especially if something new is to

come out of Africa, as Plinny noted 'Ex Africa semper aliquid Novi'. Africa has to bring something new rather than mimicking the empire.

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Interviewer	Interviewee	Date	Place
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Simanga Kumalo	Vezigama Seme	21 October 2008	Inanda
Simanga Kumalo	Ellen Seme	18 February 2009	Ulundi

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