John L. Dube's Legacy: The Harbinger, Intellectual and his Philosophy

Vuyisile Msila
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8875-0644

Abstract

Numerous missionary-educated African intellectuals sought ways to develop liberatory philosophies for the betterment of their communities. Not all were understood. However, in various ways they developed traditions of struggle to free their people from colonialism and alienated consciousness. John Langalibalele Dube was one such intellectual in the late 19th century and, during his time, many may have perceived him to be an enigmatic persona. Yet, as the first president of the African National Congress (ANC), he walked on uncharted paths with the zeal of a conscientious harbinger. It was not only the ANC that embraced some elements of his vision, but also leaders of other African states decades later.

In examining Dube's stature, using a brief literature review to collect data, this conceptual article explores elements of the man's vision which encompassed Pan-Africanism, self-reliance, spirituality and indigenous epistemologies. While not all his contemporaries were in agreement with his philosophy, through painstaking, critical reading, much can be gleaned from his legacy. His decolonial initiatives included the promotion of the isiZulu language and isiZulu literature. Furthermore, he was also instrumental in writing about the lives of the amaZulu royal family. Several ideas that inspired Dube were to be imitated by influential African leaders later, including Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda, who are among the leaders who enacted some of his vision. The article concludes that, despite the many interpretations of John L. Dube, he remains a stalwart as one of the pioneers of African nationalism and black liberation. He consciously used 'freedom, education and civilisation' for the progress of the oppressed African people.

Print ISSN 1023-1757; Electronic ISSN: 2519-5476; DOI https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2021/sp38c05

Keywords: *Amakholwa*, Black Resistance, human rights, Pan-Africanism, self-reliance, social change

Introduction

The historian Heather Hughes (2011) appropriately titled her biography on John Langalibalele Dube, *First President*. Over the years, Dube became the forgotten first president of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) and many of his thoughts became part of the new South African democratic government in 1994. Dube was a man who was ahead of his times, for his ideas were revived decades later in debates on education, human rights, decolonisation and social justice. Khumalo (2012) notes how Dube's work straddled several fields, including education, media, politics and literature. He remains a great segment of today's 'black intellectual consciousness' in South Africa (Courau 2008). Hughes (2011) also wants us to appreciate this 'first president's' life as a cycle that started in 1912 and ended in 1994. She also records an important moment in *First President*, and that is when Nelson Mandela symbolically took the baton from Dube when he went to vote in the first South African democratic elections on the 27th of April 1994. Paradoxically, the first President of the democratic South Africa interconnected with the first President of the African National Congress (ANC) pronouncing a new beginning based on Dube's aspirations as the first President of the Congress. Hughes depicts how Nelson Mandela chose the Ohlange voting station, where Dube is interred, to cast his vote. Afterwards Mandela went 'to inform' Dube who eternally reposed in his grave, 'Mr President, South Africa is now free' (Hughes 2011:xx). Here was Mandela not only showing his reverence to the first President of the ANC, but also underscoring that Dube's brilliance could not be obscured by the difficult times in which he had lived. Madiba was not alone in his praise of Dube. An Anonymous writer (1982:18) in the ANC Publication, *Sechaba*, quotes the author B.W. Vilakazi, who wrote in 1946 that Dube was 'a great, if not the greatest, black man of the missionary epoch in South Africa'. Furthermore, Anonymous (1982:18) cites A.S. Vil-Nkomo, who also praises Dube as the 'one who comes once in many centuries – No one else in his generation has accomplished so much with such meagre economic means'. Additionally, Vil-Nkomo claims that Dube was a scholar, gentleman, leader, farmer, teacher, politician, patriot and philanthropist. He

was also among the first Christian converts in Natal and men like him were borne out of mission schools, which created a new class of blacks (Cabrita 2012; Southall 2014). The first black converts became preachers, teachers, interpreters and clerks. Dube, through his mission education and having been born of a father who was a priest, also became a Congregational Church minister. In isiZulu he was a *kholwa*, a converted one.

Many traditionalists regarded the *amakholwa* as traitors who fought on the side of the coloniser (*New Nation* 1988a). The *amakholwa* believed in civilisation and progress and they adopted the Western ways of the British (*New Nation* 1988a; Couper 2012). Furthermore, with their education, *amakholwa* felt that they were entitled to equal political rights. The paradox of the *amakholwa*, though, was that, whilst on the one hand the traditionalists hated them, on the other hand, some white colonisers were also suspicious of their existence. Dube explained the latter when he postulated, 'The reason that the Christian native has a bad name (among whites) […] is that he does not submit to being treated as a dog' (*New Nation* 1988a:28). Additionally, many of the *amakholwa* assumed leadership positions in their communities. In fact, the first ANC leaders were men of the cloth who had received missionary education, although they had not been exposed to the necessary leadership training, for missionary education was more focused on ecclesiastical education (Couper 2012). Zaccheus Richard Mahabane (ANC President from 1924–1927 & 1937–1940) and Chief Albert Luthuli (ANC President from 1952–1967), like Dube, were men who were deeply religious and at some point in their lives were regarded as moderates by their followers (Couper 2012). Yet almost all the first ANC leaders, including Luthuli and Tambo, as well as Mandela were products of missionary education. Furthermore, some like Selope Thema and Alfred Xuma were regarded as conservative and moderate, and their ideas were sometimes perceived as disagreeable to the people they led (Nthali 2019). Dube was also said to have had some of these qualities, although many colonialists were so suspicious of his virtues that they labelled him as belonging to the loathed Ethiopianism (Anonymous 1982). Yet, Dube was always at the forefront in the fight for human rights and the need for African people to stand together in the struggle for freedom.

This article explores some of the ways in which Dube's values and philosophy can be understood. It also examines the role that Dube played in ensuring that social change would be achieved for the oppressed black people, albeit decades later. If there was one person who inspired Dube, the African

American Booker T. Washington would be that person. Dube contended that Washington was a living example of what the black people could achieve and was a man who had worked hard for his own educational progress (Marable 1974; Courau 2008; Hughes 2011). Yet, Washington was a controversial figure whom he was able to meet on one of his trips to the United States of America. Unlike his other contemporaries like Frederick Douglas and W.E.B. du Bois, Washington did not believe in violent protest and maintained that it was through education, especially vocational training, that black people would be able to attain success (Washington 1995a; Courau 2008).

The topics examined here explore Dube's philosophy in order to comprehend his character and his times. To understand Dube, like any other intellectual, society has to examine his philosophy in addition to his rich biography. After the explication of the methodology, the focus is on Dube's striving for Pan-African ideals and self-reliance. The article also explores how Dube tried to balance the traditional way of life and live as an educated *ikholwa*. Some readers find that the contradictions in his life eclipse some of his prowess as an intellectual (Marks 1975). Yet I see these contradictions as essential in honing Dube the intellectual and leader. Like the African-American intellectual, Booker T. Washington, his mentor, Dube appreciated the potential role of education in entrenching self-reliance for the black child and supported girl education at a time when the society was very patriarchal (SAHO n.d.). Therefore, in examining Dube's legacy we need sympathetically reading, conscientious readers would understand that he had one big dream for his people and that was the dream of freedom.

A Sympathetic Reading of John L. Dube's Politics

Whatever texts people read, they need to start off being sympathetic towards the content, because when people read what someone else has written it is because they want to understand what the person has written (EPPRS n.d.). Furthermore, the EPPRS states that wanting to understand what someone else has written is an act of sympathy; as we approach the material, we assume that the writing is logical and has value. Within academic contexts, people read and think critically as they engage with texts. Sympathetic readers use this thinking as they try to get into the authors' shoes; understanding and accepting the author's argument on the author's terms (EPPRS n.d.). When people do not read sympathetically, employing critical reading skills, they may miss the most

salient parts of a narrative. Corrigan (2012) adds that the act of reading should be accompanied by not only critical reading, but contemplative and active reading as well. On the one hand, contemplative reading refers to attentiveness, presence, dialogue and community; this kind of reading forces the reader to reflect. On the other hand, active reading includes seeking to uncomprehend and then moving 'beyond understanding to have something to say about the text, whether in the form of considered responses, probing questions, connections between the text and things outside of it' (Corrigan 2012:161).

Thomas (2018) contends how absurd it can be if, whenever people differ with another point of view, they jump at scoring points as they ridicule the other side. Sympathetic and critical reading becomes essential at this stage. Other writers have highlighted the critical nature of both sympathetic reading/thinking vs critical reading/thinking. In fact, Rosenwasser and Stephen (2011:114) aver,

> most good reading starts by giving the reading the benefit of the doubt: this is known as producing a sympathetic reading or reading with the grain … first you have to decide to suspend judgment as an act of mind, trying instead to think with the piece.

Weinberger (2015) concurs with the above as he points out that reading is not an easy task and it needs to start with sympathy. Furthermore, Weinberger states that reading is a negotiation and negotiation means that the reader needs to have an open mind instead of wanting to win against the writer. When readers are not sympathetic, they learn less because they simply confirm their own beliefs after reading. Without sympathy, reading does not enhance one's knowledge but instead leaves one worse than before (Weinberger 2015).

Sympathetic reading is about finding several interpretations that make sense, rather than those that do not make sense. Various sources have portrayed John Dube in a number of ways and it is up to the readers to apply critical thinking as they also apply their sympathetic reading. Roux (1972) and Marks (1975) write of how Dube was understood as a pacifist who was closer to the colonisers' cause. Furthermore, Roux (1972) portrays how Dube was always opposed to the politics of protest, although *amakholwa* are known for their resistance to black oppression and white domination. In 1922, a group of *amakholwa* united with the amaZulu Royal family to form Inkatha kaZulu

whose first main task was to force the South African government to understand that Solomon Dinuzulu was the supreme leader of all amaZulu and not only a chief of Usuthu, which is a mere royal section (*New Nation* 1988b). The word *inkatha* itself was a decolonial symbol which, refers to a grass coil placed on the head for carrying a load. The purpose of the *inkatha* is to bind a load together. This image of *inkatha* was useful to Dube, who supported African solidarity in the face of strife. Amakholwa and the amaZulu Royal family wanted to unite the amaZulu at a time when divisions were ravaging Zululand. During the early days of Inkatha kaZulu, the *New Nation* (1988b:28) explicates:

> Inkatha also had wider aims. A white missionary who was present at an early meeting of Inkatha kaZulu commented: 'The real object is to unite all black races. They consider that the native is victimised in many ways and receives unfair and unjust treatment from the white man; that this will continue as long as the natives are divided; that the native peoples will never be strong until there is unity among them'.

The *amakholwa* and the Royal house wanted to instil ethnic pride that would lead to self-reliance. Furthermore, this group was more moderate and sought non-radical ways to save the black people. As the amaZulu were losing power due to colonialism, Inkatha kaZulu hoped to bring back the dignity of the kingship; hence the recognition of the king. In understanding the first leaders of the liberation movements, one needs to understand their contexts through sympathetic reading. Almost all the ANC leaders were criticised at some point about their policies, philosophies or strategies. When reading Dube, people should be able to understand his worldview, which is unlike the worldview today.

Marks (1975) opines that there were several ambiguities in Dube's career and these may have made people understand him in various ways. Additionally, Marks declares that, although people should not over-emphasise Booker T. Washington's influence on Dube, they shared many similar beliefs. Hughes (2011:446) postulates that several studies have explored Dube's life and found it wanting:

> Walshe judged his presidency of the ANC (1912–1917) as probably one of the least successful of his many positions; Hunt Davis thought

that he rather too enthusiastically embraced the compromising ideas of Booker T. Washington; and Marable concluded that his political style was, in the end, a disservice to the freedom struggle.

Few ANC leaders did not have critics. A.B. Xuma, James Moroka, Selope Thema and Chief Albert Luthuli all had critics who opposed how they led the African National Congress (Roux 1972; Nthali 2019). Of these leaders, Luthuli, who was also Dube's protégé, was usually criticised for his non-violent approach and being constrained by spirituality (Couper 2012; Vinson 2018). Sympathetic reading would unmask Dube's acumen as a leader despite the ambiguities that some may highlight. Scholars reading Dube's work need to be aware of the various nuances as they try to understand the history behind Dube the intellectual, the African Christian and leader.

Dube's role as philosopher need to be broadened as debates need to reveal his thoughts. Firstly, he was among the first missionary educated blacks in South Africa to underscore the need for African unity, probably something he learnt from the fathers of Pan-Africanism in the United States. Later, scholars on the African continent such as Nkrumah (1963), Nyerere (1968) and Diop (1996) would be part of this call for a unified Africa. Dube strongly believed in the idea of Africa for the Africans (Marable 1976). During the First World War he was involved in a parley with the Natal government when he argued that Africans should have political control of South Africa (Couper 2012). He was detained for this utterance. He was also rebuked by the American Board for supporting indigenous rights. At the time there was the rise of Ethiopianism in South Africa, which saw the rise of church leaders such as Nehemiah Tile and Isaiah Shembe. Here we see a man whose incipient decolonial ideas shook the colonialists. His involvement in the promulgation of the *Native Land Act in 1913* (Roux 1972:88) showed how much he saw the importance of fighting for land rights for the Africans. Even as a Christian, Dube maintained that the Africans were duty bound to influence the legislative processes that affected them, for the Bible demanded this (Couper 2012). In fact, Dube's supportive opinion pieces in *Ilanga laseNatal* of the tax rebellion led by Bambatha kaManciza caused the colonial authorities to put him in their radar and he was considered aggressive by the British government (Higgs 2011).

Secondly, Dube was among the first in the SANNC to preach non-racialism, which was to be the cornerstone of the Freedom Charter drafted by

the Congress of the People in 1956. His philosophy highlighted the need to combine Western education and indigenous knowledges. Again, decades later, the argument by decolonial scholars would be similar, and that is the importance of ecology of knowledges. Again Wa Thiong'o drew this idea when he came with his globalectics, which refers to wholeness, interconnected, equality of potentiality of parts, tension and motion (Wa Thiong'o 2012).

Methodology

There are few primary sources that reflect Dube's works. In fact, many historians have found it curious that nothing exists, including speeches, notes and diaries. Dube is one of the least written-about leaders of the African National Congress. This is ironical, considering that he was the first President of the SANNC, the forerunner of the ANC. As a result of the paucity of his work, this article relies on secondary material describing his life and times. It was critical to briefly examine the thinking of the American Booker T. Washington whom he met and whose philosophy he embraced, including reconciliatory approaches between whites and blacks, as well as the need to free people through peaceful means, rather than violence as well as the need for self-reliance and the improvement of black lives through education (Harris 1974; Washington 1995a; Courau 2008).

Furthermore, like Washington, Dube emphasised education that empowered the black children with practical skills. The archival material of Washington was useful, because the reader could easily discern the influences of Washington (Courau 2008). Sympathetic reading and critical reading are crucial in understanding the life and times of John Langalibalele Dube. What was critical in this writing project was to examine diverse sources on Dube critically. Washington's primary data helped in understanding some of Dube's fundamental beliefs. Secondary data analysis has had its critics, because some claim that only experienced researchers will be able to utilise it well.

In some studies secondary data analysis is the only plausible way to gather data. Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) point out that for conceptual and substantive reasons, secondary data may be the only data available. Dube's story is social as well as political, and historians researching these areas usually rely on secondary material. Jaakkola (2020) contends that conceptual papers must be grounded in a clear research design where theories and their roles are explained and justified. Furthermore, Jaakkola posits that there are four

potential templates for conceptual papers. These are Theory Synthesis, Theory Adaptation, Typology and Model. Whilst in this article not all these are utilised, there is analytical rigor which focuses on the aspects that made Dube who he was.

Good conceptual papers also need the rigour found in well-crafted empirical papers. In this article there is use of theory synthesis as fresh arguments are generated about Dube and his leadership of the Congress. As evident above, there are many assumptions about Dube and researchers constantly need to conduct robust research to verify them. In robust studies claims should be proven on adequate grounds and should be of sufficient significance to make a worthwhile contribution to knowledge (Hisrchheim 2008 in Jaakkola 2020). Researchers should view the conceptual papers as part of research that could lead to new knowledge as well. The following section examines Dube's Pan-African ideals.

John Dube Negotiating with Pan-African Ideals

As discussed above, Dube was a Christianised black person, an *ikholwa* who displayed several contradictions for his times. Being *ikholwa*, he took it upon himself as an educated middle-class person to take a leading role in the advancement of his people. In his struggle for justice he underscored two things: human rights and the unity of his people. When we negotiate reading about his life we get to understand that the predecessor of the ANC, the SANNC, was not as volatile as what became of the ANC under the presidency of Chief Albert Luthuli when the military wing, Umkhonto Wesizwe, was established in 1961. In fact, the ANC became more vibrant and confrontational in the 1940s after the formation of the Youth League (Roux 1972; ANC n.d.). Yet Dube was always consistent about black unity and hence Pan-Africanism appealed to him. Washington inspired Dube and when he was in America he followed Washington and listened to some of his lectures. Washington supported Black Nationalism and racial pride and maintained that, the more black people achieved educational qualifications, the more racial pride they had (Marable 1974; Courau 2008). Like many of his contemporaries, Washington was an active Pan-Africanist who opposed the atrocities practised by colonisers in Africa. In one biography, *The Making of a Pan-Africanist*, away from the public glare, Washington explains his disgust at what the murderer Leopold did in his domination of the Congo (Wright 2015).

The Pan-Africanists in North America and the Caribbean wanted to forge unity among people of African descent and Dube learnt from this experience. The establishment of the newspaper, *Ilanga laseNatal* in 1903, was a turning point in Dube's career, especially in furthering black aspirations (Roux 1972; SAHO n.d.). *Ilanga laseNatal* became part of the project of black resistance against white domination. The newspaper sought to highlight the black struggles as it entrenched unity among the black population (Roux 1972; *New Nation* 1988c). The role of the paper was to be a boon to Pan-Africanism when one looked at the ideals of forming a black front against white domination. In fact, the first black-run newspapers played a critical role in the conscientisation of the people for political consciousness. The very first one was *Imvo Zabantsundu* (The Black Viewpoint), which was started in 1884 by Tengo Jabavu to express black views for black readers. Newspapers that followed 50 years later aspired to build on *Imvo*'s ideals and bring some form of national consciousness among black people. Dube's *Ilanga* was formed almost the same time with Solomon Plaatjie's *Koranta Ea Becuana* (Newspaper of the Batswana) in 1901, and Levi Khomo's *Leihlo La Babathso* (The Native Eye) in 1903. All these newspapers played a critical role in unifying the oppressed by demonstrating the critical views of the black population across the country (Roux 1972). In fact, many critics have argued that these early black newspapers were critical in the formation of the SANNC in 1912 (*New Nation* 1988c). After its formation in 1912, the SANNC decided to establish its own voice and the queen of Swaziland, Labotsibeni Mdluli, assisted Pixley kaIsaka Seme and Daniel Letanka, provided financial support when the first issue of *Abantu-Batho* was sold in the streets of South Africa (Limb 2012). In fact, *Abantu-Batho* incorporated Letanka's *Matsoalle* (The Friend) and Msane's *Umlomo Wabantu* (Mouthpiece of the People). The African nationalism espoused by Dube was reflected in these newspapers and their role in Pan-African ideals is unequivocal. For example, Roux (1972:112) writes about *Abantu-Batho*, 'It popularised various national slogans at different periods: "Vuka Afrika!" ("Wake up Afrika") and later "Mayibuy'iAfrika!" ("Let Africa Come Back")'. These newspapers were all intent on raising the political consciousness of black people and hence promoting African nationalism.

Roux (1972) claims that Dube's *Ilanga laseNatal* played a vital role in the 'Native political movement'. For his trouble he was incarcerated by the government of the day for an article on the Bambatha Rebellion. From the article that caused a stir was this paragraph:

> A remarkable thing […] is that the four troopers who were killed were all in the firing party at the execution of the twelve men at Richmond. What does this mean? Call it a remarkable coincidence if you please, but we regard it as having a very deep meaning, whether we are superstitious or not (Roux 1972:100).

It was not difficult to see Ilanga's objective, because many of its subjects included political developments, issues of social interest, and government policies such as poll tax as well as land ownership. *Ilanga* was used by many readers to resist the government's oppressive measures against black citizens. SAHO (n.d.) also contends about *Ilanga laseNatal*:

> Ilanga expanded the Washingtonian ideas of self-sufficiency and self-segregation. Dube used his newspaper to expose injustices and evil deeds from all quarters and made black people aware of their rights and privileges [….] At one stage Dube was accused by the authorities for inciting resentment against the government.

The above demonstrates in various ways how Dube used the written word to sustain a struggle for the freedom of the native. In *Abantu-Batho*, Dube's articles moved for unity between black people and coloureds. He also succeeded in securing annual meetings between the Congress and the African Political Organisation (APO) which was led by Dr Abdullah Abdurahman. These are some of the initiatives undertaken by Dube in his attempt to highlight the Pan-African ideals and unity. These ideals were, of course, linked to his desire to promote self-reliant Africans.

Building Self-Reliant Africans

Booker T. Washington's book *Up From Slavery* (1995b) which was mainly on self-reliance, inspired Dube; hence, later he would write his own book entitled, *Isitha Somuntu Nguye Uqobo Lwakhe* (A Man is his Worst Wnemy) (1922). Apart from self-reliance, the book preached inner change for Dube had realised that black people were insincere to one another and desperately needed over-coming divisiveness (SAHO n.d.; Your Dictionary n.d.). Dube was to get an honorary doctorate from the University of South Africa in 1936 for this work (SAHO n.d.). Dube emphasised self-reliance, proposing that black people

needed to start economic ventures so as to be respected globally. Dube's belief in black people's self-reliance was to be seen when he showed interest and wrote the biography of Isaiah Shembe, a popular prophet in Zululand at the time. Dube was fascinated by Isaiah Shembe's self-help initiatives for Africans (Cabrita 2012). The prophet Isaiah Shembe was the founder of a huge iBandla lamaNazarethe the largest indigenous church in 1910. The prophet had an immense interest in the amaZulu culture and traditions. Although there would be challenges in completing Shembe's story, initially, Dube was praiseworthy of the prophet's cleanliness and diligent nature (Gunner 1991). In Shembe Dube saw and economic and social role model (Cabrita 2011). Some of Shembe's qualities were virtues Dube learnt during his stay in America, especially with the influence of Booker T. Washington.

Shortly after completing his high school career, Dube's mentor, Booker T. Washington, went back to Hampton in 1880 to teach. He later headed a new school in Tuskegee, Alabama. This school trained black teachers, farmers and skilled workers (Wright 2015). Tuskegee also became influential in the political education of African Americans. Washington maintained that the blacks should enhance their education as they learn the useful trades and invest in business. He also underscored that it was through hard work that black people could prove to whites the critical contribution they had made to the United States of America. However, he was heavily criticised for stating that as black people tried to improve themselves through education, they should forget about the demands for a free vote and ending racial segregation (Washington 1995a; Wright 2015). He believed that diligence would be an adequate vision that would lead to equality. Yet it was Washington's skills approach to education that fascinated Dube. W.E.B. Du Bois (1995), his contemporary, maintained, though, that Washington's model of education sought to prepare black children to be of service to white America. In fact, in his most publicised speech that he delivered in 1895, Washington pointed out clearly that blacks in America should principally concern themselves with practising vocational training so as to be able to secure employment (Washington 1995a). These were more important than fighting against racial segregation. Dube was clearly influenced by these ideas when it came to education. Even the Pan-Africanist from the Caribbean, Marcus Garvey, was fascinated with the positive aspects of Washington's Tuskegee Institute. One of these positive aspects was the need for blacks to uphold black pride and self-help whilst building the community's economic muscle.

Dube went on to inform Washington in 1897 that he was interested in entrenching the same industrial education for his people in South Africa. His allegiance to Washington's ideas was clearly demonstrated in education as a tool for self-reliance and subsequent liberation (SAHO n.d.). Marable (1974: 401) writes about Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee model:

> 'This same kind of educational training is needed for the African Christians', Dube argued. 'The times and conditions require it'. The educated black mind could accept the 'self-help' doctrine, the South African black man was '[eager] to learn' and his 'natural independence' made him 'superior material to take on an energetic Christian civilization'.

When Dube returned to South Africa he sought to instil self-reliance among his people in several ways. This was critical in an Africa that was ravaged by colonialism and the denigration of the oppressed black people. Decades later, leaders across Africa stressed self-reliance and among those were Zambia's first president, Kenneth Kaunda, Tanzania's first president, Julius Nyerere, and Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah. Kaunda used his African Humanism philosophy to preach self-reliance and hard work (Tostensen 1982). Kaunda's African Humanism was based on Christian principles and became official in 1967. This philosophy clearly stated that all Zambians should strive for hard work to build the country. In this humanist approach Kaunda denounced laziness (Kaunda 1966). Several obstacles hindered the full progress of African Humanism, but the plan was clear. When Nyerere of Tanzania introduced *Ujamaa,* he also shared Kaunda's sentiments and John L. Dube's big dream for South Africa. From 1967, Nyerere introduced *Ujaama* as he tried to develop self-reliance among his people to build the *New Nation*. *Ujamaa* is a Kiswahili word which means 'familyhood'. Nyerere (1968) explained the concept as follows:

> The word *Ujamaa* was chosen for special reasons. First, it is an African word and thus emphasizes the African-ness of the policies we intend to follow. Second, its literal meaning is 'family-hood', so that it brings to the mind of our people the idea of mutual involvement in the family as we know it. By the use of the word *Ujamaa*, therefore, we state that for us socialism involves building on the foundation of our past, and

> building also to our own design. We are not importing a foreign ideology into Tanzania and trying to smother our distinct social patterns with it.

Like Dube before him, Nyerere wanted people to use their hands to support themselves and be self-sufficient. Nyerere sought to see all the villages in Tanzania working together and cultivating the soil; hence, he referred to this as African socialism (Vilby 2007). Kaunda added to this and, like Dube, he believed not only in God, but also in non-violence. Kanu (2014) points out that Kaunda emphasised self-reliance, education, non-violent resistance and hard work in the process of liberation (Kaunda 1966). Kaunda sought a kind of socialism through his humanism. Like these two giants, Nkrumah underscored self-reliance as not only an antidote to colonialism but as the ideology of a new Africa. The Convention People's Party (CPP) document (2016) explicates,

> Nkrumaism simply means self-reliance, [that the] African is capable of managing his own affairs. The values CPP stands for or the guiding principles of Nkrumaism today are those which have guided it throughout its existence. Social justice, Pan-Africanism, Self-determination, African Personality, Anti-Imperialism.

Nkrumah had a bigger vision of attaining a unified Pan-Africa where the African would be self-reliant. Nkrumah desired Ghanaians and all African states to be able to lessen Western influence and domination as Africans built power and independence (Nkrumah 1963; Nkrumah 1973).

These African philosophers followed who wanted to use education for self-reliance and self-reliance for economic and social freedom, followed Dube's footsteps and resuscitated his work. Throughout the decades, a few leaders of the African National Congress such as Xuma and Seme emulated Dube's vision of self-reliance, because this is the cornerstone of freedom. Xuma and were also likened to Dube's thought, especially Xuma who, like Dube, was once attached to Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute (Berger 2001). Seme also joined Dube, his protégé, in America reading Washington's work (Saunders 2012). The visionary prowess of Dube was also captured in the Freedom Charter, a bible of the oppressed that expressed the aspirations of the people in South Africa. There was no way that people who were not empowered and self-reliant would be able to respond to and embrace

the clauses of the Freedom Charter. Written more than ten years after Dube's death, the Freedom Charter could only be meaningful if the oppressed were empowered to share these freedoms listed in the Charter. Yet, to achieve all these, the missionary-educated Dube had to deal with some form of utilising the ecology of knowledges and hence his philosophy included seeing freedom as a combination of modernity and traditional culture (Courau 2008).

Freedom, Civilisation and Traditional Culture: Dube's Dynamic Epistemology

Due to his rather pacifist approach, Booker T. Washington was referred to as 'the Great Accommodator'. This was because his critics believed that he was too accommodating to white interests. In his famous Atlanta Compromise Speech in 1895, he narrated a story of how a lost ship at sea sighted another boat in the middle of nowhere (Washington 1995a). The lost ship's passengers were dying from thirst and they signalled that they desperately needed water. The answer from the other vessel was that they should cast down a bucket where they were. They pleaded three more times and the answer was still the same from the other vessel. Booker T. Washington explained in his speech:

> The captain of the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River. To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbour, I would say: 'Cast down your bucket where you are' – cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded (History Matters n.d.).

This speech exposes Washington's gradualism and the need to search for reconciliatory means in mending race relations. Gradualism meant the denunciation of violence to achieve change; it supported the concentration on blacks elevating themselves through hard work and patience (Harris 1974; Washington 1995a). Washington suggested that black people should start at the bottom, get education, then patience, and eventually advancement would come (Harris 1974; Du Bois 2018). Dube imitated this approach hence many

were to call him a conservative. Yet, this conservativism does not mean that he did not observe other aspects of society such as culture. In fact, what made Dube an inspirational leader was his ability to work with the amaZulu Royal family and win their trust. His contribution to culture can be seen in his writing projects. His books include *Insila kaShaka* (Shaka's Body Servant) and *UShembe, Lives of Zulu Rulers* (and this included King Dinuzulu). Dube never forgot where he came from, including the story of his brave grandfather, Chief of the Qadi, Mqhawe, who was very powerful, a fact that was known by Shaka kaSenzangakhona. Mqhawe fought beside Shaka to defeat Zwide of the Ndwandwe. Dube spoke proudly about this history of his forefather (Hughes 2011).

Dube realised the need to recognise the indigenous culture, language and history. He was aware how Dingane displaced the Qadi clan to which he belonged, thus destroying the Qadi chiefdom. He could also recite the long list of Qadi chiefs: Njila, Bebe, Ngotoma, Silwane, Dube, Dabeka, Mqhawe, Mandlakayise (Hughes 2011). He was aware of his privileges as a child from this lineage of chiefs, but was even more aware of the role that the *kholwa* should play in his later life as a Christian convert. The colonialists, though, wanted their own converts to be isolated from heathen influence. The colonialists supported Christianised pseudo-tribalism and preferred Christian chiefs to be appointed, chiefs whose authority would be undisputed (Hughes 2011). Some argued that the new class of mission-educated Africans in Natal carried their conservative political traditions into the African National Congress in 1912 (*New Nation* 1988a). These educated *kholwa* maintained that they were entitled to equal rights with whites. Conversion was believed to mean freedom and civilisation. Dube is said to have found himself in the middle of Western and traditional influences. As a result of his mission education, he was able to read and write English and learn from Western knowledge. Yet mission education always sought to indoctrinate the students to make them despise traditional ways; hence, Dube also had inclinations of being critical of his native ways of life as a mature man.

Despite these contradictions between traditionalists and the *kholwa,* the converts started the liberation struggle in which people such as Dube were instrumental. The *amakholwa*'s calls for equal rights was perceived by many colonists as a call to arms. The *New Nation* (1988a) points out that the white colonists were very suspicious of *Amakholwa*. Dube was quoted as saying once, 'the reason that the Christian native has had a bad name (among whites)

… is that he does not submit to being treated as a dog' (*New Nation* 1988a:26). Some of the white administrators tended to accuse missionary-educated blacks of being responsible for sowing a feeling of superiority among the black converts. In 1907, a police commissioner in Natal opined,

> Discontent and rebellion are the only natural consequences resulting from education aided by missionary influence, which tends to inculcate an equality between black and white. This dangerous doctrine in Natal, and must result in discontent in the subject race (*New Nation* 1988a:26).

Therefore, there was the realisation from the colonists that missionary education opened the eyes of the natives and thus many wanted to challenge the colonial administration. It was the mission-educated people who started organisations that would mobilise the people to stand up against colonialism and apartheid later. Dube thrived under these circumstances as he launched his career as a politician and a voice of the oppressed. Even though he was opposed to the actions of the traditional amaZulu in the Bambatha Rebellion, he was opposed to the colonists' actions when they incarcerated King Dinuzulu. Dube was always conscious of his African past and what Dinuzulu meant for the amaZulu. The Natal colonial government wanted to close *Ilanga laseNatal*, as the newspaper was the object of suspicion (SAHO n.d.). Dube, though, could not be alienated from his dream of building African nationalism.

John Dube, Spirituality and African Nationalism

The question of spirituality in the early ANC appeared to be a *sine qua non* for its vision (Masutha 1997; Nthali 2019). When Dube became the first president of the SANNC in 1912, he was fulfilling his ideals as a nationalist. In 1899 he followed Washington who helped establish the first Pan-African conference in London. Marable (1974) pronounces that although Washington differed from W.E.B. Du Bois, they concurred in endorsing African/black self-determination and education. Washington was also a proponent of racial pride and black power, and these influenced Marcus Garvey, who also hoped to establish a school that would follow Washington's Tuskegee model. Some critics argue that spirituality and the missionary influence were an obstacle to the liberation struggle. For example, Couper (2012) writes how Luthuli was 'bound by faith'.

As previously stated, Dube was the son of a pastor and he also became a pastor. In fact, the Christian influence was overwhelming in many early leaders of the ANC (Nthali 2019; Mavuso 2020). Apart from Dube, Z.R. Mahabane was a Methodist pastor. He was the general secretary from 1936 to 1949, while Rev. Calata, who was the General Secretary between 1936 and 1949, was an Anglican Church minister. In addition, The 9th ANC president, Albert Luthuli, was a staunch preacher of the United Congregational Church of South Africa (UCCSA). In a speech delivered by the 14th ANC President, Cyril Ramaphosa in Kimberley in 2020, he declared that the ANC cannot divorce itself from the church (ANC 2020). Furthermore, Ramaphosa added that intellectuals from the church were stakeholders in the ANC and without church leaders ad traditional leaders the ANC would not exist (ANC 2020).

Walshe (1969) contends that political consciousness in South Africa originated from Christian missions, which also helped to develop a non-racial constitution in the Cape. In fact, Walshe argues that the African political consciousness was nurtured in mission schools. Furthermore, Walshe posits that the African ideals were revolutionised as a result of this Christian education. It was through education that tribal integrity, including the customs and traditions, diminished under the influence of Christian education. In fact, the Christian religion was seen by many 'civilised' black, middle-class people as a belief system that exalted black people and made them one with white people (*New Nation* 1988a). Politicisation among the educated black elite was through religion and religion led to some emancipation that made the elite feel closer to the white world (*New Nation* 1988a). At the time it was more strategic to turn to the church to lure membership for organising for political change. In fact, Dube appealed to his English friends in Natal to work closely with the erudite AmaZulu, because that would lead to more progress. Walshe (1969: 591) contends,

> These were the commonplace utterances of the new elite. Political matters appeared as moral issues, Christianity had social implications, and brotherhood meant a shared if racially diverse society. Later, when new political organisations came into being in the first decade of the twentieth century, their membership was made up almost entirely of mission-educated Africans. As Martin Luthuli pointed out to the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903-5, the Natal Native Congress did not represent the bulk of Natives, memberships being

confined in practice to 'Christian and civilised' Natives.

Even with the ill intents of Christianity this religion was able to give rise to Ethiopianism, a religion that sought to promote Africa and Africans. Decades after Dube's departure the church played a critical role in the liberation of the oppressed. A new group of black students inspired by Black Theology were intent on using it as a tool for liberation in the late 1960s under the wing of the Black Consciousness Movement (Biko 1987).

Conclusion

From this article one can see that a critical reading of John Langalibalele Dube reveals his purpose as one of the forerunners of African freedom, social justice and nationalism. His ideas and philosophy, helped in laying the foundation for the democratic government that took came into power in South Africa in 1994. Anonymous (1982:23) summarises the life of Dube well when she points out:

> He died believing in racial equality; demanding justice and striving for African unity. These were revolutionary goals directly challenging the basis of white power and he believed in this to the end of his life. He fought all his life for the unity and liberation of the Africans- a unity and liberation he saw as coming through education, through working with sympathetic whites, through adoption of Christian values and, more importantly, through political organisation under the umbrella of the ANC.

Some writers have highlighted that Dube was an unpredictable leader, who turned from being radical to moderate in his later years (Roux 1972; Marks 1975; Anonymous 1982; Hughes 2011). Hughes (2011) narrates how many other critics have spurned Dube, stating that he became a reactionary who ended up being politically emasculated. Yet one wonders how he could have been radical and violent when the SANNC was not a violent movement. Dube was a magnanimous leader who was a giant not only of his time, but also years later as his positive values, ideas and vision influenced other leaders. He was a philosopher and a worthy African intellectual. He believed in the amaZulu tradition but the Christian God was his aegis. He cherished reconciliatory approaches with the coloniser but understood the need for his

people to fight for their freedom and African nationalism.

When he became President of the SANNC, he unequivocally accepted a leadership role to liberate his people. In his own way he became a revolutionary who wanted to challenge colonialism and white domination. Without critical reading of the man, his times and his thoughts, readers may miss the opportunity to understand his equanimity and belief in social justice, democracy and unity. Dube's agenda for black liberation was very clear: he sought black unity through self-independence and unity. He also understood the importance of organising the oppressed people in various ways, using the church, the black publications, history and propagation of equality. After critically examining Dube, the intellectual few can disagree with Madiba when he paid homage to him, saluting the spirit of this first president, Madiba was giving feedback to the forerunner, the patriot, the man who fought against all obstacles, Mafukuzela. Madiba was acknowledging a leader who opened the road never travelled before. In conclusion, it is apt to close this article with Marks's (1975:180) quotation by Vil-Nkomo as cited from *Umteteli Wabantu* newspaper in 1946: 'This pure-bloodied Zulu … has revealed to the world at large that it is not quite true to say that the African is incompetent as far as achievement is concerned'.

References

ANC 2020 Cyril Ramaphosa, Address by ANC President during the ANC 108th Anniversary Celebrations, Kimberley, 11 January. Available at: https://www.polity.org.za/article/anc-cyril-ramaphosa-address-by-anc-president-during-the-anc-108th-anniversary-celebrations-kimberley-110120-2020-01-13; https://doi.org/10.36548/jitdw.2020.4 (Accessed on 02 December 2020.)

ANC n.d. A Brief History of the ANC. Available at: https://www.anc1912.org.za/brief-history-anc; (Accessed on 12 June 2020.)

Anonymous 1982. Pages from History: John Langalibalele Dube. *Sechaba* January 1982: 18 – 23.

Berger, I. 2001. An African American 'Mother of the Nation': Madie Hall Xuma in South Africa, 1940 – 1963. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27,3: 547 – 566. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430120074581

Biko, S. 1987. *I Write What I Like*. Oxford: Heinemann.

Cabrita, J. 2012. Patriot and Prophet: John Dube's 1936 Biography of the South African Churchman Isaiah Shembe. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38, 3: 433 – 450. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2012.702073

Convention People's Party 2016. *Nkrumaism*. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0 (Accessed on 14 July 2020.)

Corrigan, P.T. 2012. Attending to the Act of Reading: Critical Reading, Contemplative Reading, and Active Reading. Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory. *Criticism and Pedagogy* 63,64: 146 – 173.

Couper, S. 2012. *Albert Luthuli: Bound by Faith*. Scottsville: UKZN Press.

Courau, R.P. 2008. *States of Nomadism, Conditions of Diaspora: Studies in Writing between South Africa and the United States, 1913 – 1936*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

Diop, C.A. 1996. *Towards the African Renaissance: Essays in Culture and Development, 1946 – 1960*. London: Karnak House.

Dube, J.L. 1922. *Isitha somuntu nguye uqobo lwakhe*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter.

Du Bois, W.E.B. 2018. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Penguin Books. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv346v0g

EPPRS. n.d. Critical Reading and Critical Thinking. Available at: https://www.polyu.edu.hk›HdBk_Ch2_July31 (Accessed on 2 July 2021.)

Gunner, L. 1991. Testimonies of Dispossession and Repossession: Writing about the South African Prophet Isaiah Shembe. *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 73,3: 204 – 207. https://doi.org/10.7227/BJRL.73.3.6

Harris, T.E. 1974. The Black Leader's Rhetorical Dilemma: An Analysis of the Debate between WEB du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the New York State Speech Association. 14 April. New York.

Higgs, H. 2012. Higgs on Hughes, 'The First President: A Life of John L. Dube, Founding President of the ANC. *Book Review H-S Africa* September 2012. Available at: https://networks.h-net.org/node/10670/reviews/11247/higgs-hughes-first-president-life-john-l-dube-founding-president-anc

(Accessed on 12 November 2020.)
History Matters. n.d. *Booker T. Washington Delivers the 1895 Atlanta Compromise Speech*. Available at: http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/39/ (Accessed on 24 November 2020.)
Hughes, H. 2001. Doubly Elite: Exploring the Life of John Langalibalele Dube. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27,3: 445 – 458.
Hughes, H. 2011. *First President: A Life of John Dube, Founding President of the ANC*. Auckland Park: Jacana. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430120074536
Jaakkola, E. 2020. Designing Conceptual articles: Four Approaches. *AMS Review* 10:18 – 26. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0 (Accessed on 11 November 2020.)
Kaunda, K.D. 1966. *A Humanist in Africa*. London: Longmans Green.
Khumalo, V. 2012. Book Review. Heather Hughes, *First President: A Life of John L. Dube, Founding President of the ANC. Transformation* 2012: 159 – 161. https://doi.org/10.1353/trn.2012.0002
Limb, P. (ed.). 2012. '*Front Matter'. The People's Paper. A Centenary History and Anthology of Abantu - Batho*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. https://doi.org/10.18772/22012095713
Marable, W.M. 1974. Booker T. Washington and African Nationalism. *Phylon* 35,4: 398 – 406. https://doi.org/10.2307/274742
Marable, W.M. 1976. *African Nationalist: The Life of John Langalibalele Dube*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Maryland, Maryland.
Marks, S. 1975. The Ambiguities of Dependence: John L. Dube of Natal. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1,2: 162 – 180. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057077508707931
Masutha, N. 1997. *Spirituality in the African National Congress Struggle for Liberation in South Africa: 1912 – 1996*. Unpublished Master's dissertation, University of Cape Town, South Africa.
Mavuso, S. 2020. The ANC cannot Divorce itself from the Church, says Ramaphosa. *IOL*. Available at: https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/watch-the-anc-cannot-divorce-itself-from-the-church-says-ramaphosa-40269967 (Accessed on 14 November 2020.)

Nachmias, C.F. & D. Nachmias. 1992. *Secondary Data Analysis Research Methods in Social Science*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers.

New Nation 1988a. Kholwa Politics in Natal. *New Nation, New History* 1: 26 – 28.

New Nation 1988b. The First Inkatha. *New Nation, New History* 1: 27-28.

New Nation 1988c. 150 Years of Black Press. *New Nation, New History* 1: 129-130.

Nkrumah, K. 1963. *Africa must Unite*! New York: Praeger.

Nkrumah, K. 1973. *Towards Colonial Freedom: Africa in the Struggle against World Imperialism*. Bedford: Panaf Books.

Nthali, M.M. 2019. *The ANC Chaplaincy: A Religio-political Perspective*. Unpublished Master's dissertation. University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Nyerere, J.K. 1968. *Freedom and Socialism.* London: OUP.

Rosenwasser, D. & J. Stephen. 2011. *Writing Analytically*. Boston: Wadsworth.

Roux, E. 1972. *Time Longer than Rope*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

Saunders, C. 2012. Pixley Seme and Abantu-Batho. In Limb, P. (ed.): *The People's Paper: A Centenary History and Anthology of Abantu-Batho*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

South African History Online [SAHO]. n.d. *John Langalibalele Dube*. Available at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/john-langalibalele-dube (Accessed on 26 November 2020.)

Southall, R. 2014. The African Middle Class in South Africa 1910 – 1994. *ERSA Working Paper 451*. Economic Research Southern Africa (ERSA). National Treasury of South Africa. https://doi.org/10.1080/20780389.2014.955275

Thomas, J.C. 2018. *Give a Sympathetic Reading*. Available at: https://petersironwood.com/2018/03/29/give-a-sympathetic-reading (Accessed on 14 October 2020.)

Tostensen, A. 1982. *Dependence and Collective Self-reliance in Southern Africa*. Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

Vilby, K. 2007. *Independent? Tanzania's Challenges since Uhuru*. Dar es Salaam: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

Vinson, R.T. 2018. *Albert Luthuli*. Athens: Ohio University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv224txq0

Walshe, A.P. 1969. The Origins of African Political Consciousness in South

Africa. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 7,4: 583 – 610. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00018851

Wa Thiong'o, N. 2012. *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Washington, B.T. [1895] 1995a. The Atlanta Exposition Address. In Hord, F.L. & J.S. Lee (eds.): *'I am because we are': Readings in Black Philosophy*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts.

Washington, B.T. 1995b. *Up from Slavery*. New York: Dover Publications.

Weinberger, D. 2015. Sympathetic Knowledge. *KM World*. Available at: https://www.kmworld.com/Articles/Columns/Perspective-on-Knowledge/Sympathetic-Knowledge-105751.aspx#:~:text=It's%20a%20negotiation%20in%20which,way%20of%20moving%20through%20it (Accessed on 11 November 2020.)

Wright, T. 2015. *Booker T. Washington and Africa: The Making of a Pan Africanist*. Cape Town: Global Africa Press.

Your Dictionary. n.d. *John Langalibalele Dube*. Available at: https://biography.yourdictionary.com/john-langalibalele-dube (Accessed on 26 November 2020.)

Professor Vuyisile Msila
Public Leadership Studies
Research and Knowledge hub
Thabo Mbeki African School of Public and International Affairs
University of South Africa
Pretoria
South Africa
msivuy@gmail.com