

Citation for the Honorary Degree for Dr. Archie Mafeje @ the University of Cape Town. Written by the university orator, Francis Wilson.

ARCHIE MAFEJE

For many people, the name of Archie Mafeje will be known best for the fact that he never returned to UCT to take up the Senior Lectureship to which he was duly appointed by the University Council, forty years ago. We shall return to that appointment in a moment but, first it is important to state clearly that we honour him today, not for what he did not do but for who he was and for his achievements as one of Africa's greatest social scientists.

Who then was Archie Mafeje? Born in 1936 in Engcobo where his father was headmaster of the primary school. His mother also was a teacher and Archie was sent to Healdtown which educated many of the country's most important leaders including both Robert Sobukwe and Nelson Mandela before it was destroyed by apartheid's Bantu Education policies. At Healdtown Archie was particularly influenced by the legendary history teacher, Livingstone Mqotsi.

After a year at Fort Hare he moved to UCT in 1956 where he started studying Zoology but soon moved across the campus to major in Social Anthropology in which he obtained a 1st. class Honours before going on to write his Master's thesis. But he also learned a lot outside the classroom for in those years ----of imposition of Bantu & Coloured education; segregation of Universities & the battle for academic freedom; Sharpeville; Langa march; banning of the ANC & PAC; and armed response from at least four different political groupings---- UCT was a cauldron of political discussion much of it centred on Freedom Square, the patch of lawn just outside this hall, next to the Arts block. There, the theoreticians of the left--- Africanists; Marxists; Trotskyists; Communists; even a few Liberals, one or two hardy Conservatives and all sorts in-between----honed their analytical skills in fierce debate with each other.

Archie emerged from all this not only with two solid degrees but also with a passionate concern for politics. His Unity Movement background gave him a life-long capacity for incisive analysis; a deep suspicion of the state, particularly of the Stalinist variety; and a cheerful willingness to be politically incorrect and to be a trenchant critic of anybody, whom he suspected of any kind of racist or imperialist thinking. Nor did he suffer fools gladly. This meant that he was not always appreciated in the liberation movement (or by academic colleagues at the receiving end of his sharp criticism) despite always seeing himself as revolutionary intellectual. He was always a free-thinking spirit: never a party-man. As a student he was also hounded by the Security Police and in August 1963 was arrested and sent in handcuffs, by train, to Flagstaff to be tried for addressing an illegal gathering there. Fortunately he was only fined & thus able to return to Cape Town, although under the ever watchful eyes of the police.

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From UCT Archie Mafeje went to Cambridge to write a Ph.D. based on field work in rural Uganda. Then, instead of coming back to UCT, as he hoped, he had to spend the next 30 years in exile.. Three of his most important bases were at universities in Dar Es Salaam¹ and Cairo² and at CODESRIA³ in Dakar. In addition he spent time as a visiting scholar in Zambia, Zimbabwe (SAPES)⁴ and Namibia. Beyond Africa his main base was at the Institute for Social Studies in the Hague where he held a chair⁵ for some years; with further links at the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies in Uppsala and CROP⁶ in Bergen. His deep knowledge of agriculture in Africa also meant that he worked extensively for the FAO⁷ in Rome.

As a teacher, he was more interested in students learning to think for themselves than in passing exams. Young students in Cairo could be asked, as their first assignment, to write an essay on “Cattle and Class in Botswana”⁸. He himself was widely read in a number of disciplines and wrote extremely well. Books, articles and pamphlets flowed from his pen for nearly forty years, starting in 1963 with a book, co-authored with Monica Wilson, on Langa⁹. In the same year he handed in his MA Thesis on Leadership and Change in the Transkei (a Bantustan in the making) out of which came an article on a Chief Visits Town¹⁰. This was followed, in 1967, by *The Role of the Bard in a Contemporary African Community*.¹¹ The empirical work continued. His Ph.D. research yielded, in 1969, a study of *Large-Scale Farming in Buganda*¹²

A highly influential critique, *The Ideology of Tribalism*¹³, was followed in 1971 by two articles on *The Fallacy of Dual Economies*¹⁴ and *What is Historical Explanation?*¹⁵ Then, in the mid-1970s, came three chapters in books: one on *The Land Question and Agrarian Revolution in Buganda*¹⁶ and one on *Religion, Class*

¹ Head of the Department of Sociology, University of Dar Es Salaam

² Chair of Sociology at the American University, Cairo.

³ Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa

⁴ Southern African Political and Economic Series Trust

⁵ Professor of Anthropology and Sociology of Development

⁶ The Comparative Research Programme on Poverty

⁷ Food & Agricultural Organisation

⁸ Alexactus T Kaure on www.namibian.com.na on 27th.April, 2007

⁹ Monica Wilson & Archie Mafeje, Langa, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1963

¹⁰ Archie Mafeje, A Chief Visits Town, Jopurnal of Local Administration Overseas, 2:88-89, 1963

¹¹ Archie Mafeje, The Role of the Bard in a Contemporary African Community, J.of Modern African Languages, v.6, part II, 1966

¹² Society for Applied Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1969

¹³ Journal of Modern African Studies, v.9, no.2, 1970

¹⁴ East African Journal, v.7,no.9, 1971

¹⁵ African Religion Research, University of California, Los Angeles, 1971.

¹⁶ In W.Arens (ed), A Century of Change in Eastern Africa, The Hague, Mouton, 1976

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and Ideology in South Africa.¹⁷ The third ranged more widely and focused on *Neo-Colonialism, State Capitalism or Revolution*¹⁸. At the same time he was beginning to worry more about his own discipline and in the Canadian Journal of African Studies he published, *The Problem of Anthropology in Historical Perspective*¹⁹. It was a theme that he was to pursue for the rest of his life: sixteen years later he was writing on the problems of the indigenisation of the social sciences in Africa²⁰ and then eventually a monograph on *Anthropology and Independent Africans*²¹ Mafeje relished nothing so much as stirring debate and this was followed by *Debates & Rejoinders: Conversations and Confrontations with my Reviewers*.²² Meanwhile he was writing across a range of topics beyond anthropology: *Science Ideology and Development*²³ was followed by three articles on agriculture and rural poverty in Africa²⁴ whilst at the political end of the spectrum came *Studies in Imperialism*²⁵ and essays, *In search of an alternative*, on *Revolutionary Theory and Politics*²⁶. Also in the 1990s came a definitive analysis of Tribalism in the Oxford Companion to Politics of the World and a book, co-edited with Samir Radwan, on *Economic and Demographic Change in Africa*²⁷.

After 1994 Mafeje turned his mind to democracy. Papers on the theory of democracy and on the national question²⁸ were followed, by reflections on the role of the state in poverty reduction. “In reality”, he wrote, “what the African peoples, poor or not so poor, are faced with is a predatory state which is preoccupied with its own

¹⁷ M. West & M. Whisson (eds.), *Religion and Social Change in Southern Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1975

¹⁸ P. Gutkind & P. Waterman (eds.) *African Social Studies*, London, Heinemann, 1977.

¹⁹ *The Problem of Anthropology in Historical Perspective: an Inquiry into the Growth of Social Sciences*, Canadian Journal of African Studies, vol X, no.2, 1976

²⁰ *African Philosophical Projections and the Problem of the Indigenisation of Social Sciences in Africa*, SAPES Books, Harare, 1992.

²¹ *Codesria Monograph Series 4/96*, 1996

²² *African Sociological Review* v.2, no.2, 1998

²³ *Three Essays on Development Theory*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1978

²⁴ *African Agriculture the next 25 years*, *Africa Development* XII,2,1987; *African Households: Prospects of Agricultural Revival in sub-Saharan Africa*, CODESRIA, Working Paper, Dakar, 1991; *Dynamics of Rural Poverty in Africa*, FAO, Accra, 1991;

²⁵ *Studies in Imperialism: A Discourse in Methodology, Research Methods & Techniques*, Harare, 1986

²⁶ Sapes, Harare, 1992

²⁷ Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995

²⁸ *The National Question in South African Settler Societies*, Sapes, Harare, 1997

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survival. Therefore, any amelioration or transformation of the conditions of life in Africa presupposes the emergence of a democratic state.”²⁹

Archie Mafeje was deeply respected by scholars across the continent and beyond. Hailed, when he died, by South Africa’s Minister of Arts & Culture as “A pioneering intellectual powerhouse”³⁰, he was described by the Institute for Social Studies in the Hague as “One of the outstanding social scientists whom ISS has been honoured to have counted on its staff.”³¹ For the Executive Secretary of CODESRIA he was “A great pan-African, an outstanding scientist, a first rate debater, a frontline partisan in the struggle for social justice, and a gentleman of great humanitarian principles”³²

This then is the man, armed with a Cambridge Ph.D and a classic published urban study, whose appointment as a Senior Lecturer was rescinded by the university council after pressure from the apartheid government in 1968. This is also the man for whom in the early 1990’s we [& I include myself] at UCT all failed to provide the appropriate space to enable him to come home to teach and write as he so badly wanted to do.

Today the University of Cape Town has apologised for these sins of commission and omission with regard to Archie Mafeje whose family has graciously accepted the apology. In 1991 Archie Mafeje dedicated his pioneering book³³ on Central Africa to his wife Shahida and his son Xolani and his daughter Dana with these words:

“for our tribulations, triumphs and emancipation”.

Shahida El Baz and Dana (and her baby, Archie’s youngest grandson, Yassin) are with us from Cairo today and Xolani is here with his mother Nokwezi and his two sons, Lumko and Lungisa. So too are Archie’s two sisters Vuyiswa and Nandipha; his brother & sister-in-law, Mzwandile and Nomthunzi, and his brother-in-law, Marshall Swana. Also his landlady for many years in District Six, Mrs. Hendricks & her son Ganief who, as a youngster, took food to Archie in jail. We welcome the whole family, most warmly. It is a privilege for UCT to be able to share with you all the triumph of Archie Mafeje’s life and work; and to celebrate his huge intellectual contribution to emancipation in Africa.

²⁹ Francis Wilson, Nazneen Kanji & Einar Braathen (eds.) Poverty Reduction: What Role for the State in Today's Globalized Economy, Zed Books, London, 2001, p.25

³⁰ Chimurenga Online #12-13

³¹ Insitute of Social Studies. News. www.iss.nl

³² Adebayo Olukoshi, Executive Secretary of CODESRIA

³³ The Theory and Ethnography of African Social Formations: The Case of Interlacustrine Kingdoms, Codesria Book Series, London, 1991.