

D. Massey, *Under Protest: The Rise of Student Resistance at the University of Fort Hare*

Unisa Press, Pretoria, 2010

310 pp

ISBN 978-1-86888-542-8

R250.00

Despite its fame, Fort Hare and its history has remained relatively little-studied, its sources under-used. There have been some attempts: a memoir-history by 1950s lecturer Donovan Williams,⁸ some official histories,⁹ and theses,¹⁰ but they do not plumb Fort Hare's complex past from the perspective of students. Recently, however, there has been a student's memoir, by Nomsa Mazwai, *Sai Sai: Little Girl*.¹¹ Now Daniel Massey, who studied there in the 1990s and wrote an excellent Master's thesis on student politics,¹² has revised and published it in the Hidden Histories series.

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8. D. Williams, *A History of the University College of Fort Hare, South Africa, the 1950s: The Waiting Years* (E. Mellen, Lewiston, 2001).
 9. Notably A. Kerr, *Fort Hare 1915–48: The Evolution of an African College* (Shuter, Pietermaritzburg, 1968).
 10. Z. Ngwane, "The Politics of Campus and Community in South Africa: An Historical Historiography of the University of Fort Hare", PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2001; and (less persuasively) M. Seboni, "South African Native College: Fort Hare 1903–54", DEd. thesis, UNISA, 1959. Seboni, as Massey observes (p 177), was regarded by many students as "a pawn of the apartheid regime".
 11. N. Mazwai, *Sai Sai: Little Girl* (University of Fort Hare Press, Alice, 2008).
 12. D. Massey, "The History of Fort Hare and its Student Activists, 1933–73", MA thesis, University of Fort Hare, 2001.

After a brief outline of Fort Hare's birth in 1916 and its early history, Massey focuses squarely on the four decades from 1933 to 1973. Drawing chiefly on three dozen interviews of student and staff alumni, together with surviving records, the five chapters narrate and explain the tides of student activism. And what a stellar cast of informants it is, representing different generations, descent paths, and political persuasions: Govan Mbeki, Wycliffe Tsotsi, Thenjiwe Mtintso, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Joe Matthews, Frank Mdlalose, Henry Makgothi, Andrew Masondo, George and Kaiser Matanzima, and Barney Pityana to name a few – not to forget lesser-known figures such as G.C. Oosthuizen and Rama Thumbadoo. These memories provide intimate insights into campus life, from Govan Mbeki's ballroom dancing proclivities to Buthelezi's enforced "bed-wetting" of *collaborateurs*, whilst dozens of photos, many previously unpublished, also bring campus history to life. There is an appendix of brief (post-Fort Hare) biographies of informants that complement the potted biographies binding together the main text. This strong biographical emphasis helps readers understand a complex history and opens up new research, though on occasion it crowds out analysis or disturbs the narrative flow or structure.

Massey traces the development of student protests, at first over local issues such as poor food, harsh discipline and attempts to censor politics but later around the broad socio-political goals of national liberation. He first sketches the more dispersed protests of the 1930s and then treats in more detail the rise of the Youth League on campus from the late 1940s, giving due deference to the impact of leaders such as Oliver Tambo and Robert Sobukwe, but also the obscure tactical machinations of young activists such as Frank Mdlalose. Then it's on into the 1950s and the onset of Bantu Education, the state's steamrolling of Fort Hare autonomy and resistance of students and progressive lecturers.

An interesting interlude is given in Chapter 2 on campus diversity, a fine working model of tolerance and multiculturalism that makes its destruction by apartheid bureaucrats after 1959 all the more tragic, the theme of Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 analyses the growth of Black Consciousness and the rise and fall of the South African Student Organisation on campus. Ironically, mass expulsions of students and sackings of academics (including historians (p 168) contributed to a broadening of Black Consciousness ideas to high schools as many such alumni turned to teaching. Along the way, many interesting events are detailed and connections explored, such as the solidarity between students and nearby nurses and with Federal Seminary faculty (such as Desmond Tutu) who offered a safe haven from apartheid police. Another important and recurring theme is the seeming oblivion of managements that never understood student protests or their wider social framework.

Massey makes many salient points, which he brings together in a conclusion that if over-estimating the role of students as the locomotive of historical change (p 243), presents a cogent analysis of the intersection between college and society, and of patterns of student politicisation and their causes. The greatest strength of the book is that it tells us so much about the students and their politics and pastimes, as well as their imaginative protests and from these narratives readers also gain insight into the lives of academics, most notably Z.K. Matthews and his wide influence, and administrators. Massey supplements his interviews (at times rather laboriously recounted) with official files, from which he extracts the administrative context. That students later followed different political pathways is well explained, as is how a Fort Harian *esprit de corps* remained a tangible unifying force. The author brings out well the full majesty of Fort Hare's multiracial tradition and just how hard students (and some faculty) fought to maintain

academic independence and integrity. Across the above fields, and in his effective use of neglected oral and archival sources, Massey has opened up new pathways for Fort Harian studies.

There are a few minor glitches. SANNC should read SANC. And like many Masters theses there are some lacunae, though this does not detract from the book's usefulness. Massey does not detail the formative years¹³ due to a paucity of sources and a wish to rely on interviews. He has a hunch that student activism only started in 1933 with Eddie Roux's visit, and his reliance on later generations means youth radicalism of the 1910s and 1920s is forgotten (p 33). In accounting for earlier moderation, the visit of Aggrey in May 1921 was a factor, as was D.D.T. Jabavu's address to students on the Israelite affair of the same month. But might not others have preceded Roux, say from the ICU? Whilst the author consulted white newspapers, including *Alice Times*, he did not venture into the black press (such as *Imvo Zabantsundu* or *Inkundla ya Bantu*) whose vernacular columns may well reveal more on *Koleji e Fort Hare*. It is unlikely the widely-publicised student "riots" at Healdtown in 1918, and across the veld at Lovedale in 1920, would not have impacted Fort Hare. It is also likely that early students knew something of the ANC – *Abantu-Batho* (in which D.D.T. Jabavu published) was sent there on exchange. The interest of the black press in Fort Hare was intense, with J.T. Jabavu its greatest champion, and *Abantu-Batho* joining him to urge its black staffing.¹⁴ Scholars might also try and locate *S.A.N.C. Magazine*, a student quarterly first published in 1918, and *Christian Express* carried a regular "Lovedale and Fort Hare News" column, whilst the 1930 student Christian conference at Fort Hare suggests it was not all cricket and ballroom dancing in the early days.

But these and other periods and themes may safely be left to others – indeed the period after Massey's book has now been covered by Rico Chapman.¹⁵ In the meantime, I encourage you all to read Daniel Massey's splendid history – and ponder the salutary lessons it brings to post-apartheid South Africa.

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