

Institution: University of Lincoln
Unit of Assessment: 30 History
Title of case study: The political and social impact of reappraising John Langalibalele Dube, founding President of the African National Congress
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Heather Hughes' 2011 publication of the first full-length biography of John Dube, founding president of the ANC, has had a significant impact on local and national government, public history, national media and public debate in South Africa. This work has changed public attitudes towards Dube as a political leader, and towards the role of women in early twentieth-century African nationalism. This revision of ANC history has been built into permanent exhibitions at several sites within the country. The book's use in a government green paper on land reform also reveals the depth of her work's political impact.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Hughes' research into the eminent African nationalist politician John Dube, carried out during her time at the University of Lincoln and culminating in her recent biography, has required work in five languages, and research across three continents. Leading statesmen such as Dube would, in a less discriminatory society, have been well represented in archives. However, because of the deprivation and denial consequent upon segregation and apartheid, no major collections of personal papers of <i>any</i> leading African nationalist figures of this first generation have survived. Since such papers are usually the primary requirement for biography, Hughes necessarily adopted a different approach for her study. She hunted down as many fragments as she could (odd letters, fleeting news clips, photographs, old pamphlets) in archival collections and took oral histories from Dube's former colleagues, friends and acquaintances. With such information, she was able to recontextualise documentary evidence in the major institutional archival collections, for example the British Colonial Office and missionary society records.</p> <p>This research has enabled her, most importantly, to revise the standard account of Dube as individually bringing about transformative social and political change, by recovering the suppressed narrative of women's roles in South African nationalism. Significantly, she was able to show that many achievements previously attributed to John Dube should either be credited to his first wife, Nokutela (she was the outstanding musical talent, not he, who trained a number of influential musicians such as Reuben Caluza), or to both of them as a team. Together they founded the remarkable independent school, Ohlange (1900) (whose iconic significance was intensified by Nelson Mandela choosing to cast his first-ever vote there in the 1994 elections) and <i>Ilanga lase Natal</i> (1903), one of the earliest African newspapers. Both the Dubes, then, emerge from Hughes's biography as path-breaking figures in the development of African nationalism. So few women of the first generation of 'modern' political leaders are now remembered that this has changed the perception of gender relations at the dawn of the nationalist struggle for equality.</p> <p>By bringing public and private lives together, Hughes was also able to resolve what had been puzzling aspects of Dube's role as first president of the ANC. Why did he suddenly abandon a delegation in London in 1914, and what were the circumstances of the ending of his presidency of the ANC in 1917, after a five-year incumbency? Hughes showed that both were related to the break-down of his marriage to Nokutela, over an extramarital affair. The consequences were painful for Nokutela (she was seen to be partly to blame because she had been unable to bear children) but in addition the funding from key sympathisers of Ohlange dried up — ending their dream of building a self-help community based on industry and Christian virtue, free from state or missionary control. On both counts, his colleagues in the ANC found him too great a liability as their leader.</p> <p>By placing Dube within his broader, international contexts Hughes has also been able to demonstrate the full extent of the external links between South African nationalism and American interests in South Africa.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hughes, H. (2012) Dialectical dances: exploring John Dube's public life. <i>South African Historical Journal</i> 64:3, 418-33. DOI: 10.1080/02582473.2012.669787 • Hughes, H. (2012) Lives and wives: understanding African nationalism in South Africa through a biographical approach. <i>History Compass</i> 10:8, 162-173. DOI: 10.1111/j.1478-0542.2012.00869.x

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- Hughes, H. (2012) Leadership in the early ANC. *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa* 66:2, 3-12. [Public domain; University of Lincoln Repository]
- Hughes, H. (2011) *First president: a life of John L. Dube, founding president of the ANC*. Johannesburg, Jacana Press. 312pp; photos, notes and index; ISBN 978-1-77009-813-8.
- Hughes, H. (2007) 'The Coolies will elbow us out of the country': African responses to Indian immigration in the colony of Natal, South Africa. *Labour History Review* 72:2, 155-168. [Public domain; University of Lincoln Repository]
- Hughes, H. (2001) Doubly elite: exploring the life of John Langalibalele Dube. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, 3, 445-458. DOI: 10.1080/13632430120074536

4. Details of the impact

Hughes' work has impacted upon public debate and attitudes, government policy and cultural capital in South Africa, readdressing a deeply entrenched male bias in the presentation of African nationalist leaders (empowering participants in South African public debate to challenge the predominantly patriarchal understanding of African nationalism in public discourse) and Dube's relationships outside South Africa. It has informed South African government work on Land Reform and challenged public perceptions of the ANC's history.

In the lead-up to the ANC's 2012 centenary, *First President* demonstrably impacted on the South African press, leading them to highlight Nokutela Dube's role in the ANC's growth and the connections between South African nationalism and America. Hughes selected extracts of her work for a double-page spread in *City Press* (circulation 250,000), South Africa's premier 'black' newspaper, for the day of the ANC centenary, and was interviewed on national television (SABC2 and e-tv) and radio (Radio 2000). Articles based on her research were published in Johannesburg's *Sunday Times* (circulation 504,000) in December 2011 and in *Business Day*, reflecting changes in attitudes engendered by the book. Features in *The Witness* revealed how the authors' views had been changed by the book: one focusing on ANC contacts with America and the other noting that 'women tend to be dropped from memory no matter what their contribution is to society' emphasising the importance of Nokutela Dube's newly-discovered role. *First President* has been the primary source for Prof. Cherif Keita's efforts to popularise Nokutela's memory, leading in early 2013 to Nokutela's posthumous receipt of a Mahatma Gandhi Satyagraha Award. A headstone is finally being erected over her grave, forming part of the National Liberation Heritage Route honouring those who fought against segregation and apartheid. In July 2013, Hughes's work was used extensively in the Heritage Impact Assessment Report to recognise Ohlange as a Grade II Provincial Landmark.

The book's appearance led to wider public controversy. Well-known local writer Jacob Dlamini featured it in South Africa's leading business/finance daily, *Business Day*, eliciting a response from Tito Mboweni, recently-retired Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, debating what constituted acceptable usage in discussion of political leaders' private life.

Hughes' work has increasingly changed and challenged public perspectives in digital fora. It featured on the blog posts of two high-profile figures. Zachie Achmat (leading global campaigner for AIDS treatment), called it his book of the year saying, 'it has diminished my ignorance of the links between South African and African-American intellectual history'. Controversial South African writer Moss Mashamaite challenged a white author's 'right' to write about a black political figure demonstrating the work's contribution to wider South African political debates about gender and race.

Hughes work has impacted directly on public and political debate about land reform. It was quoted extensively in the Government Green Paper (2011) on land reform (addressing one of the most pressing legacies of apartheid), strengthening arguments for radical land tenure change, demonstrating parallels between 1930s and present-day land reform. The paper concludes that the book, 'addresses the hunger and need for land by African people. The situation has not changed much since the 1930s...we must change it now!' This paper led to national reference groups on land reform working towards a lands rights management board (to be charged by the government with pursuing the land agenda reform) being established.

Hughes has used her research to create major cultural resources, challenging prevalent gendered perceptions concerning African Nationalism. Her publications led directly to her work as advisor for five new permanent exhibitions on the Woza eNanda heritage route (Durban City Council's flagship heritage project); and to producing the heritage interpretation at Dube TradePort, the largest international air logistics hub in the subcontinent — a series of tall fixed panels in both English and

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Zulu on the main walkway approach. Hughes wrote interpretive text on Dube and other historical figures associated with the area, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Albert Luthuli (1950s ANC President). She broke down the male bias often characterising such interpretation, by including material on Nokutela Dube's achievements, the first time ever in such a public heritage installation. She also presented a new perspective on the relationship between the Dubes and Gandhi, important in a region where relationships between African and Indian South Africans are complex and sometimes tense. Hughes also provided visual material (images of Nokutela Dube were displayed publically for the first time) and wrote the inscription for the new sculpture of John Dube at the entrance. The Trade Port and the sculptures/panels were officially opened by South African President Jacob Zuma in March 2012.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 1) 'Hughes's book gave us access to aspects of Dube's life and work that would otherwise have taken us months or even years to uncover, if at all, and working under severe time constraints meant that we would in any event not have had the time to do such in-depth research. Heather Hughes was incredibly generous with her insights and greatly enriched our understanding of Dube the man, the leader, the teacher and the believer. I believe this richness is reflected in our exhibitions.' Beatrice Roberts, Totem Media (professional creators of educational tools including exhibitions). See the exhibitions at http://www.totem-media.net/Content_Page_Woza-enanda-press-release.asp.
- 2) The opening ceremony of Dube TradePort and unveiling of the panels (8 March 2012) can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mcnXgJa2es>. Hughes' role can be verified by the contractor of Virtual Consulting Engineers.
- 3) Jacob Dlamini devotes his *Business Day* column, 4 August 2011, (audited circulation 41 000) to Hughes's 'brilliant new book' at <http://www.bdlive.co.za/articles/2011/08/04/jacob-dlamini-understanding-john-dube-s-betrayal-of-ck9763;jsessionid=EA83FF6138CCF621CDD6F3A8B5321F8A.present1.bdfm> and Tito Mboweni's response (17 August 2011), referring to Hughes's book as 'brilliantly researched and written', is at <http://www.bdlive.co.za/articles/2011/08/17/dube-much-more-that-is-relevant>.
- 4) Stephen Coan's feature article 'The ANC's American Roots' in *The Witness*, 28 July 2011 (audited circulation 20,000), at http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global%5B_id%5d=65438.
- 5) R. Simanagaliso Kumalo's (manager of the John Dube Memorial Project) feature article 'Returned to memory' in *The Witness*, 18 July 2011 (audited circulation 20,000), at http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global%5B_id%5D=64804.
- 6) The South African Government's Green Paper on Land Reform (*Government Gazette* 16 September 2011), at <http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=150833>, cites information from Hughes's *First President* in support of urgent and extensive land reform proposals.
- 7) Material from Hughes's *First President* forms the basis for the entry on John Dube on the Durban Municipal Authority's heritage website, Ulwazi: see http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=John_Langalibalele_Dube.
- 8) Moss Mashamaite's blogpost at <http://moss-mashamaite.blogspot.co.uk/>.
- 9) '[It] is indisputably my best read and buy of 2011....[it] is written in exquisite prose. For the first time, I gained a real appreciation for John L. Dube as a leader...[Hughes's] biography of Dube is one of the finest books on South African history produced in the last decade.' Zackie Achmat, internationally-known campaigner for social justice and treatment for AIDS sufferers, on *First President* on his blog at <http://writingrights.nu.org.za/2011/12/28/gay-%e2%80%9cerotica%e2%80%9d-court-judgments-and-crime-novels-my-best-reads-in-2011/>.
- 10) Ethembeni Cultural Heritage, *Phase 1 Heritage Impact Assessment Report: Proposed Developments at JL Dube Memorial Site, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*, 26 July 2013, July 2013 <http://197.85.190.96/sites/default/files/heritagereports/JL%20Dube%20Memorial%20Phase%201%20HIA%20Report%2026%20July%202013.pdf>.