

The Call of an African Prophet: The Redemptive Vision and Politics of Pixley
ka Isaka Seme

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Programme Director;

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Studies;

Members of the Seme family, especially Gogo Helen, my brother Vezi and my
sister Nompumelelo;

Distinguished academics and staff from the University of South Africa; and

Ladies and gentlemen

Introduction

Let me first express my sincere gratitude, Programme Director, for the invitation that has been extended to me to deliver the annual Pixley ka Isaka Seme Memorial Lecture.

I feel especially honoured that you have asked me to deliver the lecture this year. As you are aware, 2019 is an important year in the history of black people in South Africa. One hundred years ago, Eskia Mphahlele, Sibusiso Nyembezi, Noni Jabavu and Peter Abrahams were born. Over a period of several decades they distinguished themselves as foremost men and a woman of letters whose literary influences were not only felt in South Africa, but found resonance in the African continent and the world as a whole. I have chosen to start this lecture by highlighting the extraordinary achievements of Mphahlele, Jabavu, Abrahams and Nyembezi because there is a tendency in our society to celebrate only those who made significant contributions to our political life. While politics is important, it does not define the totality of our being and existence as a people.

In recognition of their enormous contributions, the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study, which I have the privilege to lead, has dedicated this year in their honour. In this regard, we have been hosting a series of lectures, seminars and other public events to reflect on their contributions to arts and culture of our society and humanity as a whole. We have already held two seminars in honour

of Eskia Mphahlele. In the next weeks and months, we will honour the three other centenarians.

This year is important for another reason. One hundred years ago, the South African Native National Congress (known today as the African National Congress) sent a deputation to England to meet with representatives of the British imperial government and possibly the British monarch. Members of the deputation were Josiah Gumede, Richard Selope Thema, Rev Henry Ngcayiya and Levi Mvabaza. In London, Solomon Plaatje, who had decided to remain in England after the 1914 ANC deputation, joined them. The timing of the deputation was significant. The First World War, which had started in Europe in 1914, had ended in November 1918. Millions of people had perished during the course of the war, including scores of black South Africans. Among those black South Africans who paid the ultimate sacrifice were those who died when the SS Mendi sank in February 1917. The question that faced black people in the aftermath of the First World War was the following: would Great Britain on whose behalf they had fought and died in the war intervene to resolve the oppressive political situation in which black people in South Africa found themselves? Did the victims of the sinking of the SS Mendi die in vain?

The ANC convened a special conference on 16 December 1918 at which these questions were extensively discussed. One of the major outcomes of the special conference was a memorandum that was drafted outlining the demands of black people in South Africa. A deputation was appointed to present the memorandum to the imperial government of Great Britain the following year, in 1919. Among the prayers contained in the memorandum was the demand for the revision of the Constitution of the Union of South Africa in order to extend political rights to all black people across the land. Reading the memorandum a century after it was drafted and presented to the British imperial government, its clauses on the land issue are striking. It is remarkable that the memorandum did not restrict itself to the land lost due to the Natives Land Act that had been passed five years before in June 1913. The memorandum demanded the return of land that black people had lost in the 1800s. For instance, the memorandum called for a review of the 1848 Proclamation and the 1854 Convention both of which had resulted in black people of the Orange Free State losing their land. It also called for the review of the Conventions of 1881 and 1884, which had resulted in black people living in the Transvaal losing their land. Furthermore, the 1918 ANC memorandum called for the review of various Proclamations, which led to

black people in the Cape Province losing their land after numerous wars. In the case of Zululand, the memorandum called for the land demarcated after the 1897 Proclamation to be kept in the possession of black people and not to be given to white people.

Programme Director, I have gone to some detail on the 1918 ANC memorandum and the deputation that was sent to Great Britain in 1919 because the issue of land ownership has always been and continues to be at the heart of black people's struggle for emancipation in South Africa. It was also central to Seme's political vision. In fact, it is not possible to think of another matter that Seme was as passionate about as the imperative for black people to regain possession of their land. During the course of this lecture, I will speak in detail about Seme's contribution to the struggle for land.

Programme director, I have titled this lecture 'The Call of an African Prophet: The Redemptive Vision and Politics of Pixley ka Isaka Seme'. This may be a surprising title to some of you because it is rare to think of political leaders as prophets. Yet, if one looks closely at the totality of Seme's political vision and his contributions over a period of more than four decades, one cannot but conclude that he was no ordinary politician; he was an African prophet whose political vision and mission in life was the redemption of the black race and its emancipation from oppression.

Seme led a long, distinguished and eventful public life. It is impossible to do justice to his political endeavours in one lecture. Keeping this in mind, I have decided to focus this lecture today on Seme's conception of black emancipation. To pose it as a question: how did Seme conceive the notion of black emancipation? Central to his conception was his strong belief that negative colonial and racist stereotypes about black people and the African continent had to be challenged. In this regard, one of his major endeavors was to present a positive and uplifting image of Africans: their history, culture and their contribution to science and human civilization as a whole. Seme's second major contribution, which I will talk about in this lecture are his endeavors to forge unity among black people in South Africa. As he argued in 1912 when he founded the ANC, as long as black people were divided, they would not enjoy the fruits of human civilization and progress. The third major contribution was on the issue of land. Seme believed that human existence without land

ownership was living a life without dignity. The sum total of these contributions distinguish Seme as one of the greatest political of the twentieth century.

The first major contribution that Seme made was advance an image of black people in Africa and the world as fully human, with contributions to civilization, arts and culture, science, and statecraft of which to be proud. Seme's redemptive and prophetic vision of the African continent and its peoples was first articulated in the speech he delivered at Columbia University in April 1906 titled 'The Regeneration of Africa'. Although the speech was a contribution to the university's public speaking competition, its impact was felt outside the halls of Columbia and earned Seme the respect across the world.

'I am an African, and I set my pride in my race over against a hostile public opinion', so Seme began his speech. What followed this introduction was a spirited defence of the African people, their contributions to human civilization, science, arts, culture and other areas of human existence. Starting from North Africa, Seme marveled at the achievements of the Egyptians:

Come with me to the ancient capital of Egypt, Thebes, the city of one hundred gates. The grandeur of its venerable ruins and gigantic proportions of its architecture reduce to insignificance the boasted monuments of other nations. The pyramids of Egypt are structures to which the world presents nothing incomparable. The mighty monuments seem to look with disdain on every other work of human art and to view with nature itself. All the glory of Egypt belongs to Africa and her people.

Seme listed numerous achievements and contributions to civilization by other peoples of Africa, including the gigantic pyramids of Ethiopia whose architectural beauty surpasses that of the Egypt; the valour of the Congolese fighting for their freedom; and the genius of the system of governance in Botswana. Seme also challenged those who questioned the intellectual capabilities of and contributions of Africans to science and art. Addressing the challenge of John C. Calhoun, a slave owner in the American South, who reportedly said he would change his view that black people were intellectually inferior if he could be shown a black person who understood Greek syntax, Seme mentioned a number of black people who had distinguished themselves as scholars and scientists.

Having demonstrated Africa's glorious past, Seme cast his eyes to a future and prophesied an Africa in which her people made significant contributions to human civilization:

The brighter day is rising upon Africa. Already I seem to see her chains dissolved, her desert plains red with harvest, her Abyssinia and her Zululand the seats of science and religion, reflecting the glory of the rising sun from the spires of their churches and universities. Her Congo and her Gambia whitened with commerce, her crowded cities sending forth the hum of business and all her sons employed in advancing the victories of peace—greater and more abiding than the spoils of war.

He added:

The regeneration of Africa means that a new and unique civilization is soon to be added to the world. The African is not a proletarian in the world of science and art. He has precious creations of his own, of ivory, of copper and of gold, fine, platted willow-ware and weapons of superior workmanship... the most essential departure of this new civilization is that it shall be thoroughly spiritual and humanistic—indeed a regeneration moral and eternal.

In order to fully appreciate the significance of Seme's prophetic vision for the African continent and his redemptive portrayal of the achievements of the black race, it is important to recount the debates among intellectuals of African descent in the diaspora regarding their relationship with the African continent. Instigating the debate were huge efforts in the United States of America to repatriate freed slaves back to the African continent for permanent settlement. Mostly driven by the American Colonization Society, the 'back-to-Africa' movement gained momentum after the US government passed a law that allowed freed slaves to be captured and returned to their former owners. The resettlement of African Americans in Liberia and Sierra Leone, which saw leading black intellectuals in the diaspora such as Edward Wilmot Blyden (who settled in Liberia in 1850) and Alexander Crummell (who settled in Liberia in 1853) moving to the African continent.

Although some of the resettled African Americans firmly believed in the promise of Africa, others were not so convinced. Alexander Crummell, for instance, held a dim view about the African continent's prospects. In an address he delivered in 1861 titled 'The Progress of Civilization along the West Coast of Africa, Crummell's view of Africa's past was startlingly different from Seme's. He observed:

...we have to observe the sad and startling fact, that mental and moral benightedness has shrouded the whole of the vast continent of Africa, through all the periods of time, far back to the earliest records of history...

And then, standing at the very start of the Christian era, if we strive to penetrate the long lapse of ages, which anticipated the coming of the Lord, we meet vista upon vista of the deepest darkness, stretching out to the earliest dawn of the world's being. So far as Western Africa is concerned, there is no history. The long, long centuries of human existence, there, give us no intelligent disclosures. 'Darkness covered the land, and gross darkness the people'.

Crummell pointed at the vast Sahara desert as having cut-off the African continent from the influence of European civilization. The consequences of this marginalization from Europe, he claimed, led to the following:

Thrown thus back upon herself, unvisited by either the mission of letters of grace, poor Africa, all the ages through, has been generating, and then reproducing, the whole brood and progeny of superstitions, idolatries, and paganisms through all her quarters. And hence the most pitiful, the most abject of all human conditions! And hence the most sorrowful of all histories! The most miserable, even now, of all spectacles!

Seme, having arrived in the United States of America in the late 1800s, right at the time when these debates were taking place would have been aware of Crummell's opinion about the African continent and its supposed backwardness. His spirited defense of its achievements and the prophetic vision about its future and contribution to human civilization should be understood in the context of those debates. To be fair to Crummell, it is important to mention that he, too, believed in the regeneration of Africa. In his 1853 sermon titled 'Hope for Africa', Crummell stated that there was evidence that Africa had entered a period of regeneration. As evidence of Africa's regeneration, he mentioned the black government in Haiti, the establishment of an independent republic in Liberia as well as a colony in Sierra Leone. Unlike Seme who saw these developments as evidence of the ingenuity and capability of Africans, Crummell saw external forces such as the missionaries and European governments as responsible for the regeneration. In this regard, he described the role of the European powers in Africa as 'scattering darkness from her

(Africa's) agonized brow, her hastening the day of her final relief and regeneration'.

Seme's redemptive vision for the African continent thus should be considered one of the significant interventions of the political debates of the time. That it came from a young student who had not even graduated from his first degree attests to Seme's precocious talent and passionate for the continent and her people. Seme's positive portrayal of Africa and Africans would influence successive generations of black intellectuals in the African continent and the diaspora in general. Henry Sylvester Williams, who organized and convened the first Pan African Conference that took place in the United Kingdom in 1900 considered Seme his friend. Other intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, to mention just two, would dedicate their political lives in pursuit of the vision Seme espoused in 1906, a strong belief in the unity of Africans in the continent and the diaspora, and a pursuit of the regeneration of Africa. Many African nationalists who led the struggle for decolonization and independence were greatly influenced by Seme and his ideas. For instance, fifty years after Seme's 1906 speech, Kwame Nkrumah cited it as relevant to condition and ideals that faced the African people. While addressing the first International Congress of Africanists held in Accra, Ghana, he read Seme's speech in its entirety. Here at home, Seme's prophetic vision influenced leading New Africans such as Selope Thema, Zakes Matthews, A.P. Mda, Anton Lembede, the young Nelson Mandela, and later on the much younger generation such as Thabo Mbeki, whose speech 'I am an African' echoed Seme's speech a century earlier.

Seme's endeavours did not end with the 1906 speech. After his graduation from Columbia University, he spent several years in the United Kingdom, firstly as a law student at Oxford University and later on at Lincoln Inn in London trying as a lawyer. While a student at Oxford, he was a founder member of the Cosmopolitan Club, which was a student society that sought to bring together and unite students from the African continent and other parts of the developing world. In London, he made friendships with leading personalities in the emerging Pan African movement, such as the famous Jamaican scholar, TES Scholes. In 1910 he made his way back to South Africa with a legal qualification, which enabled him to be the second black person in South Africa to be admitted as an attorney, the first having being Alfred Mangena a few months before him. Though a pioneering lawyer, Seme's next major contribution was in uniting black people in South Africa.

The Call for Black National Unity

Towards the end of October 1911 Seme issued a clarion call to all black leaders in South Africa and the neighboring territories to unite and form what he called the South African Native Congress or simply the Native Union. He pleaded with black leaders to put aside their personal differences and act urgently to form a national organization that would represent black people's political interests. The sense of urgency arose from the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, in which the previously warring white people came together and in the process excluded black people. Seme lamented at the disunity of black people and identified it as the main impediment to their progress. In his plea for unity, he declared:

The demon of racialism, the aberrations of Xosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongaas (*sic*), between the Basotos and every other native must be buried and forgotten; it has shed among us sufficient blood! We are one people. Those divisions, those jealousies are the cause of all of our woes and all of our backwardness and ignorance today.

Although Seme's ambition of the founding meeting taking place before the end of 1911 was not met, the inaugural conference took place on 8 January 1912. Seme's achievement in bringing together black leaders the majority of whom had not met in one room was historic. Selope Thema, a delegate at the conference, would marvel at Seme's achievement in organizing the ANC's conference and bringing the 'tribes that had never met before except on the battlefields'. Further highlighting the historic significance of the conference, he called it (the conference) a 'gathering of educated Africans who had never exchanged views before, it was [a] gathering, if I may say so, of the departed spirits of the African race, among whom were such men as Sandile, Tshaka, Moshoeshe, Cetyewayo (*sic*), Moroka, Khama, Sekhukhune, Sotshangana and Ramapulana (*sic*)'.

In his keynote address to the conference, Seme decried the political exclusion of black people in the land of their birth by stating:

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 in which we have no voice in the making of laws and no part in their 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.

The significance of forming a national organization that would unite black people across the land was not lost on Seme and his colleagues. At a meeting that met on 11 November 1911 to plan for the inaugural conference that was to take place in January 1912, Sefako Makgatho, a leader of the Transvaal African Congress, supporting Seme's initiative, remarked the establishment of the Union of South Africa by white people had taught black people a finest lesson about unity. Walter Rubusana would make the same point at the January 1912 founding conference, when he stood up and spoke passionately about the need for black unity and for the support of Seme in establishing the ANC. Using his talent for poetic language, Seme employed a colorful metaphor to emphasize the same point, when he pointed out 'when a man drove a swarm of locusts from his mealie fields the swarm would invade the neighbor's lands, but by concerted action there was a chance to exterminate the pest, and a Congress of this nature would unite the separate bodies to work for the common good of all concerned'. It was this foundation stone of national unity, which Seme and his contemporaries laid in 1912 that anchored black people through decades of difficult struggles for liberation.

Seme's extraordinary role in organizing for the founding of the ANC and in agitating for black political unity has not been fully appreciated, I believe. Two arguments are often made to minimize his role and contribution. The first is that there were several initiatives at forming a national organization that were made before Seme's effort. Second, it is pointed out that he was not working alone in organizing for a national organization that would unite black people. Both of these arguments are valid. It is indeed correct that there were numerous attempts made at forming a national political organization that would unite black people. When Seme returned in 1910 from his studies in the United States of America and England, he found the South African Native Convention (SANC), which was led by Rubusana as president deputized by John Langalibalele Dube. The SANC had been established in 1909 to campaign for the inclusion of black people in negotiations for the formation of the Union of South Africa. In fact, when Seme got involved in politics upon his return, he joined the SANC, soon becoming its treasurer. However, the SANC was not widely supported by all leading personalities and political organisations in the black community. The biggest challenge was political division in the Cape Province, where John Tengo Jabavu refused to associate himself and his political organization, Imbumba Ye Zizwe, with any political organization led

by Rubusana. Due to Rubusana's involvement in the ANC, Jabavu opted not to affiliate Imbumba.

Furthermore, after the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, which postponed deciding on the Cape black franchise enthusiasm in the Cape for a national black political organization waned. The political initiative shifted to the northern provinces, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. It should not be surprising therefore that much of the agitation and planning meetings for the establishment of a national organization came from the Transvaal. In short, while there had been previous attempts at forging black political unity, parochial provincial interests and divisions thwarted those efforts. The ANC was the first truly national black political organization.

It is also correct that Seme did not act alone in forming the ANC. There were leaders who had tried before him and who worked with him. Those leaders included Thomas Mapikela from the Orange Free State, Sefako Makgatho from the Transvaal, Rubusana from the Cape, Plaatje also from the Cape, Dube from Natal, and even representatives of the Swazi royal family, especially Prince Malunge who became a link between the emerging nationalist movement in South Africa and the Swazi royal house. In this sense, the founding of the ANC was a collective effort. Seme himself said as much in his opening address at the inaugural conference when he described the plan to form a national organization as a scheme that he and his colleagues worked on. Having said this, it would be historically inaccurate not to accord a special mention of Seme's name in the founding of the ANC in 1912. He was the moving spirit and the leading organizer of the initiative. He organized all the planning meetings leading up to the inaugural conference, wrote the first constitution of the organization, and his leadership role was demonstrated by him giving the keynote opening address at the founding conference on 8 January 1912.

It is no wonder that when Seme died in June 1951, the overwhelming unanimous sentiment was to recognize him for founding the ANC. The editorial of the leading black newspaper at the time, *The Bantu World*, capture the dominant sentiment when it stated 'If today, Basutos, Zulus, Xhosas, Shangaans, Bechuanas and Vendas know themselves as Africans and that Africa is the land of their fathers, they owe this to the inspiring foundation of African nationalism laid by Pixley ka Izaka Seme'. At Seme's funeral, no less a figure than Dr Albert Xuma, the sixth president of the ANC, acknowledged Seme's seminal role in the founding of the ANC by calling him 'an architect' of black people, who gave them 'the inspiration of being a nation, he himself having the foundation of our freedom'. Seme would continue this spirit of

building black unity when he founded *Abantu-Batho*, the first national black newspaper. This was significant because even though there were black newspapers at the time such as *Imvo Zaba Ntsundu*, *Tsala ya Bechuana*, *Ilanga lase Natal*, *Inkundla ya Bantu*, to mention a few, they were largely provincial newspaper that catered for specific regional constituencies. Seme was convinced that for the cause of black unity to succeed, it was important to build national platforms such as a national newspaper that would unite black people. In many fundamental ways, Seme was not just a founder of an organization; he was indeed the architect of black national unity. Or to take from *The Bantu World*, Seme made it possible for black people not only to see themselves as ethnic fragments, but also to consider themselves as Africans to whom South Africa and the African continent belonged to them. Laying that foundation of national unity is legacy of his endeavors that will last as long as we consider ourselves one people.

Seme's Legacy on the Land

The third and final issue I wish to talk about is Seme's contribution to the struggles for black land ownership. I cannot think of any other issue that Seme was as passionate about as the ownership of land by black people. Writing in April 1929 he declared that without land and homeownership that accompanies it, there could be no dignity. The land question was at the heart of black struggles for emancipation. Since their encounter with Europeans, black people had been losing their land. The land dispossession accelerated in the 19th century, with black people being forcefully deprived of their land through military conquest and sheer abuse of the coercive machinery of the colonial state.

Seme demonstrated his determination fully to confront black land dispossession as soon as he returned from his studies overseas. Two opportunities presented themselves for his involvement. First, a number of white farm owners did not use their farms. They rented them to black squatters and sharecroppers. The government introduced the Squatters Law, which prohibited black squatters in white farms. The introduction of that law precipitated the selling of farms by white owners. Seme and his associates use that opportunity to buy the land from white farmers. Seme however did not have the money to buy the land. He devised a scheme by which black people would pool their resources and establish a company or syndicate to buy the land. In early 1912, just after founding the ANC, Seme and his associates established the Native Farmers' Association of South Africa and registered it as a company in Natal. The

purpose of the company was to buy land from white owners who were willing to sell and then sell the land in small portions to black people for settlement.

The board of director of the Native Farmers' Association was black, so was its management. Among the board directors were Ezra Nkosi, who was appointed the company secretary, Andries Hlongwane and Mboshi Shabalala. At its founding, the company had between fifty and sixty shareholders, all of whom were black. Some held a controlling stake in the company. The first three farms the Native Farmers' Association purchased were certain portions of the farm, Daggakraal, and certain portions of the farm Driefontein, all of which were owned by a certain white farmer by the name of Willem Gouws. The total land area the Native Farmers' Association bought was just over 4857. After buying the land, the Native Farmers' Association began to sell small lots to black people, the majority of whom were being evicted from farms in which they had lived in for ages.

Although the Native Farmers' Association got into serious financial difficulties and was eventually dissolved after evidence of financial and other types of mismanagement, the purpose for its establishment, which was to buy land from white people for black settlement and use, was one of Seme's boldest steps. The significance of his land purchase scheme rivals his founding of the ANC. As the ANC has lived for over 100 years, the farms that Seme bought in Daggakraal in 1912 for black people are still owned by black people even today. Several attempts by numerous apartheid governments to destroy Seme's dream of a community of black people owning their land failed. Daggakraal lives and is an enduring testament of Seme's bold vision.

Seme's struggle for black people to repossess their land took him to Swaziland. The Swazi had lost huge portions of their land when their king, Mbadzeni, granted substantial land, mineral and monopoly concessions to white people. The first group of white people who went to the Swazi king seeking land concessions were white farmers from the Transvaal. They wanted to use the land for winter grazing for their livestock. Ignatius Maritz and Johan Ferreira were two such white farmers from the Transvaal. In 1877, they visited Mbadzeni to ask for the land concession. He granted them such a large piece of land that they subdivided it into farms where about 400 people were able to settle. The situation got worse when gold was discovered in Barberton, which drew the interest of British prospectors who then went to Swaziland to seek mineral concessions from the king.

The granting of Swazi land to foreigners through the instrument of concessions would prove tragic for the Swazi people. Between 1907 and 1911,

Lord Milner, the British High Commissioner to South Africa at the time, issued a proclamation in which he ordered the concessionaires to relinquish one third of the land they obtained through concessions. The remaining land would be held in freehold title, which effectively meant that two-thirds of such land was granted to concessionaires as their private property. The Swazi were given five years to live in the land that now belonged to white people as private property, after which they would have either to pay rent or be evicted. This proclamation came to be known as the Swaziland Concessions Partition Proclamation of 1907.

The five-year grace period ended in 1913. The Swazis were then faced two options: they could either be labour tenants on the farms or face eviction. If they chose to leave the land that had become private property for white people, they faced another problem. The Partition Proclamation had left Swaziland with severe land shortage, which meant there was not adequate land for settlement and for sustaining livelihoods. It was at this point that the Swazi royal house enlisted the legal services of Seme to help them get their land back.

Seme felt a strong sense of injustice at the manner in which the Swazi had lost their land. Writing to Alain Locke, his African American friend that he met while a student at Oxford University, Seme argued that the significance of the Swazi struggle for their land went beyond the borders of Swaziland. At heart, it was a struggle for the freedom of the African people as a whole, he contended. The petitions he drafted and submitted to the British authorities on behalf of the Swazi people were all scornfully rebuffed. At one point, the Deputy Resident Commissioner in Mbabane dismissed the Swazi petition by claiming that the king of England believed the partition of Swaziland was in the best interest of the Swazis. Continuing in this patronizing vein, the Deputy Resident Commissioner advised the Swazi that the King of England was ‘wise and can see into the future and he knows that this decision is best for you, his children, who cannot see into the future’. He added ‘It [the proclamation order] is his final order, and every word of it must be obeyed’.

After these numerous rebuffs and failed deputations to England, Seme decided to follow the legal route. The matter was taken to the Special Court of Swaziland, with Seme representing King Sobhuza II and the Swazis. The court decided that the 1907 Land Partition Proclamation had nullified all the rights to the land held by the Swazi. Seme advised the Swazi to appeal the court decision to the Privy Council in London. The Privy Council also ruled against the Swazis, arguing that the 1907 Land Partition Proclamation gave the British High Commissioner to South Africa power to acquire the land and deal with it

in the manner he deemed fit. With that decision, Seme had suffered a major defeat, which spelt the end of the legal route for the Swazi to acquire their land.

The defeat did not change Seme's view about the Swazi legitimate claim to their land, nor did he abandon his central belief that land ownership was central to restoring the dignity of black people. For what remained of his life, he involved himself in various initiatives trying to buy land for black people. Although his endeavors were not handsomely rewarded, his major contribution in the struggle for the black ownership of the land lives as the enduring legacy of his contribution to the cause for black emancipation.

Conclusion

Pixley ka Isaka Seme lived a long, complex, and sometimes controversial life. Like all of us, he made mistakes and sometimes fell along the way. What cannot be disputed is that he stands as one of the greatest thinkers and leaders of the 20th century. His fundamental belief in the unity of black people as central to their emancipation has stood the test of time. The continued existence of Seme believed that political freedom without land ownership was meaningless. On this point again, history has vindicated.