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THE LEGACY OF ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES

IN SOUTHERN AFRICA:

LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AS GOVERNMENTS

This paper explores some aspects of the narrow translation of a liberation movement - an agency of transformation - into an exclusivist apparatus claiming to represent the interest of *all* people and a total monopoly in advocating the public interest. It thereby tries to explain to some extent the dominant party syndrome under liberation movements, which have been in power since Independence.[1] Sobering post-colonial realities have not met the expectations of those who considered the fight against colonialism as a fight for the implementation of positive values and norms linked to enhanced socio-economic equality, civil and human rights, democracy and other individual freedoms. Instead, the post-colonial reality reflects the contradictions and challenges of revolutionary optimism turned into the self-righteous entitlement culture of a new elite.

Some far-sighted scholars and writers on the continent had seen this coming. Among them is Artur Carlos Maurício Pestana. He published the notes he collected in 1971 during his participation in the guerrilla war of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the rainforest (the *mayombe*) of the Cabinda front under his *nom de guerre* as a groundbreaking novel. It offers a remarkable degree of sensitivity and insight into the complexity (and limits) of social transformation subsequent to a situation of armed resistance against foreign occupation under colonial rule. In a revealing dialogue, the commander of the guerrilla unit ("Fearless") explains to the political commissar ("New World"), for whom he ultimately sacrifices his life in battle:

> "We don't share the same ideals. (…) You are the machine type, one of those who are going to set up the unique, all-powerful Party in Angola. I am the type who could never belong to the machine. (…) One day, in Angola, there will no longer be any need for rigid machines, and that is my aim. (…) what I want you to understand, is that the revolution we are making is half the revolution I want. But it is the possible. I know my limits and the country's limits. My role is to contribute to this half-revolution. (…) I am, in your terminology, adventurist. I should like the discipline of war to be established in terms of man and not the political objective. My guerrillas are not a group of men deployed to destroy the enemy, but a gathering of different, individual beings, each with his subjective reasons to struggle and who, moreover, behave as such. (…) I am happy when I see a young man decide to build himself a personality, even if politically that signifies individualism. (…) I cannot manipulate men, I respect them too much as individuals. For that reason, I cannot belong to a machine." (Pepetela 1996: 197 and 198)

This conversation is more than fiction. It sets the parameters and social constraints for societies in Southern Africa with a history of armed resistance against settler colonialism.

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[1] It is based in parts on other texts, which further elaborate on certain issues (see i.a. Melber 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2009).

Transformation and conservation of political rule

Governments were formed by the anti-colonial liberation movements, which had been far from non-violent. They took control of the state machinery and reorganised themselves as political parties. Their legitimacy to rule stemmed from their emergence from the decolonisation process as representatives acting on behalf of the majority of the people.[2] Since then, with varying results (and sometimes with the use of further organised violence as illustrated by the case of Matabeleland in Zimbabwe), they have been able to strengthen their political dominance and maintain control over the state.

The social transformation of Southern African societies shaped by a settler colonial brand can at best be characterised as a transition from controlled change to changed control. The result is a new ruling political elite operating from commanding heights, whose foundations are further strengthened by selective narratives and memories related to the war(s) of liberation. These create new (to some extent invented) traditions to establish an exclusive post-colonial legitimacy under the sole authority of one particular agency of social forces (see Kriger 1995 and Werbner 1998b for Zimbabwe; Melber 2002c, 2005 and 2007 for Namibia).

The mystification of the liberators plays an essential role in this fabrication. Visible signs of post-colonial "patriotic history" include the *chimurenga* (liberation struggle) music of Zimbabwe (which has been turned into a perverted form of self-adoration under the Mugabe regime) and the Heroes Acres in the capitals of Harare in Zimbabwe and Windhoek in Namibia. Both were constructed by a North Korean company and are of striking similarity in their display of unashamedly heroic narrative and symbolism. They suggest a one-dimensional linearity from early to modern anti-colonial resistance and celebrate the leaders of 'the one and only' liberation movement and government. The symbolic language of such enactment is one of male chauvinism and militarism – hardly any different from the *machismo* of the colonial monuments. Other examples of the invention of post-colonial exclusivity are the choice of national holidays that tend to commemorate the achievements and sacrifices of the 'one movement's' struggle as all-embracing national events.

The autobiography of Sam Nujoma (2001), Namibia's first Head of State and leader of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) since the party's establishment, is another example of similarly reduced nationalist focus. The autobiography is treated as official history and was turned into a Hollywood film at a cost of N$50-million from the public purse. As "a partial, highly selective account", it "wishes to try to stamp a certain version of the past on the nation's collective memory, to help shape the future" (Saunders 2003: 98). Its reading, as the historian Saunders further suggests, "will bring no comfort to those concerned about the future of democracy in Namibia today" (ibid.; see also Saunders 2007).

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[2] In Angola and Mozambique this claim was based on the relative military success in fighting the Portuguese occupation and taking control of the state. In Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa the legitimacy was secured more visibly through general elections.

The situational application of militant rhetoric as a tool for inclusion or exclusion in terms of post-colonial national identity is common practice. It demonstrates that declared notions of national reconciliation and the slogan of 'unity in diversity' are not receiving appropriate acknowledgement in terms of political pluralism. Politically correct identity is instead defined by those in power along narrow lines of (self-)definition and (self-)understanding. As observed in the case of Zimbabwe:

> "whilst power relations had changed, *perceptions* of power had *not* changed. The layers of understanding regarding power relations, framed by socialisation and memory, continue[d] to operate. … [Although] actors had changed ... the way in which the new actors executed power in relation to opposition had not, [because] their mental framework remained in the colonial setting. Patterns from colonial rule of 'citizens' ruling the 'subjects' [were] repeated and reproduced." (Yap 2001: 312-313; original emphasis)

The goal of the struggle was national liberation defined as political independence in a sovereign state under a government representing the majority of the previously colonised people, who were excluded from full participation in society through the imposition of the Apartheid system. The power of definition in the post-colonial system of political governance was exercised mainly by the national liberation movement in interaction with the international system represented by a variety of competing actors under the polarised conditions of superpower rivalry during the 1970s and 1980s. This implies that the struggle was influenced by exile politics and international diplomacy.

The independence processes in Zimbabwe and Namibia resulted first and foremost in an internationally monitored and legitimated transfer of political power. That the political power exercised by and large met the definitions and expectations of a democratic political system was a desired result, but not the main goal. The liberation struggle was understood and primarily perceived as the right to self-determination of the population on the basis of free and fair general elections. Decolonisation, not democratisation, was therefore the priority.

Both independence and a democratic system were achieved to some extent in a parallel process at the same time. But it is important to note that these goals are neither identical nor necessarily congruent. One might argue that the principles agreed upon by the parties prior to the elections in the cases of Zimbabwe (1980), Namibia (1989) and South Africa (1994) were a prerequisite for the implementation of a joint resolution of conflict and served as an agreed framework and point of departure for the foundations of the newly established state. They were in all three cases characterized by a notion of plural democracy. Others might counter, however, that the democratic component was designed to maintain a status quo under a controlled change in terms of securing the existing property relations and former privileges by those who benefited from colonial minority rule.

Decolonisation as unfinished business of democratisation

The post-colonial politics of the ruling parties often show a blatant lack of democratic awareness and forms of neo-patrimonial systems. A case study of Mozambique suggests that despite regular elections, "they have not been accompanied by a steady institutionalisation and 'Mocambicanisation' of democratic values, norms and rules" (Braathen/Orre 2001: 200). A lack of consolidation, if not a trend of erosion of democratic values and norms - despite the existence of institutions and a canon of virtues as enshrined by the Constitution - is also visible in other Southern African countries (see the contributions to Melber 2003a and 2003b).

The unabated exploitation of Angola's oil wealth by a powerful oligarchy within the ruling MPLA, when the country's population remains among the most destitute in the world, despite an end to the civil war, is one of the biggest scandals on the continent. Elections in Angola were postponed time and again, denying the citizens the right to vote for an alternative, with the ruling party using the delays to manufacture control over the electoral process to guarantee itself victory. In such circumstances constitutionalism and the rule of law are absent from the political system in place (cf. Vidal/Chabal 2009). Instead, those in government and state take over civil society (Messiant 2001) and turn the country into a corporate business of those in control over the party (Marques de Morais 2010).

Tendencies to autocratic rule and towards the subordination of the state under the party, as well as politically motivated social and material favours as a reward system for loyalty or disadvantages as a form of coercion in cases of dissent, are common techniques. The political rulers' penchant for self-enrichment with the help of a rent - or sinecure - capitalism goes hand in hand with the exercise of comprehensive controls to secure the continuance of their rule. Accordingly, the term 'national interest' means solely what *they* say it means. Based on the rulers' (self-)perception, individuals and groups are allowed to participate in, or are excluded from, nation-building. The 'national interest' therefore serves the purpose "to justify all kinds of authoritarian practice" and that the concepts of " 'anti-national' or 'unpatriotic' can be defined basically as any group that resists the power of the ruling elite of the day" (Harrison 2001: 391). Such selective mechanisms of the exercise and retention of power have little or nothing to do with democratic principles, but have much in common with the commando structures that emerged during the days of the liberation struggle, especially in exile. A South African political activist summarises her experiences as follows:

> "Many of my former comrades have become loyal to a party rather than to principles of justice. (…) Unfortunately it is true that those who have been oppressed make the worst democrats. There are recurring patterns in the behaviour of liberation parties – when they come to power they uphold the most undemocratic practices." (Kadalie 2001)

In view of such frustrating realities, which followed the initial euphoria of attaining sovereignty under international law, there is a growing tendency to critically analyse the

processes through which victims (former liberation fighters) become perpetrators (cf. Lamb 2001).

Breaking the taboos in this regard is necessary in a debate that deals increasingly with the results of liberation, analyses the concept of solidarity in the past and marks the end of the cultivation of 'heroic narratives'. The much-celebrated attainment of formal independence is no longer being equated with liberation, and certainly not with the creation of lasting democracy. Instead, there are increasing attempts to investigate the structural legacies, which in most cases set far too narrow limits on realising societal alternatives in the post-colonial countries. There is a growing insight that the armed liberation struggles were not a suitable breeding ground for establishing democratic systems of government following independence. The methods of resistance against totalitarian regimes were organised on strictly hierarchical and authoritarian lines. If not, they would hardly have had any prospect of success. In this sense, the new societies carried within them essential elements of the old system, which they had fought. Aspects of the colonial system reproduced themselves in the struggle for its abolition and subsequently in the concepts of governance that were applied in post-colonial conditions.

The result is that the new system has little transparency. As a new elite in the making, those in power are at best prepared to be accountable only to themselves and care little about the notion of popular democracy (Good 2002). There is a lack of (self-)critical awareness and extremely limited willingness to accept divergent opinions, particularly if they are expressed in public. Non-conformist thinking is interpreted as disloyalty, if not equated with treason. This marginalisation or elimination of dissent drastically limits the new system's capacity for reform and innovation. A culture of fear, intimidation and silence inhibits the possibilities of durable renewal at the cost of the public good. In the long term, the rulers are themselves undermining their credibility and legitimacy.

More than forty years ago, the Martinique born psychiatrist and political revolutionary, Frantz Fanon, who had joined the Algerian liberation struggle, presciently described in his manifesto, "The Wretched of the Earth", the internal contradictions and limits to emancipation in anti-colonial resistance and organised liberation movements. Writing at a time when the Algerian war of liberation had not even ended, Fanon presaged the abuse of government power after attainment of independence in the wake of establishing a one-party state. In a chapter entitled "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" he predicted that the state, which both vigorously and by restraint should convey a sense of security, trust and stability, instead foists itself on the people in a spectacular way, harassing and mistreating the citizens and in this way showing that it is in permanent danger (Fanon 2001: 132). He continues by criticising the abuse of power exercised by the party, which

> "controls the masses, not in order to make sure that they really participate in the business of governing the nation, but in order to remind them constantly that the government expects from them obedience and discipline. (…) The political party, … instead of welcoming the expression of popular discontentment, instead of taking for its fundamental purpose the free flow of ideas from the people up to the government, forms a screen and forbids such ideas." (Fanon 2001: 146 and 147)

The growing blending of party, government and state among the liberation movements in power indicates a very similar development in the post-apartheid era of Southern Africa. A constellation based on the use of force to gain liberation from the undemocratic and repressive conditions that prevailed in the colonial societies of Southern Africa was hardly favourable for the durable strengthening of humanitarian values and norms. In the course of abolishing anachronistic and degrading systems of rule, these constellations created new challenges on the difficult path to establishing sound and robust egalitarian structures and institutions, particularly in relation to the promotion of democratic societies. At the end of the day independence without democracy is still far from being liberation.

Zimbabwe and beyond: Liberation movements in power

In Zimbabwe, the violent practices within and between the liberation movements escalated soon after Independence in organized massacres in Matabeleland (the western part of Zimbabwe occupied mostly by Ndebele-speakers considered to be in their majority supporters to the Joshua Nkomo led ZAPU, competing with ZANU for power). Between early 1983 and late 1986, an estimated 20,000 people lost their lives through horrific acts of barbarism carried out by the Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwe National Army, trained by North Korean military advisors. Although known and reported at the time, the massacres were largely ignored, even by the former colonial power. Described by Robert Mugabe as *Gukurahundi* ("the rain that washes away the chaff before the summer rains", cf. Phimister 2008), the organized mass violence constituted a defining moment for his regime.

The Catholic Church in Zimbabwe was a lonely voice revealing the scale of atrocities. Since then, the openly violent character of Mugabe's rule has drawn worldwide attention. Notably, however, it only became a concern for the international community (as represented by the Western countries) when the so-called fast track land reform dispossessed the majority of the commercial farmers and portrayed the conflict (misleadingly so) as one between a remaining white settler minority and the government. This suggests a moral selectivity in Western perceptions, which the populist rhetoric of the despotic regime managed to exploit.

The solidarity displayed by African leaders towards the manipulations and vote rigging in hijacking the presidential elections in Zimbabwe by the reigning ZANU already in March 2002 and ever since then – not least the ignorance displayed before, during and after the parliamentary elections in March 2005 and the refusal to sanction the regime's refusal to vacate the seats of political power as a result of the lost elections in 2008 – went even a step further. Being in denial of any of the blatant forms of abuse of power bordering to systematic mass atrocities, such as operation *Murambatsvina* ("restore order", cf. Ndlovu 2008), questions the degree of seriousness of African states in applying the notions articulated within the credo of their constitutions and the normative frameworks they subscribe to.

In the light of the polarisation between the loyalty offered by most African leaders to "Comrade Bob" and the interventionist position of those in the Western world through imposing sanctions as a result of the so-called fast track land reform, Zimbabwe almost turned into an issue of Africa against the rest of the world. This is obvious in the congratulatory message the secretary general of SWAPO in Namibia conveyed to the administrative secretary of ZANU-PF after Mugabe's re-election:

> "on behalf of the leadership and the entire membership … our elation over the resounding victory scored. … Your party's triumph is indeed victory for Southern Africa in particular and the African continent at large. It is victory over neo-colonialism, imperialism and foreign sponsored puppetry. We in SWAPO Party knew quite well that despite imperialist intransigence and all round attempts by enemies of peace, democracy and the rule of law to influence the outcome of the elections in favour of neck-chained political stooges, people of Zimbabwe would not succumb an inch to external pressure. They spoke with one overwhelming voice to reject recolonization. Their verdict should, therefore, be respected unconditionally by both the external perpetrators of division and their hired local stooges, who have been parading themselves as democrats. … As we join your great nation in celebrating this well deserved and indeed well earned victory over the forces of darkness and uncertainty, we wish to call upon the people of Zimbabwe to prove to the prophets of doom that they can do without their unholy blessing, through hard work. In the same vein, we call for unity of purpose among the African people as the only viable weapon to ward off outside influence." (SWAPO Party 2002)

It is noteworthy that Hifikepunye Pohamba, signing this message in his function as the party's Secretary General, has in 2005 resumed office as Sam Nujoma's successor as Head of State and started his second term in office in 2010. While the selective view he expressed seems unrealistic to the degree of being almost irrational, its (dis-)qualification would ignore the inner logic of the attitudes and policies displayed not only by SWAPO cadres, but to an extent also by other political office bearers of other liberation movements.

For the national liberation movements the seizure of power signals in their understanding something similar to what the US-American philosopher Francis Fukuyama (1992) dubbed as "the end of history" (in his case with reference to the collapse of the Soviet system and the unchallenged hegemony of capitalism). From this understanding follows that a liberation movement should stay in power forever after succeeding in its anti-colonial struggle:

> "The NLMs [national liberation movements], share what can only be termed a common theology. National liberation is both the just and historically necessary conclusion of the struggle between the people and the forces of racism and colonialism. This has two implications. First, the NLMs – whatever venial sins they may commit – are the righteous. They not merely represent the masses but in a sense they are the masses, and as such they cannot really be wrong. Secondly,

according to the theology, their coming to power represents the end of a process. No further group can succeed them for that would mean that the masses, the forces of righteousness, had been overthrown. That, in turn, could only mean that the forces of racism and colonialism, after sulking in defeat and biding their time, had regrouped and launched a counter-attack." (Johnson 2002).

There is another related, general (and moral) conclusion from Zimbabwe's currently anomalous situation in as much as Mugabe and some of his bedfellows are a disgrace to the history of the liberation struggle in Southern Africa and the values it claimed to strive for. ZANU-PF insults by its present politics the moral and ethical claims that motivated the local and international support for armed struggle in order to realise political self-determination. It is exactly this notion of self-determination, so dearly fought for at the costs of many lives, which is now so utterly disrespected by the new political rulers. They are not prepared to abandon political power and instead act against the will of the people. Through their totalitarian mindset they betray the values of democracy and popular participation they were in the past claiming to represent and which were assumed to be among the reasons for at least some of the international support by a solidarity movement. In return for continued despotic rule, at the cost of the ordinary people, they discredit their earlier legitimacy in liberating a country and its people. Victims turn into perpetrators. The rights of all are sacrificed for the privileges of a few. This is hardly progress compared with the situation under settler colonialism for those who continue to suffer. It is evidence of the unfinished business called decolonisation. – Not so in the view of those who hold the power today.

Jacob Zuma visited Namibia a couple on months before assuming office as South African Head of State as the ANC President on 8 December 2008. He met with President Hifikepunye Pohamba and the former President Sam Nujoma. A Joint Communiqué released after the visit, stated:

> "It was noted that there is a recurring reactionary debate around the need to reduce the dominance of former libration (sic!) movements on the African continent. In this regard the emergence of counter revolutionary forces to reverse the social, political and economical gains that have been made under the leadership of our liberation movements was discussed."[3]

In his "Letter from the President", Jacob Zuma after his return summarized and repeated part of the deliberations in the following way:

> "Ruling parties often go through certain challenges after the first decade, when the interests of different strands within the broad liberation movement begin to diverge. People begin to explore other avenues, especially when they feel they are losing control and influence within the movement. The interests of people outside

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[3] Joint Communiqué between the SWAPO Party and the African National Congress, 9 December 2008 (http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=./ancdocs/pr/2008/pr1209.html, accessed on 14 December 2008)

the movement, locally or internationally would also come into play. […] Political analysts and all who claim to know Africans better than they know themselves tell us that it is good for Africa and democracy if the majority of former liberation movements was reduced. How do we as former liberation movements ensure that we do not steer away from our mandate of serving the poor and all our people, in the current climate of counter-revolution?" (Zuma 2008)

The answer would actually be an easy one – simply by showing that the former liberation movements continue to provide the best policy choices for the majority of the people. In contrast to this 'exit option', which is rather a window of opportunity, views like the ones expressed by Zuma and his comrades seem to suggest that there is under no circumstances any inclination to vacate again the once occupied centres of political power, even if an electorate – as in the case of Zimbabwe – would vote for a political alternative. A democratic process with such a result would be considered as tantamount to an illegitimate regime change initiated by externally influenced and (mis-)guided elements willing to sabotage the project for social, economic and political emancipation, over which the erstwhile liberation movements claim to hold a monopoly. Any attacks on the liberation movement in power border in such perspective to acts of blasphemy and are dismissed as imperialist conspiracy. The articulation of political opposition is seen as a reason to marginalise, exclude and coerce those with dissenting views as a legitimate response by those in power. Instead, they could opt for a better policy, which convinces the people that they deserve to remain in political control by means of obtaining the majority votes in free and fair elections as a result of a sound policy in the interest of the people and an electoral campaign without restraints for and repression of anyone.

Liberation struggles as struggles of appropriation

The Indian psychologist and sociologist Ashis Nandy (1984), discusses how liberators tend to reproduce the past rather than offer true alternatives. In this light, the "anti-imperialist" Robert Mugabe turns out to be another kind of disguised caretaker of the policies of the racist colonists Cecil Rhodes and Ian Smith. Armed combat created new repressive institutions of the state for the dominant group occupying the commanding heights.

The ANC Youth League's leader Julius Malema's insistence to continue singing the struggle hymn *Ayesaba Amagwala* with the refrain „shoot the boer" displays not a different mindset from that of Eugene Terre'blanche, the leader of the ultra-racist AWB who was hacked and clubbed to death by two young farm labourers almost the same time when Malema intonated the song in front of an enthusiastic crowd at Harare's township Mbare. In an almost ironic analogy, this particular coincidence, which caught up with the recent South African history and the unsolved challenge of reconciliation over the Easter weekend 2010 and was widely reported internationally, displayed the affinities between victims and perpetrators and how quickly both identities and roles can merge or switch. This also includes the transition from the exploited to the exploiter.

Moeletsi Mbeki (himself a beneficiary of new business opportunities provided to so-

called previously disadvantaged) ended his critical deliberations on the post-Apartheid 'architects of poverty' with the conclusion, that the emerging African elites are with few exceptions a parasitic class. They appropriate wealth through access to national assets they are selling to others and

> "have no sense of ownership of their country and are not interested in its development. They view the country primarily as a cash cow that enables them to live extravagantly … as they attempt to mimic the lifestyles of the colonialists. … With the lack of ownership goes the pillaging of resources, neglect of the welfare of the people, corruption, capital flight and, ultimately, brutality against dissenting voices." (Mbeki 2009: 174)

Sadly enough, there is nothing more positive to add. Taking note of Julius Malema's speech in Harare on 3 April 2010 seems to make the point when he states:

> "We want the mines. They have been exploiting our minerals for a long time. Now it's our turn to also enjoy from these minerals. They are so bright, they are colourful, we refer to them as white people, maybe their colour came as a result of exploiting our minerals and perhaps if some of us can get opportunities in these minerals we can develop some nice colour like them."[4]

Such pseudo-radical populist rhetoric seeks to detract from the fact that nationalisation of this kind is merely a disguise for the class interest by those in control over the state with the intention to privatise the assets. Moeletsi Mbeki sensibly observes that this appropriation strategy goes hand in hand with an authoritarianism, which ends in "brutality against dissenting voices". As the South African Communist Party cadre Dominic Tweedie states in his comment on the murder of Terre'blanche:

> "Malema is a true demagogue. He claimed to be more communist than the communists, while wearing a R250,000 Breitling watch. He now appropriates a struggle song. He is talking of nationalising the mines, but admits that what he really means is a "public-private" partnership – a socialism for the capitalists. He is talking of taking the farms from the Boere, who include significant numbers of motivated and efficient farmers, whereas most people, and even most Boere, shun farming and want the city life.
> Malema hits cheap targets. Terre'blanche was also a cheap target. The murder of a 69-year old man in his sleep by two young cowards is a disgusting atrocity.
> We have a struggle against fascism in this country, but it is not with the AWB. If the AWB tries anything it will be smashed. The fascists we have to fear are young, and black, very arrogant and very foolish." (Tweedie 2010)

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[4] Malema lauds Bob, says SA will copy Zim's land seizures, *Sunday Times*, 4 April 2010 (http://www.timeslive.co.za/sundaytimes/article385668.ece/Malema-lauds-Bob---says-SA-will-copy-Zims-land-seizures)

Already shortly before Mphutlane wa Bofelo (2010) pointed to the fact, that "the political, social and economic conduct and morality of a person is not ultimately informed by his or her 'race' and that our judgment of what is morally and politically unacceptable should not be the race or gender of a culprit and victim". When the new elite, claiming to be in direct descent of the struggle aristocracy, seeks to provide such testimony by singing the songs of the past, this

> "is not a reflection of how attached they are to the struggle, but an attempt to locate the struggle literally in the past. They want us to believe that the struggle is over, that all we have is remnants of the old order against whom our anger should be vented. In this way, the political elite sidetracks us from singing about the current dislocation of water and electricity, the ruthless and violent eviction of shack dwellers by the red ants, the vicious police attack on service delivery protesters, the financial exclusion of students, the kleptomaniac proclivities of the new political and economic elite, the advent of black colonialists, attacks on the freedom of media, the massive acts of de-politicisation, de-historicisation of our struggle and concerted efforts towards de-memorialisation." (wa Bofelo 2010)

The anti-democratic legacy of violence

Violence takes its toll on all sides and affects if not shapes the political and institutional structures among those who resort to resistance for liberation from oppression – only to resort to repressive forms of control among themselves. Former PLO activist Yezid Sayigh (1977) argued that this was also happening in the Palestinian liberation movement. Such power structures often revolve around individual commanders who act to the benefit of their crony supporters. Resistance movements normally adopt rough survival strategies and techniques while fighting an oppressive regime. That culture, unfortunately, takes root and is permanently nurtured. All summed up, it becomes questionable whether there is a truly fundamental difference between the political systems they manage to thrown out and what they establish in that place. The justification for the legitimacy of the new regime lies primarily not in being democratically elected but in having fought the armed struggle, which liberated the masses. As another PLO analyst concluded, the organisation's legitimacy to represent the Palestine people

> "stemmed from the armed struggle the PLO had launched in its early phase. These leaders presented themselves as the fighters for the national struggle, as the custodians of the national rights, and as the healers who can rejuvenate the nation and who know what is good for the people. Thus, the leadership employed its nationalist credentials and the achievements from the revolutionary years as the basis of its political legitimacy. Indeed, they perceived themselves as capable of meeting the national aspirations and of translating them into the tangible reality of independence and liberty, and the people perceived them as the most trusted agent for the management of their destinies." (Ezbidi 2006: 63f.)

For South Africa, Suttner (2006 and 2009) thus argues that the liberation movement is a prototype of a state within the state – one that sees itself as the only legitimate source of

power, which includes intolerance to any form of political opposition. But he also carefully seeks to explain how the anti-pluralist factor remained largely unnoticed within the underground structures. These cloaked individual, independent minded thinking guided by maybe dissenting moral values, under a collective, which used hardly democratic centralism as a guiding principle to ensure maximum discipline and loyalty as a prerequisite for the survival and ultimate victory (Suttner 2008). As he suggests, the liberation organisation represented a distinct notion of family. There was a general suppression of 'the personal' in favour of 'the collective'. Individual judgment (and thereby autonomy) was substituted by a collective decision from the leadership. Such "warrior culture, the militarist tradition," according to Suttner (2008: 119), "entailed not only heroic acts but also many cases of abuse and power".

Suttner also delivered the prestigious Harold Wolpe Memorial Lecture in early November 2005 at academic centres in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, during which he admitted: "I have said things in this paper I would not have said 20 years ago or, in some cases, until very recently" (Suttner 2006: 26). Among these were his (self-)critical reflections on unity and pluralism within the dominant discourse of the hegemonic rule of the former anti-colonial organisation (the ANC) now controlling and representing the state. As he observes, this form of applied "patriotic history", which defiantly refuses to acknowledge any meaningful and legitimate opposition, equates the "national liberation movement" with the nation emerging. It is an exclusive, all-embracing concept. Suttner (2006: 24) qualified the dominant narrative as

> "a language of unity and a language that *tends to represent the unified people as embodied in the liberation movement organisation and then equates them with the people as a whole*. … In a sense the liberation movement depicts itself as a proto-state. This notion derives from a framework of ideas in which the seizure of the state was represented as the central issue of the day." (original emphasis)

He maintained, that

> "it is important, as part of the nation we are building, to acknowledge without qualification that people have the right to organise in a variety of sectors, linked to or in opposition to the government of the day. No political organisation can represent every sectoral interest and it is important that such sectoral organisations exist. No one should be discouraged from becoming involved in such activity or depicted as disloyal for doing so." (Suttner 2006: 25)

While the challenge today is not to overthrow legitimate political systems and structures by illegitimate means, the task at hand is to improve society in favour of more justice, equality and humanity. There is wide scope in any given society of this world for such efforts – not least among those in Southern Africa.

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Forgive me, comrades,
if I say something apolitical
and shamefully emotional
but in the dark of night
it is as if my heart is clutched
by a giant iron hand:
"Treachery, treachery" I cry out
thinking of you, comrades
and how you have betrayed
the things we suffered for.

August 23, 2000
Dennis Brutus[5]

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[5] Dennis Brutus, *leafdrift*. Edited by Lamont B. Steptoe. Camden, N.J.: Whirlwind Press 2005, 87