

100 years of Liberation Struggle – ANC, PAC and AZAPO – Between liberation and neoliberal politics

“What other countries have taken three hundred years or more to achieve, a once dependent territory must try to accomplish in a generation if it is to survive. Unless it is, as it were jet propelled it will lag behind and thus risk everything for which it has fought.” Kwame Nkrumah

During the 20th century, South Africa’s national struggle occupied an iconic place in the global political imagination. International opposition to apartheid came together in the heady days of socialist revolutions, anti-colonial struggles and the rise of the 1968 new left. Despite this euphoric historical ferment, the global anti-apartheid movement furnished internationalism with a distinctive political thread. This was more than anti-colonial or anti-imperialist solidarity. The anti-apartheid movement was part of a heroic endeavour to isolate one of the most racist, unjust and offensive social systems in the world. It prefigured the new transnational activism that has come to the fore against neoliberal globalisation, and it is a movement from which valuable lessons can be drawn for contemporary global struggles.

The South African liberation struggle was exceptional in the manner it captured popular imagination and influenced narratives of oppression across the world. Post-apartheid South Africa had two choices in this context: to continue the struggle in the context of transition to realise historical aspirations and the liberated South African dream, or to allow the pervasive hybrid capitalist model. This paper will discuss apartheid capitalism, the role of various key liberation movements during these 100 years, the impact of a neo-liberal policy direction, the limits of neo liberalism on democracy, the problematic of citizenship and the complexities of what is called reconciliation.

The theft of the dream

Underpinning the struggle for more in South Africa’s transition were key factors.

There was a growing wave of resistance to neo-liberalisation in Africa and a genuine belief that South Africa’s liberation struggle would strengthen the radical impulse for change. This wave of resistance was part of the emergence of a new cycle of struggle, a counter-movement to neoliberal capitalism, punctuated by Chiapas (1994), Seattle (1999) and more generally the ‘left tide’ in Latin America, and now the ‘Arab spring’ and mass protest movements in Spain, Greece and elsewhere. South Africa’s liberation struggle and democratic breakthrough in 1994 could have been a key moment in this upswing of resistance.

The structural crisis and stagnation of a monopolised apartheid capitalism necessitated a process of economic restructuring that provided an opportunity for reconstruction and development on the terms of the oppressed majority rather than capital. Ironically, even the World Bank in the early 1990s in its interventions on South African macro-economic policy accept-

ed the need for a redistributive approach, given the historical legacies of racialised deprivation and exclusion.

Despite this, the ANC-led liberation movement chose not just reconciliation but arguably appeasement. This meant that white monopoly capital was not called upon to take responsibility for its complicity under apartheid and to commit to a serious transformative program, even though the conditions existed for this. Instead it was given what it wanted in terms of neoliberal reforms and 'economic stability'. Corporate social responsibility, tax payments and black economic empowerment to engender a new black bourgeoisie were considered sufficient and a normalising quid pro quo. Even this strategy has not worked with many monopoly firms moving offshore.

Instead of pursuing the dream of a transformed and non-racial South Africa, the ANC-led national liberation movement relied on neoliberal reforms with an African voice to bring a 'better life for all'. The presumption was that South Africa would manage home-grown neoliberalisation as a short term expedient in a different way from the rest of Africa and, indeed, the world. Thus, post-apartheid South Africa moved in a straight historical line from apartheid into a market-led development model, sometimes referred to as 'Afro-neoliberalism'.

Eighteen years later, a virtue has been made out of necessity. The great globalisation leap of national liberation has been a great leap into dystopia. The deepening of the South African economy's immersion into global financial, production and trade structures through macro-economic adjustment has produced a country with one of the highest unemployment rates in the world (40 per cent), obscene inequality (and worsening in comparison with, for example, Brazil), a deepening ecological crisis (South Africa is the 13th-highest carbon emitter in the world and scary climate change scenarios face the country) and growing hunger. This is the short story of how the South African dream was stolen from the majority.

The Pan Africanist Congress

The PAC's ideological roots were laid in the ANC Youth League and the Africanist views of Anton Lembede, AP Mda and Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe . The two trends that attempted to coexist within the ANC from the 1940s through the 1950s finally parted company when Potlako Leballo, Mda, Robert Sobukwe and others formed the PAC on April 6-7, 1959. The formation of PAC was in response to the adoption by the African National Congress of its "Freedom Charter" that abandoned the belief that Africa belongs to African people, not to the colonial interests.

The "Freedom Charter" stated that South Africa "belongs to all who live in it, black and white," thereby liquidating the anti-colonial struggle of African people to regain their stolen land.

Sobukwe assumed the major leadership role until his death in 1978. The PAC made it clear that, contrary to the views expressed in attacks from various other liberation movements it was not chauvinist. It embraced and espoused non-racialism, considering that an African is anybody who owes their full allegiance to Africa. The PAC held that the struggle in South Africa was for the repossession of African land from the foreign invaders. Anyone who ex-

pressed loyalty to Africa and was prepared to accept the democratic rule of the African majority was welcomed to be a part of the independent African state.

The Pan-Africanists insisted that colonial supremacy had to be destroyed if apartheid was to end. To them, part of this process included destroying the idea that Blacks could not lead themselves.

The PAC was the first to put forward the name Azania for a free and independent Black republic in South Africa. The name was further popularized by the Black Consciousness groups during the 1970s.

The PAC was catapulted into the forefront by its role in organizing a non-violent campaign against the pass laws. It planned for massive civil disobedience and mass arrests. The ANC united with the campaign, but called for separate actions. On March 21, 1960, 69 protestors were killed in Sharpeville and 5 at Langa. Sobukwe and other leaders were arrested. Mass funerals, protests, pass burnings and strikes followed. The apartheid state responded by severe repression and mass arrests. The PAC and ANC were banned shortly afterward. With popular support and momentum on their side, the PAC moved to another phase of the struggle, the armed struggle.

The Black Consciousness Movement

Black Consciousness as a political outlook and trend emerged out of the student struggles of the 1970s. Both high school and university students began challenging apartheid policies in education. One of the notable struggles that took place during that time was Black opposition to instruction in the Afrikaans language, the language of the Dutch settlers.

The students took up other questions relating to apartheid and developed views on how to end it. In that period, thousands were killed, or beaten and jailed, by the police and army. Steve Biko, a leading force in this movement, was killed by the racist authorities while he was being held in jail for his anti-apartheid activities.

The Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCM(A)) was formed in April, 1980, as a body to coordinate the work of those living in exile who were members of some of the Black Consciousness organizations that were banned after the Soweto rebellion of 1976.

The BCM(A) declared its goal to be a free, socialist, democratic Azania, and seeks to overthrow the system of apartheid through a revolution led by the Black workers and masses. It is not clear exactly what its conception of socialism is, although it clearly opposes the private ownership of the wealth of Azania. However, it is not a Marxist-Leninist organization that uses scientific socialism as an analytical tool and methodology.

BCM was an organization with a revolutionary nationalist orientation which correctly sees that the Black masses make up the majority of the working class in Azania. To the extent that it can, it has committed itself to sending material aid to the struggles occurring at home, and has stated that it also seeks to train cadres politically and militarily to aid in the development of a people's army for liberation.

BCM was opposed to a multi-national strategy for ending apartheid and moving to socialism. Whites in South Africa were, in its view, essentially labour aristocrats, a privileged stratum of the working class. Therefore, it did not call for any of the white workers or masses to come over to the side of the Azanian people in the fight for liberation. In this effort, it is attempting to end the government inspired clashes between liberation groups that have developed. BCM has stated categorically opposed physical conflicts between the United Democratic Front, the Azanian Peoples Organization (AZAPO) and the Azanian Students Movement. It has evolved into a Parliamentary opposition party.

The neoliberal squeeze on post-apartheid democracy

"Peace is a rare gift. Peace of mind, peaceful sleeps, and peaceful spirits are all luxuries that few rebels can ever afford." Assata Shakur

Since 1994 the Afro-neoliberal project not only de-racialised and globalised South Africa's monopoly-driven accumulation model, but it has also repositioned South Africa within the inter-state system, particularly within a US-led bloc. In doing so, it has engendered technocratic and, in some instances, authoritarian state practice towards state-civil society relations. This has produced a neoliberal squeeze on democracy.

The underlining philosophy of neoliberal economy, a major component of globalization, is that state intervention in the economic life of the people, however well intentioned, is "counter-productive" and therefore undesirable. The major policy of globalisation thus includes trade liberalisation, devaluation of national currencies against 'major' currencies, especially the US dollar and deregulation of the public sector or, simply, privatisation of public utilities. The social and economic consequences of these policies have been the retrenchment of workers and consequently, massive unemployment, reduction in government spending on social infrastructure, cut in government subsidies for social services wherever they are available and subsequent increase in the of cost these services.

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This squeeze is taking place in the everyday workings of South African democracy through the disembedding and de-territorialisation of the market. The market has become our present and our future. It has been propagated in our public sphere and its values – greed, possessive individualism and competition – are being naturalised in everyday life. There is supposedly no alternative despite the deepening economic crisis.

With the advent of the global recession, South Africa lost close to one million jobs in the context of already huge unemployment. In the midst of all this, the South African Competition Commission has given permission to US retail giant Walmart to buy out one of South Africa's leading monopoly retailers. While trade unions are protesting against the likely downward push on wages, the threat of greater unemployment and de-industrialisation, the government has welcomed this market inflow. This trap of the market master narrative is profoundly undemocratic because it does not authorise other ways of thinking about South Africa's challenges and solutions.

There has also been a narrowing of the boundaries of democracy and the meaning of citizenship. The dream of a people's democracy has been shrunk from the triad of strong representative, associational and participatory democracy to a form of weak representational democracy. Our politicians have become technocrats: they manage 'market democracy' such that the juggernaut of accumulation is not constrained and growth is realised at all costs. The risk to capital is managed best by a shallow democracy.

South Africa's four national elections since 1994 have been held up as exemplars of 'free and fair' electoral contests with voter turnouts adequate to legitimate the formal meaning of citizenship: I am a voter. Actually, in this context constructs of citizenship are unclear.

A globalised South African state has reduced democratic space. This has happened through locking the country into a global power structure serving and reproducing the rule of transnational capital. The WTO, IMF, World Bank, G20, World Economic Forum, and the UN are all crucial transnational policy-making forums. These institutions are not there to serve global citizenship but to ensure that global capitalism thrives.

South Africa is a key player in all these institutions. Through its participation in this global power structure it transmits a global consensus on what capital wants back into the domestic context. A weak representative democracy is no more than a transmission belt for this consensus, which trumps the desire for more by South Africa's workers and poor majority and makes a mockery of narrow electoral democracy.

The counter-movement of resistance and hope

"...Our wounds are too fresh and too painful still for us to drive them from our memory. We have known harassing work, exacted in exchange for salaries which did not permit us to eat enough to drive away hunger, or to clothe ourselves, or to house ourselves decently, or to raise our children as creatures dear to us." "...Our wounds are too fresh and too painful still for us to drive them from our memory. We have known harassing work, exacted in exchange for salaries which did not permit us to eat enough to drive away hunger, or to clothe ourselves, or to house ourselves decently, or to raise our children as creatures dear to us." Lumumba

The underbelly of contemporary South Africa is a place of fractured hope, desperation, uncertainty and alienation. It is a place in which apartheid patterns of exclusion and degradation spawn shack settlements, where hunger stalks as the link between wage earning and social

reproduction has been broken, and where basic needs such as healthcare, education and clean drinking water are an uphill battle.

People are responding. South Africa experiences one of the highest rates of civic protest action in the world. On a daily basis hundreds of communities take to the streets against the ANC state, often in violent protests, to demand service delivery, jobs, housing and an affirmation of rights. Some commentators suggest that these violent outbursts are the 'rebellion of the poor'. But while these flashpoints are important, they are episodic, fragmented and loosely organised. The violence is sometimes linked to vicious power struggles and sometimes about recognition of voice and affirmation of citizenship.

More generally these struggles are understood as an expression of the crisis of the national liberation project. At one level this is about the splinters of the tripartite alliance and deep disaffection running through the grassroots. At another level it is about a deepening crisis as a South Africa locked into neoliberal globalisation faces the knock-on effects of the global economic crisis. It is in response to this that a new democratic left activism has emerged in contemporary South Africa. Such an activism provides a pole of attraction for a host of anti-capitalist left forces seeking to reclaim lost ground.

The problematic of citizenship

Tragically, what has instead emerged is a growing underclass and a crisis of citizenship. This construct refers to citizenship as a state of being that enables provision, belonging, control and ownership. The ownership of discourse, ownership of narratives and ownership of catalytic self-agency are still removed from the African tongue and pen. This is clearly one of the problematics that manifests as a crisis in citizenship. According to the anti-historical paradigm, white people arrived on supposedly empty territory and black people were dispossessed and displaced from their own countries. It is the same story told across the world. It is similar to the story of Aotearoa, [now called New Zealand], Australian Aborigines and Native Americans across Latin and North America. What distinguishes the South African story is that it has been recast and reframed as an issue of civil rights rather than liberation, anti-imperialist war as evidenced by many battles of resistance as early as the 1653, months after the arrival of the first European settlers. The last hundred years have seen the notion of race-based capital used to form a sense of Darwinist inspired otherness and class division, even though it was not named as such at the time. This paper seeks to contribute to the struggle to correct the on-going narrative of the historical and anti-historical manner of addressing race, class and gender politics in this country today.

The architecture of race based imperialism and capitalism necessitated an increased, deliberate and systematic structural marginalisation of the African majority in this country. African people's movements were restricted and only linked to the needs of capital and capital intensive economic activity. This model was ruthlessly applied mentally as well as physically through cheap labour in cities, sub-standard Bantu education and the employment reserves where Black people are still located in townships, farmlands or peri-urban areas across the country. Across modern South Africa, our spatial planning is testimony to the legacy of regu-

lated and legislated movement and it is imperative that we reconstruct and deconstruct the economics of apartheid.

Why Apartheid died

Apartheid did not, for example, die primarily because of moral outrage or the liberation struggles and valiant attempts of countless people. It died because it was no longer economically viable. It was not profitable anymore and the concept of positive engagement and constructive engagement, which those complicit in apartheid corroborated with, was becoming too morally disgusting and unprofitable for capital to openly remain engaged with. What then emerged from this was that the hard core anti-imperial struggle was mischievously rebranded as a far more innocuous anti-apartheid and race issue.

I suspect that if anyone asked whether any of our Heroes and Sheroes whether they spent one day in jail, one moment under house arrest, lifetimes in exile and risked their lives of access to beaches and park benches they would probably laugh with derision. This behoves us to begin to reconstruct and retell the obliterated truth about ourselves to ourselves and to our children: that the South African / Azanian question was and remains the struggle of access to resources, land and self-determination.

It is therefore critical to reconstruct the discourse on reconciliation away from liberal interpretations that remove liability and responsibility from the White minority. Reconciliation implies one of two things: [1] that there was originally a relationship of equilibrium, parity, mutual understanding, respect and honour. When we speak of reconciliation it is often related to couples who for whatever reason are not relating well and who through counsel and communication can be reconciled.

[2] Reconciliation also assumes that both parties own proportional responsibility for the damage or unhappiness caused and agree to an appropriate undertaking to correct and heal the situation. Instead, in this country, we have accepted a false construct that insists that reconciliation is something that can happen even though social, racial and economic inequalities were and are still completely ignored and where the perpetrators of race based, capitalist and political oppression were granted amnesty without accountability, liability or redress. This is self-evident in the method with which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) conducted its proceedings. The TRC consolidated the interests of capital by failing to subpoena the large multinationals that subsidised the apartheid regime for decades and by allowing apartheid architects like PW Botha, FW de Klerk to thumb their noses at the process or to be undeservedly rehabilitated as 'visionary Statesmen'. Instead the process opened up painful wounds and arbitrarily assigned a monetary value of R7000 to somehow absolve perpetrators from responsibility and to assuage the experiences of a small group of people who suffered under the colonial apartheid regime. Even Judas would have expressed contempt at this offering of the proverbial thirty pieces of silver.

When we speak in contexts and spaces such as this seminar, I believe that it is important to address reconciliation within the economy. Professor Sampie Terreblanche was calling for exactly this when he proposed the 'Truth and Justice Commission'. The idea was roundly

rejected by the new government and capital interests who deemed that foreign investors would be averse to doing business in South Africa and that the script of the new rainbow nation would be spoiled. This rainbow has to be continuously bleached and air-brushed in order to maintain a comfort level free from restitution, justice or even or any obligation of honest reflection by a minority at the expense of a majority discourse, majority truth and majority experience.

What are we reconciling?

It is hence important not only to speak about reconciliation between people, but reconciliation between the past and the present. Our economic status tells us that the past is still with us. One of the truths of the last seventeen years is that on average, the African majority in South Africa is 12 or 13 per cent worse off than they were before 1994; and that the minority population are a similar proportion better off than they were before 1994. The rich are richer and the poor are poorer and this poverty is both racialised and gendered. The majority of people in this country are African people and of those, the majority of the indigent are women. Despite this there are very few sufficiently cohesive and coherent structural interventions to bring women and African people away from the margins into the centre of the economic narrative. Instead, the policy and transformation discourses are dominated by the insistence of utilising instruments such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). Despite the many additional B's and E's to denote an enlarged beneficiaries, it is still an effective mechanism of entrenching minority rule with the complicity of the new African oligarchy. In truth the economy has not substantively transformed nor transferred power and it is not changing complexion. This is evidenced by the consolidation of an existing and new oligarchy and this oligarchy is strongly linked to and enabled by a political agenda. The troubling trend and growth of an interfacing relationship between party politics and the politics of financial/capital power augurs very badly for this country.

Reconciliation should also mean the beginning of reconciling between the past and the present in context of *what was* and *what is* now. The past is characterised by the reality that black people were marginalised in this country economically, socially, politically and educationally and that this marginalisation was legislated. The present era is characterised by the current regime whose possibly good intentions on paper, have resulted in very little tangible success in effecting a shift in these power dynamics and power relations. This speaks to the reality that citizenship and its substantive, liberatory meaning have not been addressed sufficiently. South Africa has signed up to major supra-national agreements such as the World Trade Organisation and the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement [with the European Union] that were negotiated long before 1994. These agreements are critical to the protection of the socio economic status quo and most unfortunately the majority of people in this country are unaware, uninformed of the implications of such arrangements.

Far more people need to be aware that South Africa is in the grip of particular trade agreements at the World Trade Organization for example , and that these measures reduce our African countries to facilitating states and our leaders to consultants whose job it is to hold the door open for unfettered access by western interests into our markets. For this reason, it is critical to reconcile the past and the present and to understand that there is an on-going

narrative between the past and the present and that of necessity it must always be interrogated and tested for veracity.

Narratives of truth

In order to reach the core of the basic architecture of our memory and history, we need to locate and relocate these dilemmas within a discourse and narrative of truth. To a great extent, BEE for example largely distracts us with the acquisition of wealth for a narrow proportion of the society. This is not a surprise when we recall what the prophets such as Nkrumah long warned us about the co-option of the Comprador class into the white capitalist agenda. The dilemma of citizenship is also linked to the dilemma of trust, particularly in the current South African context. The crisis of eldership as evidenced by some of the reprehensible conduct of school teachers towards female students or the crisis of families that fractured family units. This continues to bear bitter fruit of separateness, perverse and skewed male and female identities as only part of our psychoses. The end of apartheid did not end gender violence and sexism, but the expectation was that these evils would steadily lose power—they have not and instead the so called liberation era has presented us with an anti-feminist, post Beijing backlash that gender desks and government policies cannot contain.

The on-going notions of entitlement are reminders that identity is at stake including the white rights and white privilege that accuse the African majority of wanting too much, too soon and seek absolution from any obligation to cede any wealth, power or privilege. Trust in the State has largely been lost in by many people as evidenced by voter apathy, community insurrections, protracted wage disputes and endemic corruption. There are many outliers that are intended to distract us from the issues at hand one example being the chaos and on-going spotlight placed on the conduct of the Youth League. These outliers contribute to the dumbing down of the general political narrative in this country and remove attention from critical trends unfolding in our country. This is a space where it is a risky and perilous undertaking to speak about what people like Biko and Sobukwe were speaking. It is becoming dangerous to love our country and still speak against some of the questionable judgments, appointments and tender processes that we see headlining our news weekly.

How do we reconcile the space for constructive dissent, of constructive inclusion and the space to disagree, without being branded a 'counter-revolutionary?' In the interests of that necessary space, it is imperative to claim back the State as the defender, the protector and the trustworthy vehicle of our common aspirations and of our common values. It is for us to define and redefine how we intend to respond to the desperate need for plurality and to the growing voicelessness of our democracy; voicelessness that is becoming entrenched by particular legislation, judgments and appointments that threaten to silence us.

In this state of un-reconciled reconciliation how do we speak about true freedom or celebrate it? This re-telling of our history and deconstruction of truth is again officiated by the Archbishop. How are we going to redeem our education system when young people are not able to identify the trajectory of struggle? When children of eleven and twelve years of age can barely spell 'apartheid'? It is absolutely critical to state that our languages are being decimated and torn from our screaming mouths. How and what do we then reconcile with? Reconcil-

iation without knowledge of the self, knowledge of history, understanding of the mechanisms of the economy and the mechanisms of political discourse where the outliers are diverting us from core issues of this incomplete liberation struggle, is a dangerous and false reconciliation. The false hood that has become 'Reconciliation' must be revisited and redefined to deliver us from the sinking sand on which we stand. We must rather stand on the clarion call to self-determination articulated by the ones who came before and charted a course then left us before the call was fully heard and heeded.

"Always bear in mind that the people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone's head. They are fighting to win material benefits, to live better and in peace, to see their lives go forward, to guarantee the future of their children. . . We must practice revolutionary democracy in every aspect of our Party life. Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories..." Cabral