One Hundred Years of the ANC

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Several preliminary points should be made in order to better anchor the overall argument presented in this chapter. A first point refers to the notion of ‘globalisation’ itself, for this is a concept that must be demystified. It refers, of course, to all the ways in which the world has become, to put it simply, smaller in recent decades through, for example, the most dramatic of technological changes: from Skype to the BlackBerry and the like. But most fundamentally, the word speaks to the overbearing nature of our novel global economic relations (and, related to that, our global political relations). Increasingly, what we have – to a crucially important degree and in place of the nationally-premised, western-cited, ‘empires’ that Africa came to know too well – is something new: an ‘Empire of Capital’ that, through its supranational agencies (like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and its intermediaries (the state elites of both capitalist countries at the ‘centre’ of the system and of states elsewhere, such as in South Africa), works actively to guarantee the (relative) stability of the overall system.¹

Note carefully what this means. For, as I will argue, this is a very different empire from that produced by the overbearingly nationally-premised western imperialisms that preceded it. Consider, in this regard, the ambiguities of the ‘liberation’ that has come to define the essence of southern African aspiration in recent decades. There has been a crippling narrowing of the definition of liberation – from one that, in the 1960s and 1970s, saw it as heralding advance on the fronts of race, class and gender equality and of the achievement of a genuine democratic voice from below to one which has come, primarily, to see ‘liberation’ as being defined in terms of racial and national advance only.² Of this reality, the most notable critique was that advanced by Frantz Fanon in the 1950s and 1960s. For he saw what had come to pass for ‘liberation’ in Africa as not so much ‘decolonisation’ but rather as a ‘false decolonisation’:
The national middle class discovers its historic mission: that of intermediary. Seen through its eyes, its mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission lines between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the masque of neo-colonialism. The national bourgeoisie will be quite content with the role of the Western bourgeoisie's business agent, and it will play its part without any complexes in a most dignified manner. But the same lucrative role, this cheap-jack's function, this meanness of outlook and this absence of all ambition symbolise the incapability of the national middle class to fulfill its historic role of bourgeoisie.3

In echoing such an assertion with reference to southern Africa there is, of course, absolutely no need to trivialise the importance of the defeat there of racist colonialism and of apartheid, representing as it did an advance in ensuring a genuine measure of racial equality. Nonetheless, what such a perspective does do is point us back to the first general point made above, regarding ‘recolonisation.’ Indeed, one is tempted to substitute for the word ‘neo-colonialism’ of Fanon’s time ‘recolonisation,’ which is more descriptively accurate in our own time – this latter form of imperialism being enacted by global capital itself, rather than by any specific national (western) centre of empire.

In addition, in Fanon’s view, the new African elites or ‘middle class’ that came to wield local power did so in a manner virtually unchecked domestically and to little or no positive and transformative effect in terms of any genuine social and economic national advance by the bulk of the populace concerned. The elites (principally, for Fanon, state-based elites) merely brandished the single-party state and effective class dictatorship (even when there was more than one party) to supervise the pacification of the people, feeding the latter a diet of ethnic division and cruel overlordship rather than encouraging them to have any ongoing sense of their own possible empowerment. In fact, Fanon’s litany of the ‘pitfalls’ evidenced by post-colonial African history was formidable and grounded in a grim interrogation of the neo-colonial aftermath of African decolonisation and independence that has been virtually unmatched by any analyst since.

Unfortunately, such a point of reference still remains most instructive for understanding southern Africa. And yet, as noted, the Empire of Capital is also different from its more nationally defined imperialist predecessors. For there is, within it, (i) some greater room for local states to manoeuvre on behalf of their own
domestic ruling classes’ interests within a world of global capital’s dictates; (ii) some greater room (at least in theory) for national bourgeois classes, themselves and in various settings, to find some ‘national capitalist’ space wherein to grow and to prosper; and (iii) even some greater room for certain states, working in conjunction with capital, both foreign and domestic, but lodged within their jurisdictions, to guide certain ‘sub-imperialisms’ of their own devising.4 For the fact is that capitalist actors are now much less restricted in their actions by merely ‘national’ centres of capitalist activity than they were in the days of formal colonialism – although the states located at such sites (for example, the United States and its military) can still have pertinent and extremely damaging ‘imperial effects’ in their own right.

In sum, any overall imperial ‘logic’ is now much more volatile and unpredictable – as the trajectories of capitalisms (‘successful’ if also formidably unequal in their internal social implications) in, say, China, Korea and even India have demonstrated in recent decades. But what of southern/South Africa in this turbulent world of twenty-first century capitalist imperialism? Truth to tell, given the extreme nature of its dependency and its still extremely subordinate economic position within the overall global system, the African setting provides much less prospect for even the distorted ‘benefits’ of a capitalist ‘revolution’ than do many other parts of the Global South. For if the immediate future of southern Africa is to be capitalist, it will be a capitalism largely driven by global interests and capitalist priorities and fostering a limited brand of development that, while offering some wealth and power to the fortunate few, does not do so to the vast majority of the impoverished population. This is, in fact, the present southern Africa reality. And while it is true that shifts in the broad pattern of worldwide capitalism will continue to require our critical examination for other signs of change, for the foreseeable future recolonisation, as defined above, seems set to remain the region’s operative reality.

FAILED LIBERATION: THE REGION

Next, we must survey more specifically how all this comes home to roost in southern Africa, and not least in South Africa itself, in quite concrete ways. Of course, those of us who were politically active and alert in the 1960s and 1970s had hoped (with some reason we thought) that southern Africa might be different, and in genuinely progressive ways, from the continental pattern so clearly identified and criticised by Fanon. Why? For starters, the liberation movements seemed unlikely easily to be offered a false decolonisation. Quite simply, it appeared, the white colonisers, in
particular the white settler minorities in Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, were not (unlike the British and the French further north in Africa) prepared to concede any such compromise, one that would not readily be controlled in the interests of continuing white skin privilege. Moreover, the Portuguese ‘imperialist mission’ in Mozambique and Angola was, for reasons of its own, equally intractable with regard to prospective changes in the terms of their overrule. In addition, and throughout the region, capital – especially mining and related capital, both domestic and foreign-owned – had been, for a considerable period, quite comfortable with the overall framework of racial rule and quite willing to compromise over any relatively minor contradictions that might exist in the meshing and fine-tuning of racist and capitalist logics. This was in deference to its more crucial interest in ensuring the supply of labour, cheap and pacified, that southern Africa’s settler/apartheid rule guaranteed.5

There was also a very real counter-logic from which many who were concerned to see progressive outcomes in southern Africa draw inspiration: the very intransigence of white-minority rule tended to radicalise such opposition as it began to grope its way forward from the 1960s on. This meant, for example, that armed struggle of some kind and, especially in South Africa, a high level of popular mobilisation and action on the ground would be necessary in order to realise any significant change. True, the ‘positive’ implications of the need imposed upon the nationalist-cum-liberation movements actually to organise to fight were (in and of themselves and pace Fanon and his chapter 1: ‘Concerning Violence’) not entirely straightforward and self-evident. For the apparent imperatives of armed struggle also reinforced, negatively, various hierarchical and undemocratic pressures upon politics, pressures that further strengthened the realpolitik of tough, no-nonsense vanguardism – a politics that the liberation movements (and the governments they would eventually create) were also learning from both their autocratic hosts in the front-line African states bordering on the conflict zone itself and from their Stalinist allies in the East.

At the same time, such struggle did imply a need to mobilise people to a more sustained – albeit more dangerous – level of commitment than a situation in which the nationalist leadership would, in the end, merely be ushered into power by the departing colonialists. Certainly, in South Africa, the actual motor force of effective confrontation was less the force of arms than the rising tide of assertion in workplaces and townships, in Durban and Soweto in the 1970s, and ever more generally as the wave of resistance crested in the 1980s. And this gave hope that even if (as many
of us feared at the time) the ANC refused to sustain its struggle towards ensuring a more expansive outcome, its feet would be held to the fire of revolutionary purpose and democratic practice by the popular energies unleashed into a post-apartheid milieu by the nature of the anti-apartheid struggle itself. In so arguing, I do not think those of us who glimpsed such a possibility were merely – or even mainly – being naïve. Instead, we were being hopeful.

But unrealistic, nonetheless, as events were to prove. For the sober fact remains that the leadership of the southern African liberation movements proved, to an alarming degree, to be perfectly comfortable with the general pattern marked out by previous continental decolonisation – and perfectly prepared to defend their own stake in it. After all, as elsewhere, such leaderships were comprised primarily of a would-be ‘national middle class’ (Fanon) – aspirant men (emphasis added) on the make, prepared to face up to the somewhat harder path to power that insistent white hierarchies forced upon them but in the end quite willing to conform (in pursuit of their own nascent class interests) to the global status quo. This logic was pressed on them by the many seductions and pressures of the global capitalist power wielders from state and corporations alike. And there was also a temptation towards subservience to the local status quo too, especially to white entrepreneurs in South Africa – at least when that local status quo was suitably modified to remove race as the major barrier to this new black elite’s own preferment!

There were complexities too, even beyond those imposed by white settler intransigence; complexities worth specifying on a case-by-case basis. Namibia’s South West African People’s Organisation (Swapo), for example, was quite easily deflected from the task of internal mobilisation. In the first place, its attention was divided, seduced by a tempting preoccupation with high diplomacy and the ‘international’ cross-pressures that arose at the United Nations around the contested issue of South West Africa’s status with regard to South Africa’s illegal occupation. Closer to home, however, there was the crippling weight of the heavy-handed leadership of Sam Nujoma and of his complacent Swapo leadership more generally. When Swapo’s leaders were challenged, in Zambia in the 1970s, by a majority within his own movement, Nujoma was rescued by the shockingly ruthless support given him by both Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. Then, in Angola in the 1980s, only unspeakable terror (to which its Angolan host, the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola – MPLA government turned a blind eye) unleashed within the movement sustained the leadership, a leadership which then reaped the harvest of Namibian independence in 1990.
In Angola itself, the MPLA was, if anything, even more Stalinist, both in principle and in predisposition right from start than was the Swapo leadership, and quickly became an ever-more ruthless and self-serving lot, as its original ‘leftist’ ideological cover (such as it was) very soon fell away. In addition, of course, the movement and the country were never given much chance to grow beyond this sad state. In part this was a product of the external encirclement (by South Africa and the United States) and the linked ‘internal war’ (waged by the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola/Unita) forced upon the country, largely from outside. And here, too, there were the powerful invitations to the elite’s greed and to its resistance to any kind of real accountability that were proffered by the cornucopia of easy and readily available oil money.

Zimbabwe has had its own wrinkles, needless to say. Ibbo Mandaza captured the general pattern decades ago in a very strong early critique of the newly ascendant African petty bourgeoisie as it took up formal positions of power – in its own narrow class interests and those of international capital. Thus, for Mandaza, while the ‘new state’ quickly became ‘an apparent mediator between capital and labour, between the aspirations of mass of the people for the “future of independence” and the role of international capital in its quest for more profit,’ it also became ‘weighted in favour of the latter, inclined towards controlling these popular demands, if only to appease capital in the name of “stability,” peace and security.’ Indeed,

change in the economic sphere meant essentially the gradual embourgeoisement of the African petit bourgeoisie as the latter found their class aspirations fulfilled ... There was more than a symbolic commitment to the capitalist order as the members of the African petit bourgeoisie variously bought houses, farms, businesses, etc; political principles and ideological commitment appeared mortgaged on the altar of private property.

In sum,

as the African petit bourgeoisie began gradually to find access to the same economic and social status as their white counterparts, so, too, did it become increasingly unable to respond effectively to the aspirations of the workers and peasants. The leadership would find it increasingly difficult to confront former white settlers, let alone international capital.

This situation in Zimbabwe would change, as I note in the immediately succeeding paragraph, but Mandaza’s early account of the false decolonisation of Zimbabwe is
chilling, not least in its all too exact foreshadowing of what eventually was to come to happen in South Africa itself.

In fact, the situation in Zimbabwe was, in spite of its novel twists and turns, only to get worse. Thus, this new black elite first fastened on the opportunities provided by a more or less self-imposed ‘structural adjustment’ in the 1980s and early-1990s to further feather its own nest. Then came a dramatic negative popular response to this trend and other related ones, a response exemplified not least in the assertions of the trade union movement and the rise of a strong opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). At this point, Mugabe and his gang felt compelled to turn, rather startlingly and in some desperation, to both a vocal ‘anti-imperialist’ rhetoric and to (long overdue) land reform – this latter being quite visibly manipulated in favour of the elite’s own interests, however – in order to shore up the regime’s fading political credibility. Yet such opportunist populism did not really work to silence growing dissent, and President Robert Mugabe and company chose primarily to reinforce the intensity and negative impact of their most basic tactic: sheer brute force. They thereby produced a country that was not only in even worse social and economic shape than any of its other ‘liberated’ neighbours, but also one that was really no different from them in the basic logic of its ‘neo-colonial’ structure.12

As I have written at length elsewhere, Mozambique was different from the actually emergent sub-continental pattern, if only momentarily. For the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo) possessed a leadership (Eduardo Mondlane, Samora Machel and others) which actually sought to push against a false decolonisation to a more genuine liberation: beyond colonial and racist rule, beyond capitalist exploitation and peripheralisation and beyond male arrogance and domination. Perhaps briefly it showed a distinctive promise, one that once prompted Norrie McQueen to write of the Lusophone African liberation struggles that they had originally offered ‘a clear alternative to the cynical manipulation of ethnicity and the neo-colonial complaisance of the kleptocratic elites who increasingly defined African governance in the 1970s and 1980s.’ In sum:

Whatever their fate, the projects of the post-independence regimes of lusophone Africa were probably the most principled and decent ever proposed for the continent. They have not been superseded in this regard and seem unlikely to be.13

Yet the Frelimo leadership was also (at least from the time of Mondlane’s assassination by the Portuguese) unapologetically high-handed and vanguardist,
however much its authoritarianism may have been, at least at first, ‘in a good cause.’ Then, too, Machel’s death and the wasting effects of Rhodesian and South African (via Resistência Nacional Moçambicana-Renamo) destabilisation paved the way for a degeneration in Frelimo’s own momentarily high purpose and Mozambique, too, stumbled into the snares of ‘false decolonisation,’ external dictate and elite aggrandisement.\textsuperscript{14}

**FAILED LIBERATION: SOUTH AFRICA**

And what, finally, of South Africa itself – no exception, we now know all too well, to Fanon’s warning. Indeed, despite the enormous importance of the overthrow of one of the cruellest instances of institutionalised racist rule imaginable, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that, on the African National Congress (ANC) watch, this country has not, in fact, been, genuinely liberated – except in the most limited (albeit still meaningful) sense of that term. Instead it has itself been recolonised – recolonised by capital, with the ANC quite content, it would seem, to have had this happen, and with this new African ‘national middle class’ being only different from the newly ascendant stratum that Fanon excoriated with regard to the newly liberated ‘rest of Africa’\textsuperscript{15} by having rather more assertive hopes for itself in the private sector. For in South Africa, as elsewhere in the region, the victors in the ‘liberation struggle’ have been, unequivocally, (a) global capitalism, (b) this capitalism’s principal protagonists in the private and public sectors (including their white indigenous-class counterparts in South Africa itself), and (c) the ‘new class’ of black businessmen, politicians and professionals who, as in the several countries of apparent ‘liberation,’ have now consolidated themselves in positions of intermediary power and privilege.\textsuperscript{16}

How, then, are we to interpret such an outcome?\textsuperscript{17} One option would be merely to celebrate capitalism, its present and its ostensibly promising future – although this is a difficult position for an African to take, one might think, unless (s)he is one of the privileged few, or an employee of one or other of the international financial institutions. But in elevated circles in South Africa, it is simply common sense. Nelson Mandela, for one, despite possessing an alternative vision immediately on his release from prison, came to accept the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) policy in just such a ‘common-sensical’ manner.\textsuperscript{18} And Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, Reserve Bank Governor Tito Mboweni and then President Thabo Mbeki (who had already played an important role in crafting such a future in the 1980s
when meeting with South African businessmen in exile) and others joined right in (with many erstwhile ANC activists also moving briskly into the private sector). Indeed, they now crafted the firmly neo-liberal Gear strategy – said, by Manuel himself, to be ‘non-negotiable’ – to replace the mildly more radical Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Yet it is hard to believe – it goes against almost all the evidence – that this is really the way to continue to liberate the future for the vast mass of South Africans.

True, one could argue that South Africa (or at least the South African elite, black and white) has fared marginally better than have its neighbours, in part because of its capital’s own neo-colonial expansion into the continent. But there remains the nagging fact, alluded to above, that globally this is not terribly significant. There are two reasons for this: firstly, South Africa has not, after all, been markedly successful as a national economy in overall terms. And, secondly, domestically there has been a dramatic and widening gap between rich and poor – the gap between black and white having narrowed somewhat but the gap between rich and poor having widened significantly. Consider the fact that, as recently publicised by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), 24 million South Africans, 48 per cent of the population, live below the poverty level of R322 a month, while, as the Sunday Times has also recently shown, the country’s 20 wealthiest people, who are collectively worth R112.2 billion, have seen their wealth jump by 58.96 per cent in the past two years, while the wealthiest 100 people have seen their wealth shoot up by 62.19 per cent. Surely it is not mere demagogy to compare the less than R322 a month received by the 48 per cent of the population mentioned above with the income of one Whitey Basson, CEO of retail giant Shoprite, who last year took home a cool R627.53 million in salary, perks and share options. After almost twenty years of South African ‘freedom’ isn’t it time to ask: what kind of ‘liberation’ is this anyway?

Of course, there is every reason to think that such outcomes were fully predictable under the capitalism the ANC chose to opt for with its ‘victory’ – and bear in mind Trevor Manuel’s proud boast that it was ‘choice not fate’ that defined the post-apartheid trajectory. For, truth to tell, widening inequality is precisely the overt logic of capitalism, global or otherwise. The rationale of those who benefit from such a system is never that it will produce immediate equality. It is the well-publicised first principle of capitalist faith that those who profit most from the system can be counted upon to reinvest the best part of their profits and that, as a result, the economy will expand, with all of us then benefiting, even unto the last generation.
Yet, in fact, that is not how capitalism actually works, especially in those parts of the world shaped by centuries of colonialism and by contemporary global discipline, which are not able to compete on anything like an even playing field with the big national players and corporations. Them that has gets (though even ‘they’ themselves are having some difficulty in keeping the irrationalities of their global system from springing a leak, as those of us who live in North America now know very well) and those who don’t have don’t get.

The result is, as my country-woman Naomi Klein, in her brilliant book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, has succinctly summarised in the title of her chapter on South Africa: ‘Democracy Born in Chains: South Africa’s Constricted Freedom.’ But just how did the ANC manage to miss, as she puts it, its ‘unique opportunity to reject the free-market orthodoxy of the day’ and come, instead, to stand, in her words, ‘as living testament to what happens when economic reform is severed from political transformation?’ ‘Politically [she writes] its people have the right to vote, civil liberties and majority rule. Yet economically, South Africa has surpassed Brazil as the most unequal society in the world.’

Why was this allowed to happen in South Africa, where the national liberation movement had not merely defied for so long the racist state’s sustained intransigence but also articulated a refusal to bend by that state’s capitalist allies? Klein’s opinion: the ANC merely forgot, she suggests, to look to the economy, so preoccupied were they with the political challenges of transition. In her view, the plan for recolonisation was executed under the noses of ANC leaders, who were naturally preoccupied with winning the battle to control Parliament. In the process the ANC failed to protect itself against a far more insidious strategy – in essence, an elaborate insurance plan against the economic causes of the Freedom Charter ever becoming law in South Africa. The slogan ‘the people shall govern!’ would soon become a reality, but the sphere over which they would govern was shrinking fast.

Yet with all due respect, and despite the fact that Klein calls in various usually quite credible South African observers to testify to her version of events, this is just not good enough. For example, she strongly associates herself with Vishnu Padayachee’s opinion that, as she paraphrases it,

\[
\text{none of this happened because of some grand betrayal on the part of the ANC leaders but simply because they were outmanoeuvred on a series of issues that seemed less than crucial at the time – but turned out to hold South Africa’s lasting liberation in the balance.}
\]
The same goes for William Gumede’s view (which she quotes directly) that ‘if people felt [the political negotiations] weren’t going well there would be mass protests. But when the economic negotiators would report back, people thought it was technical.’ This perception was encouraged by Mbeki, who portrayed the talks as ‘administrative’ and of no popular concern. As a result he [Gumede] told me, with great exasperation, ‘We missed it! We missed the real story.’

Yet Gumede, Klein notes, ‘came to understand that it was at those “technical” meetings that the true future of his country was being decided – though few understood it at the time.’ But here Klein is, in the end, basically, incorrect. For ANC negotiators, not least Mbeki, actually did ‘understand it at the time.’ After all, Mbeki had already stated firmly in the mid-1980s that ‘the ANC is not a socialist party. It has never pretended to be, it has not said it was and it is not trying to be. It will not become one by decree or for the purpose of pleasing its “left” critics.’ Indeed, a mere decade later Mbeki, in announcing, with Gear, the ANC’s turn further to the right, would quip: ‘Just call me a Thatcherite.’ Nelson Mandela’s own almost total reversal of his position from the radical assertions he made as he emerged from his Cape Town prison is also pretty staggering in retrospect. In fact, the country’s future was not merely accidentally stumbled into by the ANC leadership in a moment of inattention but had, in Manuel’s words, been decided by its own ‘choice’ – and not by ‘fate.’

The fact is that Fanon’s original hypothesis is actually far more credible than are those of Gumede or Padayachee, or Klein herself. What had actually happened was that the ANC elite simply changed the rules of the liberation game ... and stole the chips. Shortly before his death in 2001, Rusty Bernstein, veteran South African Communist Party (SACP) and ANC militant, posed this urgent question to himself: ‘What is going wrong, and why?’ For he felt an answer to that question was ‘the essential precondition for any rectification, and thus for any return to optimism about South Africa’s democratic future.’ Note, too, that the answer he gave to the question is not merely about economic choices made but about political ones as well:

The drive towards power has corrupted the political equation in various ways. In the late 1980s, when popular resistance revived again inside the country led by the UDF, it led the ANC to see the UDF as an undesirable factor in the struggle for power, and to fatally undermine it as a rival focus for mass mobilisation. It has undermined the ANC’s adherence to the path of mass resistance as a way to liberation, and substituted
instead a reliance on manipulation of the levers of administrative power. It has paved the way to a steady decline of a mass-membership ANC as an organiser of the people, and turned it into a career opening to public sector employment and the administrative ‘gravy train.’ It has reduced the tripartite ANC-COSATU-CP alliance from the centrifugal centre of national political mobilisation to an electoral pact between parties who are constantly constrained to subordinate their constituents’ fundamental interests to the overriding purpose of holding on to administrative power. It has impoverished the soil in which ideas leaning towards socialist solutions once flourished and allowed the weed of ‘free market’ ideology to take hold.

Indeed, even so loyal an ANC comrade as Ben Turok now feels constrained to say much the same thing, wondering in one of his recent books why the ANC’s ‘liberated’ state has not ‘given equal attention to empowering the masses as to [the empowering of] the elite? And why has the insistence of parliament on broad-based empowerment brought so little success?’ Indeed, Turok feels forced to come to what he calls the ‘irresistible conclusion that the ANC government has lost a great deal of its earlier focus on the fundamental transformation of the inherited social system.’ Which is to put the relevant point mildly, I would suggest!

ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives? A next liberation struggle? Take, as one example of mild distemper, Moeletsi Mbeki. Certainly he is no socialist and generally seems quite content merely to deride the lack of any real attempt, by his brother or by anyone else, to empower a kind of black national bourgeoisie – here he quite specifically does not mean merely the predictable beneficiaries of the black economic empowerment initiative he scorns – that, in his view, would alone have had a chance to slip the leash of global capital’s control and build a vibrant national capitalism on South Africa. Failing that, however, Moeletsi Mbeki can see only a kind of Tunisian/Egyptian denouement in the offing:

\[ \text{I can predict when SA’s ‘Tunisia Day’ will arrive [in 2020 is his prediction]. Tunisia Day is when the masses rise against the powers that be, as happened recently in Tunisia ...The ANC inherited a flawed, complex society it barely understood; its tinkerings with it are turning it into an explosive cocktail. The ANC leaders are like a group of children playing with a hand grenade. One day one of them will figure out how to pull out the pin and everyone will be killed.}\]
Small wonder that many in the union movement and in the township organisations are far more restive (and, it would seem, far more leftist) in inclination than is Moeletsi – this in spite of the apparent pattern of their actual voting in elections. For, as Peter Alexander has recently summarised the current situation:

Since 2004 South Africa has experienced a movement of local protests amounting to a rebellion of the poor. This has been widespread and intense, reaching insurrectionary proportions in some cases. On the surface, the protests have been about service delivery and against uncaring, self-serving and corrupt leaders of the municipalities. A key feature has been mass participation by a new generation of fighters, especially unemployed youth but also school students. Many issues that underpinned the [initial] ascendency of Jacob Zuma also fuel the present action, including a sense of injustice arising from the realities of persistent inequality ... [Moreover,] while the inter-connections between the local protest, and between the local protests and militant action involving other elements of civil society, are limited, it is suggested that this is likely to change.

True, such societal distemper can produce some very unsavoury results, ranging from crime, including high rates of violence against women, to the kind of xenophobic mob violence against Africans from elsewhere on the continent that recently scarred South Africa. For if the mass of the populace is denied (and even actively discouraged from seeking) the kind of liberation that the articulation of a sense of genuinely expansive social purpose – like ‘socialism,’ tangible communal endeavour and genuine democratic self-assertion – might deliver, it can become a very sour ‘mass’ indeed. Thus, if Zuma temporarily fed off such distemper (alongside many other quite genuine grievances concerning the Mbeki leadership) in surging past Mbeki in 2008, ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema momentarily promised/threatened to play much the same card even more fiercely and intemperately. Such at least was the apparent thrust – crudely nationalistic, even racist – of his recent, apparently popular and potentially quite explosive bombast. Thus, in June 2011, The Economist headlined its account of the continuing ‘rise’ of the outspoken Malema – a rise most recently visible in his unopposed re-election as leader of the Youth League – with the comment that ‘the black man who is rude about whites is doing rather well.’ The article continued:

Mr Malema is no fool. He has proved himself a master at politics and at tapping into the anger of his young black audiences. More than half of black youths under 25 are officially unemployed; the real figure is much higher. Two-thirds leave school without any qualifications. Most live
in poor black townships or shanty towns, ineligible for state welfare. Seventeen years after the ANC came to power promising a better life for all, many can look forward only to a career of crime and drugs or to early death through AIDS. How good, then, to be told by Mr Malema that they are in no way to blame for their plight. Scapegoats are at hand: the new greedy black elite with their hands in the public till, lazy self-seeking politicians, but most of all selfish whites – the 9% of the population who, thanks to the imperialist racist exploitation of blacks over the past 350 years, still have most of the country’s land, wealth and top jobs.29

But, if not a ‘fool,’ Malema was to prove a bit too much of a loose cannon even for the ANC and he was expelled from the party for a variety of other reasons in 2012. Yet much of his ‘analysis,’ as revealed in the above quotation, is – despite the heavy sarcasm of The Economist’s tone in reporting it – uncomfortably close to the truth. And, indeed, similar points have been presented much more soberly and thoughtfully by others to whom we now turn.

Take, for example, the striking outreach towards a possible new format of politics by Cosatu president Zwelinzima Vavi. In October 2010 he and Cosatu met, independently (and in the face of sharp criticism from their ostensible ally, the ANC, for doing so), with representatives from a wide range of active civil society organisations, where he argued forcefully:

Inspired by the African proverb that says ‘If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together,’ we gather here – as the progressive trade unions, social movements, NGOs, progressive academics, small business and street vendor associations, taxi associations, religious bodies, youth organisations, environmental groups, indigenous peoples’ groups and other progressive formations – to say to ourselves that we have the capacity to make a decisive contribution in changing our current situation for the better.

Internationally, globalisation and neo-liberalism have launched assaults on the working class, which include, but are not limited to: informalisation, flexibilisation, regionalisation of states, deregulation, marketisation, financialisation and securitisation. The global governance, commercial and trade system is supported by political and ideological institutions, rules and enforcement mechanisms that only broad civil society coalitions have historically been able to challenge successfully. In South Africa, the Gear strategy epitomised the dominance of the neo-liberal ideology within the leading sections of the government. The neo-liberal logic still continues to be dominant, in spite of some talk about a developmental state. Increasingly though it has taken a more
crude political expression and there are some emerging elements that tend to perceive the working class and active elements of civil society as merely being a nuisance that must be crushed with the might of the state apparatus.

[However] today, as we gather here, there is panic in the ranks of the predatory elite, which is a new coalition of the tenderpreneurs. Paranoia elsewhere is deepening with the political elite, convincing itself that any gathering of independent civil society formations to confront our challenges is a threat to them.\

Vavi spoke equally sharply in February 2011, addressing the Southern African Bishops’ Conference Justice and Peace AGM and asserting that ‘clearly we do not live in a society where everyone is happily living in peace. And the underlying reason is the continuation of poverty and inequality. Which brings me to my topic tonight – the poor.’ He continued:

We have a constitution which grants people certain rights. Yet in practice millions are denied those rights, especially socio-economic rights, in what has become the most unequal nation in the world. The rich elite earn millions by exploiting the labour of the working class. A minority, including some of our former comrades in public office, make their millions by corruptly manipulating opportunities to win tenders, bribing officials or using political connections. Meanwhile the mainly black poor majority suffer from deep and widespread poverty, huge levels of unemployment, pathetic levels of service delivery in healthcare and education, housing and transport, and little hope of escaping from a life of struggling to survive from day to day. We are one of the most unequal countries in the world, and unless we mobilise for changes, the levels of inequality will become entrenched.

Take note, as well, of another kind of response to the marked social distemper of the current moment – the attempt to transform unrest into a much more potent, organised and explicit possible counter-hegemony to that of ANC rule. There have been a number of such assertions in the near past. Indeed, I recall one promising, but ultimately somewhat illusory, herald of novel left prospects, visible in the counter-demonstration to the ANC-hosted World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and the substantial march of protesters from Alexandra township to the conference centre in salubrious Sandton, a moment that I have recounted elsewhere.

More recently, however, other earnesters of similar purpose have begun to be evidenced – still in a modest vein but with real long-term seriousness – as in the
activities of the new Democratic Left Front (DLF), for example. Initial statements of
the kind of project the latter movement-in-the-making has in mind are to be found
in the illuminating and extended documentation that followed the DLF’s founding
conference in early 2011. At the same time, two of the chief organisers of the confer-
cence wrote clearly of this initiative in an important article in the Mail & Guardian
online, pegged to the DLF launch:

One conference is merely a milestone in a long journey that has to
do with trying to reimagine a left politics through ethical practice.
Our ethical compass is about living and inventing democracy inside
this process (definitely through heated debates, differences and new
ways of thinking about consensus), plurality as strength, collective
intellectual practice, self-education and building transformative power
through struggles. This is a process without preconceived outcomes
and thus is unique in South Africa. Such a process means abandoning
the illusions of a vanguardist left committed to a violent overthrow
of capitalism or a reformist left seeking to make capitalism more
humane. More importantly, we are about strengthening and advancing
grassroots struggles through opposition but, at the same time, advancing
transformative alternatives from below. This is illustrated by the ideas,
proposals and campaigns that were adopted as part of our common
platform of action dealing with ecological resources, unemployment,
food sovereignty, education and public services.

Nor are similar voices absent within the ANC itself. For there are signs that, ‘fuelled
by a dangerous mixture of high unemployment, slow growth, weak leadership and
fierce feuding within the governing party,’ some ‘influential factions’ in the ANC are
‘pushing to transform the courts, the media, the economy and ... the much praised
constitution’! In sum, in all these varied voices is to be found the promise of a next
liberation struggle.

A NEXT LIBERATION STRUGGLE

‘Liberation,’ as defined in the ‘first’ liberation struggle, has led ineluctably,
throughout the region, to recolonisation by the Empire of Capital. So the DLF
and other critical observers of the southern African scene, both in South Africa
and beyond, seem to be asserting. Elsewhere I have, in much the same spirit, even
titled one of my own recent books The Next Liberation Struggle. In it, I discuss
the possible need in the southern African countries (including South Africa) to
realise just such a renewed struggle as the book’s title evokes. Of course, this is
not the place to speculate on the possible particulars of any such ‘next’ or ongoing
liberation struggle, nor am I competent, as a practitioner/observer much more deeply implicated in the first liberation struggle than the present one, to do so. I would merely suggest that any such renewed struggle will seek to ‘liberate’ the meaning and practice of liberation in order to embrace, in its name, a far wider range of achieved freedoms than those inherent in ‘merely’ overcoming the institutionalised racism of the apartheid and crude colonial variety and achieving only a quite minimal ‘national liberation.’

As noted above, any such ongoing struggle would, this time, be seeking to deal much more effectively with issues of class, gender and democratic empowerment, even if we were to assume, for the moment, that the ‘first’ liberation struggle did subdue, at some level, the grim reality of racial and national oppression. A next liberation struggle, then? This is indeed a sobering question and the stating of it a sobering note upon which to end any presentation at a conference originally organised precisely around a consideration of southern Africa’s first liberation struggle. But it is not, I fear, an inappropriate question to pose, either at the conference at which this paper was originally presented or in the present chapter. For the struggle does indeed continue, as we used, so confidently, to say.

Endnotes


4. This latter role is, for example, one that South Africa has come to play vis-à-vis its neighbours in southern Africa. See, on this, D Miller, O Oloyede, R Saunders, eds, South Africa in Africa: African Perceptions, African Realities, A Special Issue of the African Sociological Review, 12, 1 (2008).

5. On the shifting nature of South African-domiciled capital’s own contingent links with racial supremacy, changes that would ultimately redefine such capital’s attitudes towards the prospect of ‘black majority rule,’ see J Saul, ‘On Taming a Revolution: The ANC and the Bleak Denouement to the Anti-Apartheid Struggle,’ The Socialist Register 2013 (London: Merlin Press, forthcoming).

6. On this subject see the various articles that appear in the special themed section on ‘Southern Africa: The Liberation Struggle Continues,’ in ROAPE, 38, 127 (2011), 77–134.


11. Ibid.


15. See the opening paragraphs of this chapter.


17. In writing this section I draw on my forthcoming article, ‘On Taming a Revolution.’

18. Recall Mandela apparently hailing the free market as a ‘magic elixir’ in his speech to the joint session of the Houses of Congress in Washington in 1994.

19. Indeed, some of these would also be involved in the breakaway Congress of the People (COPE) movement that, in the wake of Mbeki’s overthrow and in (false) anticipation of Zuma’s radicalisation of the ANC project, launched itself in 2008 and contested the 2009 election, not very successfully, as a possible right-wing alternative to the ANC.

20. But see, in sharp contrast, Alan Hirsch’s rather smug *Season of Hope: Economic Reform Under Mandela and Mbeki* (Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 2005), especially 3–34. It would be difficult to find a more revealing statement of the rose-tinted consensus that premised economic thinking in the Mandela and Mbeki years than is to be found in this book.


22. See P Green, *Choice, Not Fate: The Life and Times of Trevor Manuel* (Rosebank: Penguin, 2008). The book itself is a startling example of hagiography (with regard both to Manuel and to the ANC at its most conservative) but the lead title is also an arresting shorthand advertisement for the way in which the ANC would apparently like to present itself to right-thinking readers!


24. On this issue, too, see J Saul, ‘On Taming a Revolution.’

25. Some of the material, especially the quotations, in the final pages of this chapter, including the present one from Bernstein, also appear in my article (the text of a Harold Wolpe Lecture presented in Durban during the trip that also took me to the Johannesburg conference at which an earlier draft of this chapter was originally given), ‘The Transition in South Africa: Choice, Fate ... or Recolonisation?’ *Critical Arts* (Durban, forthcoming). I am quoting Bernstein himself from a letter he wrote to me not long before his death, a letter which is published as ‘“The Turning Point, etc. ...” Letter from Rusty Bernstein to J Saul,’ *Transformation*, 64 (2007), 140–344.


37. See J Saul, ‘Race, Class, Gender and Voice:’