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Anti-communism and the Attempts to Re-Write the Histories of National Liberation in Southern Africa*

Jacques Depelchin

Introduction

The rise to power of such right wing ideologues as Reagan and Thatcher has brought back to the fore the kind of rabid anti-communism that had not been seen since the heyday of McCarthyism in the USA. It would be erroneous, however, to single out these two leading figures as the catalysts of the current right wing crusade against communism. The Apartheid Regime in South Africa has played a leading role ever since it came to power in 1948 in basing its indefensible laws on the "necessity to defend western democracy against Soviet Expansionism."

Although the U.S. can certainly boast to have the most sophisticated communication network in the history of mankind, it can also arguably boast to have produced the least informed people, especially when it comes to the business of the American government's involvement in foreign affairs. The educational value of whatever information is available has become less important than its market value. In a society dominated by advertising messages, labels have become more important than what stands behind the labels, hence the simplistic uses and abuses of anti-communism which is so widespread today.

*The substance of this paper drew its inspiration from the work of the history workshop group of the Centre for African Studies at the Eduardo Mondlane University. Some of the ideas were specifically discussed with the late Aquino de Braganca, killed on October 19, 1986 in the same plane crash that killed President Samora Machel. Pauline Wynter and Ed Ferguson read a draft and made suggestions. To all of them I am thankful for their help and willingness to share their agreements and disagreements.

The idea of writing this paper was in great part prompted by the 1984 issue of the *Socialist Register* which had one single theme: The uses of anti-communism. Unfortunately, there was no article that dealt with the uses of anti-communism in Africa, despite unavoidable references to events that took place on the continent and which were directly relevant to the theme under discussion, and there was no attempt by the editors to explain this lacuna. This essay could be seen as an effort to try and contribute to a part of history of the continent which is drastically understudied and deserves more attention. As in the essays that appeared in the *Socialist Register*, this one, too, shall look at how abusive anti-communism has contributed to preventing a more realistic understanding of the historical processes that have taken place on the continent.

One of the problems that has beset the discussion on communism and anti-communism has come from the post-World War II history of the superpower confrontation which has resulted in a sort of neo-colonial approach to the histories of former colonies. Whereas under colonial rule their histories were either ignored or written from the perspective of the colonizers, under the current history of great powers domination, the histories of the former colonies and all third world countries have become fodder to the conflict that has pitted the United States and the Western powers against the Soviet Union. From the point of view of the histories of these countries the end result is not dissimilar to what prevailed when they were ruled by colonial powers: ignorance, neglect, and outright distortion.

Because of this imposed cleavage, any third world country that seeks to establish its sovereignty and have it respected is immediately judged in terms of that cleavage, not in terms of the rules and principles of international law. Anti-communism has been much more virulent in former colonies precisely because their struggle for national liberation was automatically analyzed in terms of East-West confrontation and not in terms of assertion of national sovereignty. The East-West framework of analysis is becoming more and more outdated, but, as the Reagan administration and the Apartheid Regime have shown, it can be used quite effectively to bring havoc and destruction to peoples who refuse to be looked at through that kind of prism.

This paper is being written in a context which is dominated by forceful, and sometimes crude, attempts by the Reagan Administration and the Apartheid regime to mount a scare campaign against those who think that it is no longer acceptable to live under rules and regulations dictated, imposed and maintained by force by the owners of property and capital in South Africa. This campaign is not only concentrated on Southern Africa, but it has been in existence, with lows and highs, ever since the end of World War II. One of the banners of this campaign has been anti-communism. Its most recent manifestation has surfaced in South Africa in the form of portraying the ANC as an organisation dominated and/or run by members of the South African Communist Party. This latest manifestation should not, however, be seen as specific to South Africa.

In the case of South Africa, the campaign of anti-communism, because of the actual existence of the South African Communist Party gives the attack and those who lead it an apparent measure of credibility. But this apparent measure of credibility requires a series of tacit premises, one of the most important, if not the most important, being that communist organisations or organisations likely to lead to a communist society should be feared. So much so that when, as it has so often recently happened, journalists do meet members of the ANC who are also members of the SACP, they feel obliged to stress the point that these people are far from the fearful image that has been propagandized. Describing the meeting with Joe Slovo in Lusaka recently, Allister Sparks wrote: "Both as a man and a politician, he did not fit this stereotype. The ogre turned out to be witty and charming."¹

Stereotypes and labels are economically and technically attractive shortcuts to managers and producers of information who are more preoccupied with cost effectiveness than with promoting more complex and sophisticated understanding of what lies behind the stereotype or the label. One of the reasons for this situation derives from the transformation of the conditions of production and reproduction of knowledge in general and historical knowledge in particular. One example of how this transformation is taking place can be observed in the *USA Today*. The country with the densest and most sophisticated network of information cannot properly inform about what is

taking place in Southern Africa because the content of the information is in part an indictment of those who control the media.

This essay is part of a larger project on the liberation struggles in southern Africa. Here the objective is merely to look at the current anti-communism in Southern Africa in historical perspective, and demonstrate that while anti-communism itself may have been directly raised as an issue intermittently, its use has been part of the economic, social and political and ideological arsenal of the colonizing powers to squash the national liberation struggles. When these could not be stopped, the colonizing powers and their allies would then do all they could to interfere especially in those countries which attempted to move away from the embrace of the former colonial power.²

When communism was not raised, something else would be used, but with the same aim: to provoke fear. Thus, for a while, the U.S. State Department with the help of the Belgian government tried to portray Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the Congo in 1960, as much more than a nationalist hero, as someone who had been lured by the Soviet Union.³ When it became clear that such a portrayal could actually backfire, for lack of evidence linking Lumumba to any communist or socialist organization, Lumumba was depicted as psychologically unstable, megalomaniac, violent. All of these labels were aimed at producing the same effects as the communist labels. Lumumba had to be seen as a man to be feared.

The invariable message at the core of anti-communism is to instill fear. In an article on U.S. foreign policy, Richard Falk quoted a high level White House advisor as saying that "the Reagan people came to Washington convinced they had to scare the American people."⁴

In the case of Africa, the fear of communism has been compounded by depicting the environment as fearful and hostile and by the racist characterization of blacks as blood thirsty savages.⁵ More recently, AIDS has been added to the threatening image of Africa as allegedly "coming from there" even though there is no scientific evidence for it, as pointed out by a recent in-depth study in the *New Scientist* (March 26, 1987).⁶

For any of these images to be successfully effective, even though--and especially if--they are based on unsubstantiated statements, they ought to go hand in hand with an antidote. In the case of the environment, the antidotes have varied from the histories of "discoveries" of Africa to the popularization of the white man's ingenious capacity to tame the dangers of tropical jungles as in Tarzan movies, to the general euphemistic explanation of European civilizing mission -- development, in today's jargon. But for this antidote to be believable it ought to convince one that what it is attempting to cure is indeed threatening to the well being of Africans. This has been achieved, fundamentally, by simplifying to the point of total distortion the histories of African societies. Thus, Tarzan swinging from tree to tree may be scoffed at by those who know that Africans do not live in trees, but it certainly leaves a more indelible imprint on viewers about the inherent backwardness of Africans. The aim of Tarzan movies and anti-communism, not to speak of colonialism, has been the constant preoccupation of the religious and secular missionaries: to save the Africans from themselves. Thus, save for the rare exceptions like Las Casas, the Catholic hierarchy thought that slavery accomplished a positive thing by saving the Africans from paganism.

Whereas Western Europe was eager to save Africa from paganism, its eagerness seems, now, to be directed toward saving the continent from communism (or socialism). But, the objective, all along had been the same: take the land away. And so, with the Bible gained in the exchange, Africans, a quarter century after independence, find themselves too weak to even hold the Bible, and receiving charity through posters and films of bloated and emaciated children. Thus, while some academic historians thought they were participating in the process of decolonizing African history, the former colonizers and their new allies (some from among the former colonies) were actively making sure that such a decolonization did not proceed. In this, their most systematic and consistent supporter has been the South African Apartheid Regime.

As the editors of the 1984 issue of *Socialist Register* point out in their introduction, anti-communism has been fed not only by the phantasms of the extreme right, but also by the very history of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. To this, at least for the United States, one would have to add the traumatic

scars - and fears- left by the experience of McCarthyism. The fear of communism is fed by equating communism with the worst aspects of the Stalin era, forgetting in the process the crucial role played by Stalin and the Soviet people in defeating fascism between 1940 and 1945. Once this aspect, and this aspect alone is constantly stressed, there will be very little room left for looking at the achievements of the Soviet peoples. And once this point is made, it becomes easier to then make communism, violence, and terror interchangeable.

The central and ideological objective of anti-communism has been to select one aspect in the history of communist movements which is highly condemnable and then make it appear as if communism can be reduced to this single aspect.

Whichever view one holds regarding communist leaders from Lenin to the present, one should not obscure the fact that communism, has been an integral part of the historical struggles of oppressed and exploited peoples against their oppressors. And it is precisely because of this much longer history that it is possible to say that "anti-communism is older than communism itself"⁷, i.e. that anti-communism is only one of the ways in which the owners of capital and property have sought to maintain their economic, social, political and ideological supremacy. The debate between communists and anti-communists should not obscure the more fundamental struggles for a more equitable society, for social and economic relations aimed at removing all forms of repression and oppression. It is not necessary to be a communist to subscribe to these goals.

The situation today in Southern Africa is not much more different than in the early 1960s when many of the European colonies were fighting for and achieving independence: the movements or political organizations that refused to go along with the colonizers' conception of independence were given all kinds of negative attributes. Doom and failure were predicted for those countries which dared follow a path other than the one that had already been charted by the former colonial masters. And to a certain degree, many of these predictions are now seen to have come true. However, the manner in which these precautions - such as the bad economic situation - came true is rarely analyzed,

or, when it is, the analysis is reduced to juxtaposing unproved assertions.

Juxtaposition of images or juxtaposition of words is, of course, one of the most effective techniques used in the selling of products through TV advertising. Having proved their effectness in the selling of products, these techniques are increasingly used in the sale of knowledge of any kind, including historical knowledge. For this to be possible, knowledge has to be packaged in a manageable (i.e. saleable) form. Packaging requires labeling. From labeling to stereotyping the distance is not long. And since in a certain U.S. world of labels, "communism", "marxism", "socialism" are all the equivalent of life-threatening diseases, it becomes tempting to so label anybody or any political movement that does not conform to the American ideal and thus give license to destroy and kill. In a recent interview, a leader of the "Contras", Edgar Chamoro, referred specifically to this process in Nicaragua when he said that "we need to label them communists so as to kill them".

The current situation in Southern Africa and the alliances that have developed seem to demonstrate that there is a relationship between the virulent anti-communist attacks of today and the refusal of the former colonizing powers and their new allies to accept the full consequences of the anti-colonial struggles of the past half-century. The issue is important not only because it related directly to what is going on in Southern Africa today, but also because the current confrontation will affect the manner in which the histories of national liberation are being written. Indeed, it can be argued the central objectives of the current onslaught in Southern Africa are precisely to: firstly, eradicate the gains that had been achieved by the struggles, and secondly, point out - after obliteration had been achieved - that the whole history of national liberation had been nothing but words. It was a mirage.

One of the problems, at least in the west, is the predominant perception that the practice of erasing and rewriting history is something which is mostly done by the Soviet historians, or historians of communist parties. Clearly, this is an oversimplification, but the issue cannot be laid to rest by simply saying that this practice is found on both sides of the ideological divide.

But rewriting of history can be done in so many ways that it is not even necessary for anyone to come and erase. The erasure of history can be done in such a way that no manipulation of texts or photographs will be necessary. The Apartheid Regime, for example, unable to silence the opposition both inside and outside its borders, has resorted to Nazi-type tactics and legislation whose objectives are to leave data which only recount its own side of the history. Allan Boesak was, therefore, quite right when he recently (February 1987, during a visit in the San Francisco Area) suggested that the time had come for journalists to ask whether they should continue to file meaningless stories on South Africa that are approved by South Africa or leave.⁸

Given the manner in which the mass media are recounting what is taking place in Southern Africa, it is important to analyze critically not only the events, but most importantly, the means, methods and form that are being used to tell the story. As already pointed out, the packaging of information, that is to say the parameters that help "sell" the information are increasingly becoming more determinant than the substance. This phenomenon is not as new as one might think. During the so-called era of "discoveries", a distorted and distorting knowledge of Africa was produced. Nowadays the medium has changed, but the viewers are led to believe that they are still "discovering" Africa. The divorce between the images and the conditions in which they are received could not be more complete.⁹

One can see at work how the economic laws of the information market transform the production of historical knowledge. One can also see how history is being transformed into a marketable commodity. What has to be examined then is not so much what is visible, but the processes - especially, but not exclusively, through film and TV - that now exist for producing facts which although ephemeral and highly visible, end up determining the kinds of questions as well as the framework within questions are raised concerning the ongoing struggle in Southern Africa. While academic history is still very much ruled by 19th century methods of research, the critical apparatus has lagged far behind the technological means that exist today to produce historical knowledge.

1. The Colonial Discourse

Most academic historians would argue today that professor Trevor-Roper's assertion that there was no such a thing as African history except the history of the occupant is no longer tenable, and that the body of literature is sufficient proof of the fallacy of that statement. However, whereas most writers responded to the assertion by demonstrating the existence of another history, few, if any, bothered to examine what made professor Trevor-Roper's assertion possible, and to many plausible.

The critics of Professor Trevor-Roper were right, but had they analysed further, they would have noticed that Professor Trevor-Roper did represent historical forces that were unwilling to see the history of the continent written by its inhabitants. One of the achievements of colonial historiography had been to suppress the history of slavery, and what had made that achievement so total was the physical and social destruction of the means that could have made the production of such a history possible. As it is, what has been recaptured is only bits and pieces which pass as history, but which should be looked upon only as vestiges.

In an essay on colonialism and literature, Abdul R. JanMohamed pointed out that the colonial situation gave rise to a manichean form of representing that situation in the literature.¹⁰ The manichean allegory that dominates the colonialist literary representation can be understood as "a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and other, subject and object."¹¹

Needless to say the above would apply with equal force to historical writing since, as the author himself argues, "the ideological function of this manichaeism, in addition to prolonging colonialism, is to dehistoricize and desocialize the conquered world."¹² However, in the case of Trevor-Roper's statement, it has to be seen as more than representation, it directly translated the future agenda of the colonialist forces. By saying that the only worthwhile history of Africa was that of the conquerer, Trevor-Roper was saying that the

conquerer was ready to make sure that such a situation remained so.

The insistence with which the Apartheid leaders and their allies repeat to the ANC that they must stop violence is reminiscent of 19th century colonial history vintage: It is the colonizers who came to put an end to tribal warfare. Hence the colonial administrators could refer to this process as "pacification campaigns", regardless of the fact that the warfare that is referred to had itself been the result of the violent conquest by European powers. And of course, the apologists for Apartheid readily see the mob lynching as a vindication of their preconceived notions about Africans: left to themselves they shall return to their primeval violence.

At the economic level the colonial discourse emphasized economic development, and as a proof of it, they would point to the buildings, the railroads, the schools, etc. However, what is not pointed out is that all of the colonial statistics only begin to become significant at the end of the 19th century. Although there have been attempts to do so, most economic historians find it difficult to look at slavery in terms of economic development, unless one is ready to accept slave trade as a measure of economic development for the continent from where they were being taken.¹³

The conception of colonial rule as having brought economic development usually goes along with two other corollaries. The end of colonial rule usually spells economic demise. And the leaders of Apartheid make use of this and also add that "their" blacks are better off than the blacks in the rest of the continent.

2. Which History will prevail in Southern Africa?

Since 1975, but with even greater force since the creation of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) in April 1980, the struggle between the Apartheid Regime and its victims has intensified to such a degree that it is becoming increasingly difficult to discuss the history of national liberation without a sense of being out of place. For countries like Angola and Mozambique which achieved independence with the aim of transforming their societies into socialist societies, this objective of socialist

transformation is now being treated with derision and contempt.¹⁴

The words "We have no place to go" uttered by refugees in Mozambique can be seen as a vivid translation by the Mozambicans themselves of what they have lost. The obvious objective of the South African regime and its allies is to make living in Mozambique so difficult as to obliterate completely not only the capacity of Mozambicans to orientate themselves physically, but also historically. In a world of total physical deprivation, historical consciousness can act as a last temporary refuge. However, since socialist transformation is now being described as mere rhetoric, it is difficult not to see in the onslaught in Southern Africa the same effect that colonial conquest had achieved in earlier phases of the history of the continent and which led so many Africans to be ashamed of their own history, their own culture, and sometimes their own people.

One of the direct consequences of the intensified attacks against the Frontline states has been a slow but noticeable transformation of the history of the national liberation struggles. The transformations vary, according to the level of knowledge. For those who knew little, the liberation war is simply referred to as a "bush war".

By creating devastation, famine and endemic poverty, South Africa can then let the journalists do the rest of the work. Since one of the premises of anti-communism rests on the assumptions that socialism is by definition incapable of being economically efficient, the role of South Africa in bringing havoc and destruction to Southern Africa takes second place in the hierarchy of causes for explaining economic decay in countries like Mozambique and Angola.

The process by which the history of national independence is erased in favor of that of the one promoted by the Apartheid regime is visible in the way western journalists write about the effects of the war of aggression in countries like Mozambique. As in all other colonies, the journalists make their ideological proclamations of the nostalgia of colonial rule by implying that nothing worthy of interest has happened since 1975.

Thus, to illustrate graphically - i.e. stereotypically - that history stopped in 1975, the empty shelves of a shop, in Maputo, lead to the conclusion that "the store looks as though

it closed 10 years ago."¹⁵ Obviously, one of the consequences of such writing will be either to decide that a history that has led to such a disastrous situation is not worth writing or reflecting about, or that the necessary steps will be to produce the evidence that, indeed, things happened in quite a predictable manner. In both cases, the result will be to simply ignore and or distort a crucial phase of Mozambican history.

3. East-West confrontation and the elimination of national histories

It is now fashionable to distinguish between the globalist and the regionalist, i.e. between those who analyse the situation in southern Africa in terms of East-West confrontation or in terms of the local conflicts. The central problem of this kind of debate is that it establishes the same kind of manichean view of the world mentioned above. There is no doubt that East-West confrontation has had its impact on the southern African scene. However, it is equally true that it is not possible to understand the history of national liberations without analysing the local forces.

The difficulty of analysis is further compounded by the fact that on each side of the ideological divide the manichean view of the world is further reproduced. Thus if one reads publications like *Geopolitique*, *Conservative Digest*, *Washington Times*, which serves as propaganda mouthpieces of the Republican right, one is left with the impression that Chester Crocker and Frank Carlucci have been supporters of leftist organizations.

From the point of view of the right, the reason for accepting and enforcing this kind of debate has to do with the fact that knowledge of the history of national liberation has been ignored. Since the premise was that the movements were led by a bunch of discontents who were agents of the Soviets and the Chinese, there was logically no reason to study or pay attention to what these national liberation movements were doing.

From the point of view of the left, more often than not, the expressed hostility of western government was sufficient for assuming as given the knowledge of the history of the liberation movements. The priority was to defeat the enemy on the ideological battlefield. Once a liberation movement has

proved its worth by defeating the enemy as was the case of the MPLA and Frelimo, its study seemed to become irrelevant. Indeed, it is no accident that the critical study of the history of national liberation movements has been a difficult, but not impossible, undertaking.¹⁶

Both of these positions, at least as they are found among academics, are rooted in an abstract and idealistic conception of history. From the right, it stems from the already mentioned conviction that the history of the colonies or former colonies can only be understood through the histories of the colonizers. From the left, it stems from insufficient empirical research, often combined with the conviction that general marxist theory can compensate for this deficiency.¹⁷

The current situation in South Africa provides a clear illustration of how history can be understood, analyzed and acted upon outside of academic frameworks, of the right or of the left. Indeed, the more enlightened rulers of the Apartheid Regime would not have met with the ANC leadership had it not been for the realization that the process and forms of mass political organization, now taking place in the streets of the townships, were the product of people who have become conscious that, ultimately, they will determine the course of history.

This kind of history is most threatening to the leaders of Apartheid, and they have shown this fear by banning any report of it. When the dead cannot be talked about, and when the names of people in prison cannot be mentioned, one is indeed faced with a regime that will stop at nothing to impose its own will. But it should not be forgotten that what the Apartheid Regime is doing today is no different from what colonial regimes did. The only difference may be in degree or intensity.

National histories or the histories of revolutionary processes are complex and cannot be transformed so as to be comprehensible (and therefore manipulable?) to the forces that are opposed to change, but this is precisely the process that is at work in Southern Africa. But, again this is not new and at the risk of overstating the case, it could be argued that the whole arsenal of the social sciences has been a part of a process of creating analytical moulds which are themselves part of the arsenal of domination.

When fighting the oppressor, the oppressed are faced with a double task: how to put an end to the oppressor as well as the sources and causes of oppression. It is no accident that the founders of Frelimo chose to include among their objectives that of putting an end to the exploitation of many by man. The oppressor's fear stems from the fact that since they are accustomed to the use of violence as their primary weapons of domination, it would never occur to them that the oppressed would think otherwise. Yet, the Mozambicans and Angolans who struggled for independence ended up freeing the Portuguese people in the process, even before themselves, so to speak, since the coup of April 25, 1974, occurred well before Mozambique and Angola were declared independent, in June and November 1975, respectively.

When confronted with the atrocities of the MNR armed bandits, the right responds by saying that all guerilla movements commit atrocities. It is indeed a historical fact that the French and the Bolshevik revolutions led to white and red terror. However, the fact that this happened in history should not mean that wherever revolutions are attempted, a similar pattern will occur. During its armed struggle, Frelimo made a point of stressing that if the struggle against Portuguese colonial rule was for transforming the Mozambican colonial society, then such a transformation had to begin in the struggle itself by adopting not only different objectives, but also and more importantly different means and methods. Such a conception of the struggle was based on the understanding that the oppressor, despite his privileged position was also a victim of his own oppressive rule.¹⁸

The manicheist view of the world that had prevented the colonizers and their allies from understanding other societies is being currently illustrated by the western responses to the changes taking place in the Soviet Union. As pointed out by Chris Donnelly, head of Soviet Studies Research Centre at Sandhurst in England:

People can't cope with the idea that he (Gorbachev) can be a genuine reformer at home, but also have foreign policy objectives which are in *his* interest, not *our* (italics in the original)... But that's not what people want to hear. They want him to be what they hope he is.¹⁹

Mutatis mutandis. It is this same logic that has been the basis of the Western countries' perceptions and understanding of the post World War II history of Africa. But there is a difference: whereas the Soviet Union cannot be treated like a minor power, African countries are constantly treated as if they are still part of the colonial empire.

Interestingly, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, there appeared a significant number of publications under the general theme of social change in Africa. With hindsight, it is now evident that the positive light in which these changes were seen were determined by whether these changes conformed to the modernization theories and models which western social scientists hoped the "traditional" African societies would follow. In those days, it was almost revolutionary to admit that African societies were capable of changing since the colonial premise was that African societies were incapable of change unless they were made to change by the colonizers. With regard to Gorbachev, a similar phenomenon is at work: commentators are almost saying that the changes that are taking place in the Soviet Union should be credited to the West and not to the capacity of the Soviets to initiate change in their own terms and for their own reasons.

4. What is at stake in Southern Africa?

In their efforts to alert the world to the catastrophic situation in southern Africa, the Frontline states and Mozambique in particular have been pointing out, since at least 1980, that Apartheid is a crime against humanity. Every crime committed by the Apartheid Regime also indirectly erodes the humanity of those who are witness and could - but do not - do something to put an end to such a regime.

These appeals seem to have fallen on deaf ears in the West except for a few exceptions (the usual Nordic countries and the anti-apartheid organizations). Among the international agencies, the response from the World Bank and the IMF has to be set apart and can already be seen as part of the process of rewriting the recent history of Mozambique. Moreover, the response from institutions like these should not be divorced from the general context of the pressure toward privatization which has swept most western countries, and perceived as the panacea to "failed" socialisms.²⁰

It is not difficult to understand why western governments would not listen to appeals to their sense of humanity. In a recent study on conflicts between the Third World countries and the rich nations, a conservative writer like B.D. Nossiter noted that: "Washington tends to consider Third World nations almost exclusively as instruments in the Cold War. With the rest of the industrial West, the U.S. views the Latin Americans, Asians, Africans suspiciously as heretics from the market orthodoxy, *threats* to the banking system, convenient for exports, but *invaders* of domestic markets."²¹ (my italics)

From the days of slavery, it was an established rule that the slave could not claim to have a greater sense of humanity than the master. In today's southern Africa there are formally no masters and no slaves, but there is a struggle for the building of a humane non-racial, democratic, just society. For those who believe in the superiority of the capitalist system because no other system has been able to compete with its capacity to produce commodities, it might be a salutary exercise to reflect on the legend of Midas whose drive and desire for riches made him turn everything he touched into gold. Bankers like David Rockefeller, who was approached by President Machel to help Mozambique's against Apartheid, do not understand phrases like "Apartheid is a crime against humanity" precisely because their central point of reference is not humanity but the world of commodities and finance capital.

In societies where commodities have assumed the importance of deities, it has become difficult (and to some impossible) to understand that there may exist societies which have suffered so much from the drive for profit that the production of commodities - and the political and ideological structures that derive from it - is not the yardstick by which to measure its achievements.

It is only when this kind of mentality predominates that one can understand the underlying indictment contained in the following description of a shop in Mozambique:

At a department store in downtown Maputo, the shop manager nostalgically recalls the days when his shelves were full and the stockrooms were bulging. "This here was my crystal department, all of it from London," he says, walking past empty counters, "over there was the perfume department. I had Palm Beach suits, Italian shoes, Portuguese dresses." Today he has nothing, except for a bunch of socks, some children's clothes and a few pieces of red furniture and green furniture.²²

In a world economy increasingly dominated and ruled by commodity production, the indictment does not seem to require any explanation. It is sufficient in and by itself. It is as if the reader must conclude that the shelves emptied of their goods must be seen to mean that the history of Mozambique during this period remained empty. More importantly, how these shelves were emptied is either left without any explanation or is alluded to by making comparisons with the business world as if the business world is the only acceptable standard of reference.

Southern African societies are undergoing a historical process which is reminiscent of the proletarianization process that brought peasants to the gates of the 19th century capitalists' factories. Having lost all their means of production the peasants had nowhere else to go, but to the factories to sell their only commodity: their labor power. The present situation in Southern Africa, however, is worse: it is a combination of 19th century proletarianization and Atlantic slavery. It is this combination which accounts for the aimlessness expressed by the refugees when they were saying that they had no place to go.

The Apartheid Regime with its allies in the West is attempting to roll back the achievements of the Frontline States. It is clearly their hope that, when people begin to have no place to go physically, it won't be long before they have no idea of where they are historically. And once that stage is reached, it will not be difficult for the bankers of the IMF and the World Bank to rewrite the history of Southern Africa, as they are, in fact, attempting to do. However, history has also shown that while any people can go through phases

of being disoriented, they have always recovered. The whole history of the African continent continues to be a living testimony of that capacity.

Conclusion

As an earlier draft of this paper was being completed, the McNeil/Lehrer News Hour of April 30, 1987 carried a story filmed and narrated by Micheal Beurk for the BBC from Mozambique. Evidently, the report was produced with the objective of provoking a sympathetic response from the viewers. So much so that the producers decided that it could only elicit consensus, and therefore, only invited the architect of the Reagan Administration's "Constructive engagement", Under Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, to be the sole interviewee, contrary to their customary practice of inviting several persons with differing opinions.

Viewers were treated to at least four main, but *not equally* weighted versions or explanations of what has been taking place in Mozambique. The most important vector of the story was obviously the reporter, supported by the cameraperson and the staff of the editing room. President Chissano's intervention was skillfully done so as to reinforce the narrative line of the reporter. As in the history of slavery, the direct victims were voiceless except for their dying sounds. No doubt, the reporter and the cameraperson thought that the suffering was such that it spoke for itself. The important intervention was that of PBS interviewer, Judy Woodruff, who spoke to Chester Crocker as though it was over a cup of tea.

The result could only be predictable. The U.S. depicted as a humanitarian government running to the rescue of Mozambique, even though, because of its socialist options at independence, Mozambique has been blacklisted by the U.S. government. The whole history of Mozambique's struggle for a socialist society, what it has achieved, its shortcomings, how its achievements became selected targets of South Africa's Defense Forces, without much interference from the U.S., was obviously not mentioned. Nothing was said about the fact that U.S. AID is insisting that the money it is giving to the SADCC countries must not be used by Angola. Nothing was said about

the fact that the South African strategy to roll back the gains achieved by Angola and Mozambique in 1975 was first backed by Secretary of State Kissinger, and that the divisive tactics now being used by U.S. AID were already then in use with regard to the economic aid promised to Zimbabwe at the Lancaster House agreement in 1979.

When asked whether South Africa could be stopped from fueling the war in Mozambique, Chester Croker conveniently ducked the question by saying that he could not speak for South Africa. Yet, in typical colonial paternalistic fashion he felt no compunction in speaking for the Mozambicans. The U.S. Administration has conveniently forgotten that it sent bombers against Gadhafi, and that the South Africans did not miss the opportunity to refer to that example to explain their own incursions into the neighboring Frontline states.

The structure of the interview was reminiscent of the BBC report of Machel's death filed from South Africa with an inserted interview of Roelof Botha, almost crying over the death of the man that Defense Minister Malan had personally threatened only a week before. But again, this rewriting of history is not new to Africa: the descendants of the slave hunters have been boasting that it was the Abolitionist movement that put an end to slavery.

Then, they proceeded to "develop" through colonial rule. Chester Crocker's strategy is that of one who is convinced that Africa was developed during colonial rule, consequently he has called his strategy in Southern Africa "constructive engagement". Not all agree as testified by a recent book published in Zimbabwe under the title of *Destructive Engagement* (edited by David and Phyllis Martin, Harare, 1986).

Many educators have looked upon TV and the video invention as one of the most powerful educative instruments. Yet, as shown by the BBC film, TV, as operated by people who are not at the receiving end of oppression, repression and exploitation, may produce results which are far from educative. Some may argue that the appearance of the BBC film as this paper was being written turned out to be a God sent illustration, and therefore not very convincing. The BBC film was only the latest addition in a series of televised reports from Southern Africa.

The bias and distortions are not only reproduced by so-called straight news reporting, but can also be found in other areas as shown by Paul Simon and the Graceland album. Despite the fact that Paul Simon was confronted by groups (like the students at Howard University in the Spring term of 1987) which denounced his violation of the current artistic and cultural boycott of South Africa voted by the United Nations, his album has been promoted without any mention of this, and, furthermore, he has informed (as of June 1987) the U.N. decolonization committee he sees no need to apologize for having broken the boycott.

The overall lesson is quite simple: the most technologically advanced communication network cannot work in favor of people who are struggling for economic, social and political justice in Southern Africa because while the owners of these communication networks may proclaim their opposition to racial discrimination they would rather maintain and/or reform the system than bring it down because the superprofits to be gained from a system like Apartheid are too attractive to be rejected on moral grounds and also because of the deep seated racism that makes, in their eyes, the lives of black people expendable. But when the system is finally brought down because it will, then they will try and pretend that they were on the Frontline. Attempts to re-write the histories of national liberation will continue and take different forms, but the objectives will remain the same: the owners of land and capital will seek to maintain their supremacy, but the history of Southern Africa, so far, has shown that while they can and will win some battles, they cannot win the current war.

¹ For a good example of this, see the article by Allister Sparks on ANC leader Joe Slavo, "Bogyman shifts on the sands of time", which appeared in the London *Observer*, March 1, 1987. Reprinted in *Facts and Reports on Southern Africa*, March 1987, E. 11.

² The literature on this is vast, but Kevin Danaher's *In Whose Interest?* (Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, D.C., 1984) and *The Political Economy of U.S. Policy Toward South Africa* (Westview Press, Boulder, London, 1985) are useful starters.

³ For detailed account of this see among others, M. Kalb, *Congo Cables*, N.Y., 1983.

⁴ Richard Falk, "The Failure of American foreign policy to adjust to the end of postwar world", in *Current Research on Peace and Violence*, 2-3/1984, p. 87.

⁵ Although not focused on this aspect, Edward H. McKinley's *The Lure of Africa*, (Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1974) cannot help but make this point as, for example, in the following quite typical passage (pp. 15-16): "Tropical Africa has always appeared forbidding to the outside world...Sierra Leone was known in the 1880's as the "White Man's Grave"... To be fair, it should be pointed out that most Africans, especially in rural areas, saw the white man as fearful: young children would be told to behave lest the white man would come and take them away. This fear of the white man, however, had a more rational basis in the history of slavery.

⁶ See in particular Dr. Jonathan Mann's article, "AIDS in Africa", pp. 40-3. Dr. Mann is director of the World Health Organization's special program in AIDS.

⁷ Rudi Van Doorslaer, "Anti-communist activism in Belgium", *Socialist Register*, 1984, p. 126.

⁸ In a column that appeared in *The New York Times* and in the September 2, 1987 *Oakland Tribune*, Richard M. Cohen, a senior producer of foreign news for the CBS Evening News arrived at the same conclusion by writing as follows: "While we compromise to keep our credentials in South Africa, we no longer truly cover events as we used to. As a result, American's passion for that story, the identification with the human struggle and the underdog have receded. I wonder if the American people wouldn't be better served if the networks were thrown out of South Africa or just left on their own."

⁹ For an interesting and provocative elaboration of the failure of TV to educate as one effectively as might expect, see Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, New York, 1978.

¹⁰ Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: the Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature", in *Critical Inquiry*, 12 Autumn, 1985.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 63.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 63.

¹³ In this direction, one of the most serious attempts to look at slave trade as if it was the same as trade in any commodity was P.D. Curtin's *Economic Change in Pre-colonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, Madison, 1975.

¹⁴ For example, see the article by Roger Thurow, "African Tragedy: Mozambicans Suffer From War, Drought and Economic Decay", *The Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 1987.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ The late Professor Aquino de Braganca was crucial in promoting the systematic study of the history of national liberation in Mozambique. His basic understanding was that if Marxism was going to be a scientifically valuable tool of analysis then it

had to be nurtured and moulded through an increased knowledge of Mozambican history.

17 A more detailed argument on this is being prepared, but it has already been broached in "From the Idealization of Frelimo to the Understanding of Mozambique Recent History" *African Journal of Political Economy* (Harare), 1,1, 1986. A slightly editorially altered version will appear in *Review* Spring 1988.

18 For an elaboration on this point see J. Depelchin, "Anthropology and African history seen through the history of Frelimo" in *Contemporary Marxism*, 7, 1983. On a similar vein, but with regard to Apartheid, see E. Fred Dube's "Racism: Are there one or two categories of victims?" in *The Philosophical Forum*, XVIII, 2-3 winter-spring, 1986-87, pp. 137-41. Dube was a former inmate of the Robben Island prison in South Africa. His article is based on a personal experience he had with one of the Warders whom, it could be paradoxically said, he helped liberate from the shackles and blinders of the Apartheid system of thinking.

19 Max Easterman, "The dangers of prejudging Mr. Gorbachev's new reality." *The Listener*, March 26, 1987.

20 A Colin Legum's Third World Report dated February 13, 1987, does quote from a recent survey done for the Overseas Development Institute to the effect that the World Bank itself is apparently no longer holding so rigidly to the view that privatization is the ideal solution for African countries South of the Sahara.

21 B.D. Nossiter, *The Global Struggle for More: Third World Conflicts with Rich Nations*, Harper and Row, New York, 1987, p.xiii.

22 Roger Thurow, "African Tragedy..." *The Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 1987.