# Resistance

**Shane Moran**

## Abstract

Political resistance can lead to the declaration of final victory, invocations of permanent revolution, or to compromise with the reality of injustice in the name of the lesser evil. The latter opts for the semblance of order and the unheroic mantle of messy compromise. This essay explores some texts concerned with resistance in the hope of clarifying the debate around the legacy of colonialism. The aim is to supplement Howard Caygill's *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (2013) with reflection on some of the steps that precede the taking of a political position.

**Keywords**: Caygill, Vaneigem, Mandela, Derrida

The first text I would like to consider is Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967), a sustained theorisation of the art of resistance with a Nietzschean twist. Noting that the lie of the ideal is the truth of the master, the following passage lays down telling distinctions:

> Nobody dared to announce the end of colonialism for fear that it would spring up all over the place like a jack-in-the-box whose lid doesn't shut properly. In fact, from the moment when the collapse of colonial power revealed the colonialism inherent in all power over men, the problems of race and colour became about as important as crossword puzzles. What effect did the clowns of the left have as they trotted about on their anti-racist and anti-anti-semitic hobbyhorses? In the last analysis, the effect of smothering the cries of all those who are not Jews or blacks – starting with the Jews and blacks themselves. Of course, I would not dream of questioning the spirit of generosity which


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> inspires anti-racism. But I lose interest in the past as soon as I can no longer affect it. I am speaking here and now, and nobody can persuade me, in the name of Alabama or South Africa and their spectacular exploitation, to forget that the epicentre of such problems lies in human beings, in each person who is humiliated and scorned by every aspect of our own society (Vaneigem 2003: 36).

If 'the epicentre of such problems lies in human beings, in each person who is humiliated and scorned by every aspect of our own society', what of the struggles of the colonial periphery, so essential for conditions in the metropolitan centre and its 'giving colonialism' (see Kojève 2000)?

The hyperbolic Vaneigem would like to be the last and least of the whites, clearing away fracturing identities (racial, national, ethnic, etc.) in favour of the universal exemplar of the oppressed, the human being. An unsentimental taking of accounts is called for:

> From 1945 to 1960, colonialism was a fairy godmother to the left. With a new enemy on the scale of fascism, the left never had to define itself (there was nothing there); it was able to affirm itself by negating something else (36; and see 123).

Warning about fetishising anti-colonial struggles stresses the colonialism in all power at the risk of flattening out various resistances to that power. Is colonial contestation, then, simply reactive, tributary and secondary, even essentially the same?

> There remains the 'third world'. There remain the old forms of oppression. That the serfs of the *latifundia* should be the contemporaries of the new proletariat seems to me a perfect formula for the explosive mixture from which the total revolution will be born. Who could dare to suppose that the peons and Indians of South America will be satisfied with land reform and lay down their arms when the best paid workers in Europe are demanding a radical change in their way of life? The revolt against the welfare state will set the minimum demands for world revolution. You can choose to forget this, but you forget it at your peril As Saint-Just said, those who make a revolution by halves are only digging their own graves (74).

Surely when the wretched of the European earth go in search of a better life they are, if not happy, then resigned to dishing out humiliation and scorn onto the colonised. All suffering is not equal and the epicentre is not merely human but also geopolitical and regional, and historical. There is an imbrication here, not least because the normative model of the European state was not a finished export to the colonies, and the idea of sovereignty was shaped by the colonial experience[1].

With this in mind consider Vaneigem's spectacular reconfiguration of suffering:

> I shall not renounce my share of violence.
> Human relationships can hardly be discussed in terms of more or less tolerable conditions, more or less admissible indignities. Qualification is irrelevant. Do insults like 'wog' or 'nigger' hurt more than a word of command? When he is summoned, told off, or ordered around by a policeman, a boss, an authority, who doesn't feel deep down, in moments of lucidity, that he is a darkie and a gook?
>
> The old colonials provided us with a perfect identi-kit portrait of power when they predicted the descent into bestiality and wretchedness of those who found their presence undesirable. Law and order come first, says the guard to the prisoner. Yesterday's anti-colonialists are trying to humanize the generalized colonialism of power. They become its watchdogs in the cleverest way: by barking at all the after-effects of past inhumanity.
>
> Before he tried to get himself made President of Martinique, Aimé Césaire made a famous remark: 'The bourgeoisie has found itself unable to solve the major problems which its own existence has produced: the colonial problem and the problem of the proletariat'. He forgot to add: 'For they are one and the same problem, a problem which anyone who separates them will fail to understand' (36 - 37)[2].

[1] See Anghie (2004: 36); the argument that the capitalist formation of sovereignty needs an intimate colonial formation that corresponds to it (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:179); and Kalyvas (2018).

[2] Lest Vaneigem's position seems quixotic, see Tom Nairn: 'In the 1960s opposition was both inspired and crippled by "internationalism". This was a utopian exhalation of protest, primarily from the Left, which set a purer single

Dancing on the grave of colonialism aims to up the ante of liberation and is a way of pointing to the general oppression of all human beings, and modernity's 'bestial barbarization ... contaminated with the pestilential breath of civilization' (Marx 1964: 148). It is worth noting that this type of diagnosis has a chequered history that includes Carlyle, Dickens and the executioner of liberal society who warned against seeking compensatory 'success with Hottentots and Zulu Kaffirs' when problems at home demand redress (Hitler 1939: 607).

When push comes to shove, the anticolonial battlefield must not be romanticised for there is no escape from the problems of home, no reinvention of the self. You bring your problems with you. After all, as Du Bois explained: '[t]he race problem is the other side of the labor problem; and the black man's burden is the white man's burden' (1997: 386). Recall Fanon pointing out that when 'the [European] workers believe, too, that they are part of the prodigious adventure of the European spirit' (1963: 313) their victories can hollow out if not overturn liberation struggles. Vaneigem underlines the same insight:

> Revolutions have never done anything but turn on themselves and negate themselves at the velocity of their own rotation .... There is a kind of understanding which is allowed by power because it serves its purposes. To borrow one's lucidity from the light of power is to illuminate the darkness of despair, to feed truth on lies (10. 50).

Is resistance, then, working hand in glove with oppression, 'scuttl[ing] back and forth between the colonial state and those who opposed it' (Doran 2017: viii)? Is every Jack the Giant Killer a closet quisling?

Does the claim that the collapse of colonial power revealed the colonialism inherent in all power effectively erase colonialism and its legacy? After all, is not '[t]his is how third-world living conditions spread into the "first-world"' (Gorz 1999: 5)? Is there is nothing geographically specific about colonialism, or slavery?

## Oppression

'Did it signify love or political hate? And could politics ever be an expression

world against the dire hostilities of colonialism and imperial statehood' (2002: 158).

of love?' (Ellison 1976: 363).

Booker T. Washington's travels in Europe in 1910 made him aware of the affinity between slavery in America and the condition of the Poles and Slavs: 'It would not be difficult to compare the Negro in the South with the Polish peasant, for example, because the masses of the Poles are, like the masses of the Negroes, an agricultural people' (Washington 1912: 241, see Zimmerman 2010: 221 - 222). Noting that hatred is tied to economic exploitation, Washington is struck by 'the very different forms which racial prejudice takes in the different countries that I visited' (241 - 142). Groups that are themselves oppressed partake of the pet hatred of their oppressors for other oppressed groups: 'all are united in hating and despising the Jew' (Washington 1912: 74 - 75).

Two million Jews fled the Russian Empire between 1880 and 1920, and between 1903 and 1906 attacks intensified. The 1903 Kishinev pogrom in particular effected Emma Goldman and others who would set in motion the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP. A parallel was seen between Russian pogroms against Jews and the American lynching of blacks (see Zipperstein 2018). The affliction of pariah status is all too familiar to Washington:

> As I learned in slavery to compare the condition of the Negro with that of the Jews in bondage in Egypt, so I have frequently, since freedom, been compelled to compare the prejudice, even persecution, which the Jewish people have to face and overcome in different parts of the world with the disadvantages of the Negro in the United States and elsewhere (241).

W.E.B. Du Bois will go further and indict 'the economic foundation of the modern world [which] was based on the recognition and preservation of so-called racial distinctions. In accordance with this, not only could Negro slavery be justified, but the Asiatic coolie profitably used and the labor classes in kept in their places by low wage' (Du Bois 1997: 103). It would seem that Vangeimen's attack on the whole system can also be reached by consideration of racism and colonialism.

Recall Aimé Césaire's famous remark on the 'crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms', Nazism: 'they tolerated Nazism before it was inflicted on them ... because, until then, it had been applied only to non-

European peoples' (2000: 36)[3]. It seems that Césaire and Vaneigem are closer than the latter supposed in perceiving the colonial problem and the problem of the proletariat as the problem of barbarism. Was Césaire's mistake in Vaneigem's eyes his becoming President of Martinique? Is this the perennial sneer directed at those who become part of the system?

Vaneigem is surely correct to point out that barking at the after-effects of past inhumanity can be one of the coordinates of stalemate:

> Is there any need to expatiate on the abandonment of the Marxist project by every variety of present-day Marxism? The Soviet Union, China, Cuba: what is there here of the construction of the whole man? The material poverty which fed the revolutionary desire for transcendence and radical change has been attenuated, but a new poverty has emerged, a poverty born of renunciation and compromise .... By all means, let us destroy fascism, but let the same destructive flame consume all ideologies, and all their lackeys to boot (Vaneigem 171).

Indeed, generic platitudes can sweep the real problem under the carpet of 'unfortunate silence and paralysis of effort' (Du Bois 1903: 43). But where the problems of race and colour stubbornly remain more important than crossword puzzles, the global distribution of inalienable alienation must remain uneven[4]. Our flesh surrounds us with its own decisions and counts against flattening out the colonialism in all power. It gets under your skin.

Howard Caygill makes the point that Vaneigem's text 'begins with what remains of the capacity to resist and then seeks to energize and enhance it' (2013: 176). He at least was not afraid to ask the big questions out of fear that the answers will be too little. Vaneigem is wary of confirming the ethos of competition and tolerance that dominates society by embracing the game of debate with its winners and losers, and eventual agreement. The discursive

[3] See Hannah Arendt on the boomerang of totalitarianism fashioned in the colonies, particularly 'the boomerang effects of South Africa's race society' (2004: 267).

[4] 'The average European cow gets a subsidy of $2 a day (the World Bank measure of poverty); more than half of the people in the developing world live on less than that. It appears that it *is* better to be a cow in Europe than to be a poor person in a developing country' (Stiglitz 2006*:* 85).

terrain pre-positions participants in familiar pigeon-holes thereby ensuring that, no matter what the outcome, the ideological infrastructure, with its tensions and counter-forces, is left standing: 'Every hand was a losing hand for me' (Fanon 1986: 101).

Vaneigem is not merely objecting to the stale predictability of shuffling political representatives whose recidivist *realpolitik* changes nothing essential in the system: 'the insight that the politicians' stubborn faith in progress, their confidence in their "mass basis", and, finally, their servile integration in an uncontrollable apparatus have been three aspects of the same thing' (Benjamin 1973: 260). Never one to shy away from asking the big questions out of fear that the answers will be too little, politicians outfox the oppressed yet again. Vaneigem is referring to the constructivism of political discourse whereby everything is named and so identified in advance in accordance with familiar criteria, and so reduced to what already exists, pulling even a would-be departure back to the mainstream. A break becomes continuity, a joint or hinge, a continuously proffered departure rather than a new beginning, the scrapings of liberation.

All the points or positions, congeries of names of political orientations, are only possible from the perspective of a norm of consistency, protocols, and preconditions of discursive consistency. Whoever the winners or losers are, the great game takes its toll: '... we were fighting for the complete transformation of social conditions .... The revolution had given us back the old power apparatus, had guaranteed the sacred right to property, exploitation, and profit' (Weiss 2005: 90, 100). The capacity to resist is channeled along familiar lines that lead to the present terminus, drifting downstream under the banner of solidarity[5].

Whatever the merits of Vaneigem's caginess, can one really swallow the fantasy of noble distance, of jumping out of the ligature of the present? '[H]is soul white as snow' (Orwell 1964: 238). Isn't the shell-game that equates transcendence with truth is itself part of scenery of ideological matinee? Doesn't one have to go through, rather than around or over, the sclerotic terms of contention? Vaneigem's adherence to the master-code of proletarianisation

[5] 'Social Democracy thought fit to assign to the working class the role of the redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This training made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren' (Benjamin 1973: 262).

certainly aims at uniting and concentrating the forces of resistance in the face of the enveloping crisis in which '[t]ime is everything, man is nothing; he is, at most, time's carcass'. Was the defeat of apartheid on the basis of what Mandela termed 'the concept of freedom and fulfilment for the African people in their own land' (Mandela 1964) really a victory for the colonialism in all power? Was what was lost by the colonised also lost in Europe? What of the quest for equality and 'the transcendental structure of a colonial order, justified in terms of Western universalism' (Žižek 2014: 149)? When does downplaying anti-colonial resistance shade into resistance to resistance?

## Dispossession

> truth to tell
> I have a feeling that I lost something
> A key the key
> Or that I am something lost
> Rejected, misaligned
> By which ancestors exactly? (Césaire 2017: 689).

Minimising the international division of labour and neocolonial patterns of consumption and subject-formation in the name of concrete experience risks erasing essential differences that make possible the bad blood of colonialism. This complex causes a structure of feeling, and affective scar: 'If you keep pounding and pounding on the same spot the feeling dies, the nerves die. I can feel us sliding back to that right now' (Madikizela-Mandela 2017: 240). A parable conveniently illlustrates the nature of this wound and points to a different perspective on resistance.

Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mt. Kenya* tells the story of 'The Gentlemen of the Jungle' to illustrate the problem. It tells how the Gikuyu lost most of their lands through their magnanimity to hypocritical Europeans and their insidious trickery:

> Once upon a time an elephant made a friendship with a man. One day a heavy thunderstorm broke out, the elephant went to his friend, who had a little hut at the edge of the forest, and said to him: 'My dear good man, will you please let me put my trunk inside your hut to keep it out

> of this torrential rain?' The man, seeing what situation his friend was in, replied: 'My dear good elephant, my hut is very small, but there is room for your trunk and myself. Please put your trunk in gently'. The elephant thanked his friend, saying: 'You have done me a good deed and one day I shall return your kindness'. But what followed? As soon as the elephant put his trunk inside the hut, slowly he pushed his head inside, and finally flung the man out in the rain, and then lay down comfortably inside his friend's hut (Kenyatta 1965: 47).

You know how the story ends:

> Early one morning, when the huts already occupied by the jungle lords were all beginning to decay and fall to pieces, he went out and built a bigger and better hut a little distance away. No sooner had Mr. Rhinoceros seen it than he came rushing in, only to find that Mr. Elephant was already inside, sound asleep. Mr. Leopard next came in at the window, Mr. Lion, Mr. Fox, and Mr. Buffalo entered the doors, while Mr. Hyena howled for a place in the shade and Mr. Alligator basked on the roof. Presently they all began disputing about their rights of penetration, and from disputing they came to fighting, and while they were all embroiled together the man set the hut on fire and burnt it to the ground, jungle lords and all. Then he went home, saying: 'Peace is costly, but it's worth the expense', and lived happily ever after (52).

Chinua Achebe interprets this 'story of a dispossession that began with a little act of hospitality by the dispossessed' as a prophecy of the Kenyan struggle for liberation and the '[f]ear and suspicion' (2001: 65, 67, 78) that is the legacy of colonialism.If you don't think of the elephant you'll soon find yourself out in the cold. State, nation and land are gathered together in the symbol of the house that must be reclaimed. Is the reclaimed house private or communal property?

In South Africa, land dispossession is also seen as the original sin of colonialism:

> In his key work, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, published in 1867, Karl Marx explained that 'the expropriation of the mass of the people from the soil forms the basis of the capitalist mode of production'. The colonial white capitalists found that people would not

> sell their labour to them if they could make a living from the land. They needed to be forced to work and thus involuntary enter into capital-wage dynamic. So everywhere land dispossession has been necessary for capitalism to create a class of wage workers, the exploitation of whom is the source of all capitalist profit. Marx described land dispossession (or 'primitive accumulation') as capitalism's 'original sin' (Lungisa 2017)[6].

Does repossession of the land, then, signal the liberation of the class of wage workers and restoration of their birth-right? Is this how colonialism is to be transcended? Should what was built on the backs of black labour and colonial pillage be destroyed, digested by the representatives of the oppressed? Can the poisoned fruits of the past be decolonised? Or is capitalism integrally colonialist? What of the undertow of the depth and weight and power of history?[7]

Vaneigem's claim that egalitarian emancipation remains as stubbornly elusive in London and New York as it does in South Africa is not false:

> The impetus of the 'free' market has reunified the capitalist system by precipitating the collapse of bureaucratic, so-called communist, state capitalism. The Western model has made tabula rasa of the old forms of oppression and instated a democracy of the supermarket, a self-service autonomy, a hedonism whose pleasures must be paid for (Vaneigem 10).

[6] Marx's quip about 'original sin' is sarcastic. He is referring to the myth of bourgeois political economy in which the original sin of the poor and dispossessed is their laziness. Too lazy or weak to retain control over the means of production, they fell before dynamic capitalists (see Marx 1906: 784 - 785). Marx is mocking self-serving moralising.

[7] Recall Sir Phillip Mitchell, Governor of Kenya, 1951: '"It is necessary to devise measures which will turn the people concerned from bitter preoccupation with the real or imaginary past to a hopeful and happy enthusiasm for the future, be it in farming, industry, transportation, the public service, or any other means of earning a good living"' (quoted in Harbeson 1973: 29). 'The political attack mounted by the African nationalists on the Europeans in their rural bastion would be turned aside by a concerted attack on the problems of economic development' (Ibid.).

Who can doubt that 'the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment' (Fanon 1986: 30) have gone global? But this truth is partial because what is demanded here is not some perfect, unattainable equality, still less any approximation to the incomplete (but relatively luxurious) equality of developed nations. Although dehumanisation is not the monopoly of the colonies, it is here that the resistance to 'those who think of the African as an economic animal 'a thing to be fed' and not as a human being' (Sobukwe 1959) has overflowed into post-colonial independence. The alleviation of absolute poverty, of grinding endemic misery, and full access to democracy, is the demand:

> Twenty years of ANC rule with its evictions, its disconnections, its lies and all its greediness and violence has come to mean an abusive relationship with us. Twenty years after apartheid we live like pigs in the mud, our children die of diarrhœa, we are forced into transit camps at gun point, the police beat and shoot us in the streets and the assassins kill us with impunity. If we stand up and demand that our humanity is recognised we are removed from the housing list and placed on the death list. We were promised housing but we got evictions, forced removals to rural dumping grounds and transit camps while Jacob Zuma got Nkandla. We were promised jobs but even a job picking rubbish needs an ANC card. We were promised democracy but when we want to be part of discussions and decision making we are taken as a dangerous threat to society. We were promised the rule of law under a Constitution that would respect everyone but from Durban to Cape Town the Municipalities treat the poor as if we are beneath the law. We have seen miners murdered in cold blood in Marikana (*Abahlali baseMjondolo* 2014).

Economic transformation is the proposed means of purging and healing[8]. If economic prosperity and employment do not flow from the project of liberal non-racial emancipation, what value does liberal egalitarianism retain? Has the sclerotic liberal moral-humanist ideal of freedom been served up without

[8] See Pamela Pilbeam's argument that popular insurrection was often directed at liberals whose economic policies were indistinguishable from conservatives (2001: 19 - 40).

actual, economic freedom?

When democratisation has replaced modernization and the heralds of democracy use their power much as the modernisers did when they promoted the transition from tradition to modernity by shoring up their own interests under the rhetoric of freedom and progress - barely dissembling the process of economic growth as the violent appropriation of peoples' resources - the myth of development as freedom is exposed[9]. As René Maran has it:

> Civilization, civilization, pride of the Europeans, and the burying-ground for innocents .... You build your kingdom on corpses. Whatever you may want, whatever you may do, you act with deceit. At your sight, gushing tears and screaming pain. You are the might that exceeds right (1989: 8 - 9).

This is not a new battle. These strains and stresses within enlightenment are what the following sympathetic diagnosis underestimates:

> Today, more than ever, one should insist on this properly Hegelian ambiguity of colonialism. The colonial powers did indeed brutally intrude into traditional societies all around the world, derailing their customs and destroying their social fabric – not to mention the economic exploitation .... [But] the very disintegration of traditional forms opens up the space of liberation. As was clear to Nelson Mandela and the ANC, white supremacy and the temptation of a return to tribal roots were two sides of the same coin (Žižek 2014: 135 - 136)[10].

As much as this overview is correct in its general outline, what the summation misses is the network of legacies and relations that circulate in the post-colony. All power remains with Western discourse.

Compare this with Jacques Derrida's remarks on Nelson Mandela's

[9] 'How ironic if "barbarism" should break out not in spite of, but precisely because of, the limited nature of the transition to democracy that is currently being granted – in both theory and practice – global sanction' (Saul 1994): 196).
[10] 'As a leader, he [Mandela] was, at different points in his career, a champion of the downtrodden and a friend of big business. Time and again he let the end justify the means' (Keller 2008: 89).

invocation of the entire South African nation against the partial white nation. Derrida insists on a fact that cannot be erased:

> The definition of the 'entire nation' registers – and thus seems to reflect – the event of the *coup de force* [a bad blow; violent intervention] that was white occupation, followed by the founding of the South African Republic. Without this event, how could we see even the slightest relationship between a general will and what the Freedom Charter calls the 'will of the entire nation'? The latter finds itself paradoxically united by the violence done to it, which tends to disaggregate or destructure it forever, down to its most virtual identity. This phenomenon marks the establishment of all states after decolonization (Derrida 2008: 68; and see Fulela 2008).

Within this complexity are the residues of an affective history, the all too present history of feelings about this history that inform ideals about a possible future. As Nelson Mandela explained in 1962 about early African societies:

> There was much in such a society that was primitive and insecure and it certainly could never measure up to the demands of the present epoch. But in such a society are contained the seeds of revolutionary democracy in which none will be held in slavery or servitude, and in which poverty, want, and insecurity shall be no more. This is the inspiration which, even today, inspires me and my colleagues in our political struggle (Mandela 1962).

Derrida interprets the passage from parliamentary democracy to revolutionary democracy as 'a society without class and without private property .... the *effective* accomplishment, the fulfillment of the democratic form, the *real* determination of the formality' (72). But did Mandela say he was inspired by the ideal of a society without class and without property?

Two years later at the Rivonia Trial, Mandela confessed his attraction to,

> the idea of a classless society, an attraction which springs in part from Marxist reading and, in part, from my admiration of the structure and organisation of early African societies in this country. The land, then

> the main means of production, belonged to the tribe. There was no rich or poor and there was no exploitation (Mandela 1964).

As Derrida stresses, it is the idea of a classless society and its egalitarianism that Mandela holds out as a guiding idea as he enacts a problematic moment of reflection whereby the total logic of the system is reflected back into one of its members: 'The inheritance which you were sent to claim/ defined itself in contradiction' (Walcott 2004: 76). Lionised Mandela's admiration for the early African societies and the British parliamentary system was enunciated when 'the black peril was made to become synonymous with Communist infiltration' (Modisane 1986: 122)[11]. Is Derrida's celebration of revolutionary democracy and Mandela's admiration for the law celebration of the acceptance of European economic and social institutions and norms?

Let us place these issues in the context of the original injustice and the political resolutions opposed to it:

> The Land Act had many predecessors, of course, because gradually Europeans had been confining Africans onto smaller and smaller reserves. But it was the act of 1913 that definitively institutionalized the situation and set the stage for the formation of the South African Apartheid regime, with the white minority having both the political and economic rights and the black majority being excluded from both (Acemoglu & Robinson 2013: 265).

An abbreviated evolution of ANC's syncretic posture on the land question moves from original demands for free (adult male) participation in land market

[11] See recent evidence for Nelson Madela's membership of the South African Communist Party, which would seem to lend substance to the National Party's position that the ANC was a communist front organization (Ellis 2013: 21–23; and Filatova and Davidson 2013). The crucial issue is not so much whether Mandela lied at his Rivonia trial about his membership - does the mouse speak truth to the cat?- but whether the ANC has, and is, misleading people regarding its commitment to liberalism and/ or Stalinism. See Freeman and Flanagan 2012; Malan (2014) on the editing of *Long Walk to Freedom*.; and Myburgh 2016). Has the influence of the communist prioritisation of class served as a barrier to racial nationalism?

(SAANC 1916) to the assertion that Africans 'as sons of the soil' (SANNC 1923: 279) have the right to unrestricted ownership of land, and the demand for 'the right to equal share in all the material resources of the country .... [and] a fair redistribution of the land as a prerequisite for a just settlement of the land problem', (ANC 1943: 218) then to the Freedom Charter's 1955 call for the land to be 'shared among those who work it'[12]. The idea of restitution and redistribution was underlined at the exiled ANC's first National Consultative Conference, Morogoro, Tanzania, in 1969. Morogoro's revolutionary declaration reasserted 'the right of the African people as the indigenous owners of the country', and clarified the analysis:

> The bulk of the land in our country is in the hands of land barons, absentee landlords, big companies and state capitalist enterprises. The land must be taken away from exclusively European control and from these groupings and divided among the small farmers, peasants and landless of all races who do not exploit the labour of others (ANC 1969)[13].

The legacy of dispossession is also a matter of feeling and propinquity, invariably subject to the messiness of partiality.

The trauma of colonialism is often deflected into political appeals to the immediacy of lived experience whereby 'what is often called the black soul is a white man's artifact' (Fanon 1986: 6). This invites the accusation of

[12] According to Ruth Hall, the influence of the Communist Party on the Freedom Charter 'transformed the specification of the land question from one of protecting right in private property, tenancy or communal land, as the SANNC had defined it in 1916, into an ambiguous vision of land for workers and tenants' (2015: 131).

[13] Hall further argues that Morogoro 'rejected the vision of 'modernisation' as meaning only the promotion of a capitalist farming class, and called instead for the wholesale restructuring of social and property relations' (2015:132). Alternatively, one could choose to highlight the following: 'The white people who now monopolise the land have made South Africa their home and are historically part of the South African population and as such entitled to land' (ANC 1969).

picking the scab of 'pre-experiential nostalgia' (Forbes 2005: 85)[14]. In turn, the kind of levelling out of modalities of oppression and resistance in the name of universality elides the fact that feelings and ideals shape the relationship with the past. As Zimbabwean Yvonne Vera writes:

> There is a severe moment one wishes to retreat from because the time before, in its not-knowing, its not tragedy, is preferable and consoling, and good. And what is good becomes whatever is calming, what restores like a torn membrane the time before (2000: 148).

In this dialectic of appropriation and expropriation the rupture of a form of life, its subsumption and distortion, the domination and the humiliation, the shattering of institutions of social practice that govern intersubjective behaviour and the language of communication – all tempt desire for cleansing overturning and rejuvenation in the purification mode of nostalgic retrenchment: 'I want to find something which belonged to me' (Vera 36). The past is never dead, it is not even past (see Sobukwe 1959). Is independence always working though 'a sovereignty whose essence is always colonial' (Derrida 1998: 39 - 40) destined to end in frustration?

The sense of grievance and modality of resistance secreted by an antagonistically structured social whole is not the same in the post-colony as it is in the metropole (see Mbembe 2002: 241). For example, consider the following interpretation of the 1913 Land Act that locates it within the context of economic development:

> As the agricultural economy developed, the rigid tribal institutions started to give way .... This new economic dynamism, not surprisingly, did not please the traditional chiefs, who, in a pattern that is by now

[14] Countering the idea of the Africans as the majority national group and the falsification of the history of the country in the claim that they are the 'indigenous owners of the land', Neville Alexander elaborates: 'If this refers only to people descended from Bantu-speaking tribes, it is patent nonsense, for it is well known that the Khoi- and the San-speaking people inhabited Southern Africa even before Bantu-speaking people appeared there. Not that this is of any significance in itself, but it makes nonsense of the idea of "ownership" by "Bantu-speaking Africans"' (No Sizwe 1979: 101 - 102).

> familiar to us, saw this as eroding their wealth and power .... Chiefs also resisted improvements made on the lands, such as the digging of irrigation ditches or the building of fences. They recognized that these improvements were just a prelude to individual property rights to the land, the beginning of the end ... [but] their resistance would not be enough to stop the new economic dynamism of South Africa (Acemoglu & Robinson 2013: 262 - 263).

Unlike Mandela's interpretation, here the traditional leaders are cast as impediments to economic development. This is more than a modulation of analysis or a difference of stress; it strikes at the heart of the understanding of the colonial situation. It reveals a fracture hidden beneath consensus regarding the Land Act:

> After 1913 vast numbers of Africans were evicted from their lands, which were taken over by whites, and crowded into the Homelands, which were too small for them to earn an independent living from (Ibid. 267).

Indeed, the iteration of the central grievance – that the Land Act, and not colonial conquest, was responsible for the lands being taken over by whites – covers over divergence of interpretation. Thus, an economic historian can remark of South African GDP relative to other countries: 'the remarkable long-run deterioration in South Africa's relative performance, from one of the best economies in the first period [1913-1950] to one of the worst in the last [1973-1994]' (Feinstein 2005: 5). While this may be true, what is it to the victims of expropriation?

What to do when the imperative of economic growth intersects 'in South Africa with a post-Apartheid expectation of a democratizing and redistributive state' (Brown 2015: 20)?[15] With the paint of the post-apartheid institutional superstructure barely dry, is it the patience and resistant good will of South Africans that keeps the whole thing together? Does basic civility,

[15] See the account of the 'fundamentally progressive nature' of Zimbabwe's land occupation movement as resistance to, and consequence of, neoliberalism and the dominance of the market-driven land reform (Moyo & Yeros 2005: 188).

strained and wracked by the Golgotha of history, form the foundation in a compartmentalised society (see Saul 1994: 196)?

Or is this feeling of reciprocal tolerance a comforting projection of overflowing good intentions, the inveterate afterglow of 'the cloud cuckoo land inhabited by much of white South Africa' (Anonymous 2017)? A rummaging through lost time for a memento of the afterglow of 1994, when '"[h]uman beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine" (Orwell 2015: 4)? Was that reality or illusion? What produces this perception and, more importantly, its object? Justice Pius Langa explains:

> Many cannot forgive and we cannot fault them for that. There is no right way to deal with the immense violation that was apartheid. But, as a society, we must keep alive the hope that we can move beyond our past. That requires both a remembering and a forgetting. We must remember what it is that brought us here. But at the same time we must forget the hate and anger that fuelled some of our activities if we are to avoid returning to the same cycle of violence and oppression (Langa 2006: 358 - 359[16].

Is good will spontaneous or produced, autonomous or coerced? Is it part of the problem or the solution? Is its endorsement descriptive or prescriptive? Is it possible to definitively disentangle these supposed alternatives: 'of half ripe reconciliation/ hanging from its tree' (Mpe 2008: 153)? Witness Margaret

[16] Contrast this with: 'This constitutional commitment to recognising and incorporating the historically oppressed and marginalised through a programme of social justice, has provided a discursive and structural opportunity for the hegemony of both social justice-talk and the social justice civil society sector. "Social justice" – grounded in the foundational law of the "new South Africa" (a transformative constitution), wrapped around the *lingua franca* of "post-apartheid" politics (human rights), and advanced by an epistemic community made up of public interest litigation organisations, legal advocacy organisations, cause lawyers, think tanks, state officials, and charity organisations (the social justice sector) – has, as a result, become the master frame for imagining emancipatory politics in the "new" South Africa' (Madlingozi 2017: 128). See Meierhenrich (2008) on the stubborn faith of South Africans in the idea of lawfulness.

Madlana recounting the death of her 12-year old son at the hands of white security police:

> I would like to apologise before God ... if ever I was to be employed, I was going to poison the white man's children. The way they killed my son hitting him against a rock, and we found him with a swollen head. They killed him in a tragic manner, and I don't think I will ever forgive in this case, especially to these police who were involved, and who were there .... We were taken as dogs, baboons and all such things. These dogs and baboons which work for them, which bath their children, cook for their children, however, they are still content to kill them (TRC 1998 380)[17].

What of that 'rare artesian hatred' (Achebe 1966: 3) that fractures the fantasy of a rainbow interpretive community? 'Maybe freedom lies in hating' (Ellison 1976: 13).

## Justice

> We are going to be distrusted for a long time
> (Jaspers 2000: 10).

The critical issue is not merely the elusiveness of egalitarian emancipation but rather the possibility that its liberal form may well come to be seen as the primary obstacle to socio-economic liberation:

> Firstly, white liberal academics and humanitarian activists considered South Africa to have been decolonised and as such, achieved some measure of legitimate statehood. They thus narrowed the injustice frame to the egregious denial of recognition of the human rights of

[17] 'It is always the same concern: to see to it that the nation survives its discords, that the traumatisms give way to the work of mourning, and the Nation-State not be overcome by paralysis. But even where it could be justified, this "ecological" imperative of social and political health has nothing to do with "forgiveness", which when spoken of in these terms is taken far too lightly. Forgiveness does not, it should never amount to a therapy of reconciliation' (Derrida 2001: 41).

> Africans, the failure to both fully integrate them into the Union and grant them some access to societal resources. Secondly, the dominant strand of African elites was impelled to elaborate a reactive praxis of emancipation whose main task was to counter colonialist assertions that the natives could not be granted citizenship rights and full belonging because the natives had yet to reach the stage of maturity and civilisation required to participate in South Africa properly. It is this reactive praxis that reduced the quest for emancipation to a quest for a constitution that will not so much decolonise the state and society, but will rather transform them. At the heart of this emancipatory quest were politics of social justice *contra* liberation (Madlingozi 2017: 131)[18].

Is agreement with the Freedom Charter's 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people' the basis of national homogeneity? Can interpretation of South Africa's past form a shared symbolic consciousness; homogeneity as substantive equality grounded in agreement regarding antipathy to the systemic pulverization of individual lives? What if that pulverization is seen to persist even as the value of the individual is touted above all else? What, then, of the "infrastructural possibility of identity and identification"' (Chandler 2014: 69)?

As wrongs that have gone unredressed congeal about unfolding injustice, the indictment against the founding fathers reads as follows:

> These 'New Africans' were seized with a 'civil imaginary' in that they held on to the promise that conversion into Christianity and attainment of Western education would lead to human recognition, extension of

[18] 'It is our considered view that the political change-over in 1994, did not bring true liberation. It was a bluff which continues to subject black people to economic and social apartheid. This economic apartheid must end now. The demand for land and jobs now is the demand to end apartheid because it is now evident that apartheid did not end in 1994. We are not part of the CODESA compromises, which only focused on taking over political power without the control of the economy. We are a generation that is fighting for true economic emancipation NOW!' (EFF 2019)

> civil rights and their integration into the South African polity as British subjects. African elites–mainly lawyers and *petit-bourgeoisie* - that established the South African Native National Congress (later the ANC) were self-avowed New Africans who feared that the abyssal societal structure of the Union held the possibility of them being forever banished to the 'other side' and reduced to the ranks of uneducated and 'uncivilised' Africans. Over and over again, ANC spokesmen asserted that they are as mature and civilised as any [white] South Africans and thus they are deserving of recognition, incorporation and equal opportunities in the Union. The ANC accepted the sovereignty and legitimacy of the settler-created state. Its demand for franchise was, therefore, a political demand for the recognition of the humanity and rights of Africans; a process that, if successful, will eventually lead to their incorporation and full participation in the Union. This position was slightly modified in the ANC co-sponsored Freedom Charter of 1955. Although the long-standing ANC policy of not contesting the legitimacy of the settler-created state and of not demanding the restoration of subjugated indigenous sovereignties and the return of dispossessed land remained, the on equality and fair distribution of resources. As is clear, the predominant character of the ANC's vision of emancipation was that of justice-in-society, albeit a transforming South African society (Madlingozi 2017: 131).

According to this argument, the founders and their heirs have a faulty analysis of South Africa: 'the democratisation paradigm triumphed over the decolonisation paradigm' (135). The alternative is the destruction of white supremacy and the settler state 'through the restoration of the sovereignties of subjugated kingdoms and the return of dispossessed land' (132). The 'fetishisation of human rights, deification of the Constitution, and veneration of civil society' entrenches 'teleological whiteness' (129). All power remains with Western discourse against the 'mythical language of a people seeking deeply for their dispossessed Africanness and their land' (Mngxitama 2013). Accommodate the landless without weakening the economy, or, economic growth as the continuation and intensification of colonial policies. How can the consequence ever attack the ground on which its stands? True, a consequence can't, but a person can and that is the elephant in the room.

Will rejecting the graft of 'that most insidious beat of Western

modernity and colonialism, *viz.* the politics of identity' (Madlingozi 2017: 134) undo 'the deconstruction of a sovereign African and his reconstruction as a colonial subject' (Ngũgĩ 2009: 16)? The proffered antidote to 'an inferiority complex and the absence of any hope for the future' (Fanon 1965: 128) mobilises the jargon authenticity as the gold standard of political efficacy: 'a sort of nostalgia, a sort of ancestral memory' (Orwell 1973: 81). Disappointment seeks refuge in a new form of the oldest utopianism[19]. The critique of the retreat to culture or ethnos is well worn (see Fanon 1967: 42 - 43). But as George Orwell noted, 'what is resistance without the activation of tradition? Why should one feel it to be intolerable unless one had some kind of ancestral memory that once things had been different?' (Orwell 1973: 51).

What if resistance to the nativist jargon of authenticity – 'theoretical whip in hand' (Parry 2004: 40) – functioned to consolidate the pathological system? What if the hasty disparagement of the ad hoc nature of this retrieval of homogeneity is itself a trap? Is not the call for the restoration of subjugated indigenous sovereignties, return of dispossessed land, and equality and fair distribution of resources a call to ground democracy in actual conditions? As Chantal Mouffe explains:

> The liberal conception of equality postulates that every person is, as a person, automatically equal to every other person. The democratic conception, however, requires the possibility of distinguishing who belongs to the demos and who is exterior to it; for that reason, it cannot exist without the necessary correlative of inequality. Despite liberal claims, a democracy of mankind, if it was ever likely, would be a pure abstraction, because equality can exist only though its specific meanings in particular spheres – as political equality, economic equality, and so forth. But those specific equalities will always entail, as their very condition of possibility, some form of inequality. This is why he [Carl Schmitt] concludes that an absolute human equality would be a practically meaningless, indifferent equality …. It is through their belonging to the demos that democratic citizens are granted equal

[19] 'Remember our might. Remember the resistance we showed to the white man when he first arrived, of the contempt we felt for those who had tried to change our lives. The taste of pride will be like honey on our lips' (Vera 1993: 71).

> rights, not because they participate in the abstract idea of humanity (1999: 41 - 42).

The desire for homogeneity (traditional sovereignty) acknowledges the contradiction between liberal equality and democratic equality and posits an alternative source of legitimacy. Perceiving that the principle of the general equality of mankind undermines the right of the people to substantial equality, another restorative source of credibility is proposed. If this proposition falls into the trap of utopian nostalgia, it is worth remarking that its criticism falls into the trap of colonialist complacency[20].

When universality hollows out the demand of the particular to be included in universality with the claim that you (particular) already are included, how can one not resist? Bur how will a restored legitimacy avoid being merely political itself, replicating the disease it was attempting to cure? And how can one avoid having resistance to the conflation of liberal equality and democracy recast as resistance to universality? The reversion to subjugated sovereignties embodied in the return of dispossessed land aims to address 'odium of colonialism' by utilising 'the odium of appropriation' (Schmitt 1953: 346). The restorative repetition aims not so much at retreating to an original condition as at the reinvigoration of lawfulness and justice: i fight with an octopus over an octopus hole' (Césaire 2017: 655). Alternatively, are we to embrace things as they are and accept being posessed by 'no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest .... the icy water of egotistical calculation' (Marx & Engels 1988: 82)? Are we condemned always to work within the terms of the oppressor? And who is the 'we' here?

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[20] It is often assumed that 'the resistance to change is because of information deficit, or lack of adequate stake, which can be corrected by getting the population to "participate". The possibility that after full "participation", the traditional may be preferred by the people over the "modern" is not entertained' (Rajagopal 2002:147).

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Shane Moran
English Studies
Fort Hare University
SMoran@ufh.ac.za