Chapter 14: Marching with the Shirtless and the Barefoot: Justice, Peace, and the Call for Revolutionary Reciprocity

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Abstract

GMK2023 celebrated, and reflected on the work, as well as the commemoration of the life, work and legacies of Gandhi, Mandela and King. This paper draws on some of their wisdom. This is done in a moment of what in Christianity we call a Kairos moment. It is a moment of collective discernment, decision, and commitment, to revolutionary peace, justice and nonviolent action. Since our conference is part of an unfolding system of interconnected historical events, steered by a selfless dedication to a revolution of values, it is important to highlight similar historical events of which we form part of, e.g. the responses to the Tulsa race massacre of 2021; the University of Western Cape students' 'walk-off' from campus, in 1973; Martin Luther King's 1976 'Beyond Vietnam speech; DuBois's 'politics of honesty, integrity, decency, courage and virtue'; Gandhi's call for mass nonviolent resistance to race laws, on 11 September 1906; and the spirit of nonviolence as passed on by Henry Highland Garnet, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr, Albert john Luthuli, and Nelson Mandela; and the formation and activation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in South Africa, in the wake of the Soweto 1976 student uprising, and as demonstration of the spiritual power of nonviolent revolution. In South Africa, we saw and experienced the world of apartheid as those who suffered, rose up in resistance, and yet, did this through lived lives of self-sacrifice and reciprocity. In the midst of current South Africa, being wrecked by racism, re-invited colonialism, re-embraced, and re-invented ethnic nationalisms, we make a renewed call to peace and justice through nonviolent action, as seminal to what we may now call, our ongoing *Ubuntu* struggle.

Keywords: Peace, justice, nonviolent mobilisation and action, interconnected historical events, self-sacrifice, revolution of values, *Ubuntu* struggle

I

For this closing occasion, I propose that we be guided by some words from the vast treasure of wisdom in the legacies of the persons whose life and work we have been celebrating and reflecting on this past week. Our commemoration of the life, work, and legacies of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela comes at an unprecedented moment in history, a moment when geo-economically and geo-politically the tectonic plates are shifting. All the known paradigms have lost their hold.

From the climate emergency to the political crises that seem to engulf almost every country, to the present phase of the never-ending wars that brought us to the brink of the renewed and entirely possible threat of nuclear destruction, the stakes have never been higher. For all humankind, it is once again a moment of discernment, decision, and commitment, what the Christian Scriptures call a Kairos moment, because simultaneously there remains an indestructible spirit of resistance, a revolutionary consciousness, an irrepressible longing for justice and freedom, too deeply implanted in the human heart to be ignored, denied, or destroyed.

All week long, our discussions have centered on this theme: 'Peace and Justice for all – Mobilising for Nonviolent Change'. We talk about this not as dreamers with our heads in the clouds, or as desperadoes who know that in the face of overwhelming, seemingly unstoppable violence in the world, we have already lost. We came together here, because we understand that amidst the chaos and upheaval in our world, this is such a Kairos moment. We are not simply reminiscing; we are still mobilizing for nonviolent change, for peace and justice for all God's children. We are here not because we are wishful. We are here because we seek to be faithful.

At this moment, we are not only commemorating the event that became such a moment of truth for Mahatma Gandhi. We are looking back at interconnected events, different moments but all inextricably part of the same historical wave of resistance, the same historical claim on freedom, and the consequences of that resistance.

Just over one hundred years ago, the Tulsa, Oklahoma massacre of 1921, hundreds of Black people murdered by white mobs[1]; the very place that

[1] The fact that the lawsuit for reparations from the last few survivors of the massacre has been dismissed in favour of the Chamber of Commerce is a sign of the dire situation for those striving for justice in the United States. According to an attorney for the Chamber, 'The massacre was horrible, but the nuisance it

recall the Trail of Tears for Native Americans[2]. Just over 80 years ago we saw the Salt March in India, that great historical turning point that showed not only the people of India and her oppressors, the British, the awesome power of soul force, but became the inspiration for nonviolent struggle everywhere. It is the 60th anniversary of the Great March on Washington, but also the 60th anniversary of the even greater Children's March in Birmingham Alabama. It is 60 years ago that Martin Luther King Jr., wrote that ringing testimony to the indisputable logic of the rightness, the righteousness, and the power of nonviolent resistance contained in that immortal *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, that same jail where he sat, alone, thinking that he, and the cause for freedom had been utterly abandoned.

King was wrong, however, because that same jail would be filled with wave after wave of children, all of them committed to the cause, all of them standing firm, all of them not just suffering, but singing their way into history: *Won't let nobody turn me around!* The September of that same year saw the bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church; four little girls blown to smithereens. The bombing did not wipe out the victories of that year in Birmingham and Washington, DC, but it was a reminder of the terror that is always a consequence of our daring to demand our freedom.

For South Africa, this year is the 60th anniversary of the start of the Rivonia Trial, and the beginning of the legend that Nelson Mandela would become. It is 50 years since the students at the University of the Western Cape rose up in resistance for the first time in 1973. The crowd in that 'Walk-Off' from that campus was not great in number, but the significance was huge. The students walked off, not just in rejection of the apartheid character of that 'For Coloureds Only' institution, they walked off in solidarity with striking workers. In so doing, they showed that they understood that 'student politics' not embedded in community struggles in their turn embedded in national struggles for freedom, was meaningless.

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caused was not ongoing'. The massacre, here trivialised to 'a nuisance' might not be ongoing, but the injustice certainly is. See Associated Press, July, 9 2023; npr.org/2023/07/091186690457/Tulsa-massacre-lawsuit#:-:text

[2] The 'Trail of Tears' refers to the ethnic cleansing of forced displacement of approximately 60,000 persons of 'The Five Civilised Tribes' between 1830 and 1850 by the U.S. government. See history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears

> It was, moreover, a resounding triumph for Black Consciousness and its power in transforming the minds and lives of South Africa's youth. It signified both the birth of a new era of struggle politics as well as a new surge in revolutionary youth leadership in the struggle. It was also in that year that Black Consciousness poet/philosopher Adam Small cautioned us that our protest should never be 'a form of begging'. (Small 1975: 11 - 16). To the young people of that era, Soweto came as no surprise, and neither was the astounding success of the United Democratic Front, established forty years ago, in 1983.

I mention all this because it helps to emphasize a number of crucial realities. It is a necessary response to what I call the politics of 'unremembering' – a deliberate, actively political process of manipulating, moulding, and if necessary, erasing from history facts, events, and perspectives that do not conform to the dominant narrative justifying patterns of hegemony (Boesak 2005: 103 - 131).

It signifies the continuity of struggle as well as the endurance of the spirituality of struggle. It is an intuitive response to Martin Luther King's 'inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny', as it is a response to Steve Biko's call for 'selfless revolutionaries' (Biko 2017: 241). It is that understanding by a younger generation that that famous 'handing over' of the baton is not a matter of historical determination. Neither is it a hereditary right. It is a privilege and an obligation earned not by standing on the side lines, or cheering from the spectator stands. It is earned by joining the race at one's appointed time, being there on the track, with outstretched hand ready to accept the baton from the one in front, who has already run their part of the race. That is how the baton never falls to the ground, and that is how we cross the finish line.

It is, I think, entirely fair to conclude: without Gandhi, no soul-power driven mass movements of nonviolent militancy; without the children, no March on Washington, no Voting Rights Act, and no Civil Rights Act. Without the children of Soweto, no UDF, no free Mandela, no defeat for formal apartheid.

II

That is the revolutionary reciprocity so splendidly captured in the words of Martin King, taken from that unforgettable 'Beyond Vietnam' speech in The Riverside Church in 1967, precisely one year before his murder.

> These are revolutionary times. All over the globe [people] are revolting against all systems of exploitation and oppression, and out of the womb of a frail world, new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up as never before. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. We … must support these revolutions (King 1967).

Now, as then, these are revolutionary times. Now, as then, these are global struggles. Now, as then, masses of people, now led by the youth in just about every instance, are rising up against systems of oppression and exploitation. Now, as then, the resistance is being led by the poor and the oppressed, the downtrodden and the disregarded; those of 'unimpressive proportions', says Latin American Liberation theologian José Miguez Bonino, those left behind by the oppressive forces and the revolutionary forces both (Bonino 1983: 90). They are the 'shirtless and the barefoot', the disempowered, the disinherited and the dispossessed.

These are the people mobilised and mobilising for justice and peace. They are those who, in ever-growing numbers, and ever-increasing power, are demanding freedom and justice. They are those whose protest is not a form of begging. If the new world that is emerging, emerges only at the behest of the rich and powerful, and not as a response to the hopes, demands and sacrifices of the poor, the shirtless, and the bare feet masses, it is not a new world at all.

When I read Martin Luther King Jr. on revolution, I hear him in two ways. **First, King speaks of revolution similarly to Iranian scholar Hamid Dabashi** (2012: 5,6), in terms of an 'unfolding' continuation of struggle. Dabashi urges us not to think of 'revolution' in the conventional sense, of, the French, or Russian revolutions – one historic, cataclysmic, violent moment, in which one class overthrows another. We must think of revolution, Dabashi argues, as more of an unfolding history of struggle, not confined to a specific moment in history, but with the revolutionary consciousness, the revolutionary expectancy, and the revolutionary readiness of the people. At the heart of it and in the frontlines, is not a revolutionary vanguard elite, but the people.

It is a revolutionary awareness that retains, nurtures, and re-ignites the fires of resistance that have always sustained a people in struggles for freedom and justice. It is an awareness of the continuity of struggle throughout a history of resistance, a revolution sometimes suppressed, sometimes diverted, but never really de-focused, what Dabashi calls '[temporarily] delayed defiance … the unfolding of an open-ended revolt' (Dabashi 2012: 230). Never subdued, and

fed by what Black theologian Dwight Hopkins called 'the interpretive cunning of the poor', it remains an open-ended work of the people; creating new ways to face the ever-changing challenges multi-faceted oppression always brings.

That connects with the second way in which I read King: **a revolution is not real, or complete, if it is not a 'revolution of values'.** It means, among other things, that when we speak of power, we have something totally different in mind than the 'power over others' model of our oppressors, who know only the power to dominate, demean, exploit, and destroy. Our understanding of power is fundamentally different from the power exercised by a criminal, racist, oppressive regime. I have in mind power in the way that M.M. Thomas of India taught us. He spoke of the revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s in the Third World as 'the demand of the people for power as the bearer of dignity and for significant and responsible participation in society and social history'. That is, Thomas believed, that gave the people 'a new sense of dignity and historical mission' (Thomas & McCaughey 1951: 19).

That was what we were after in the struggles led by the United Democratic Front, a truly people's movement if ever there was one, and that was what the country would see and come to believe in. That is what Gandhi called 'soul force'. It was a dynamic completely alien to the stunted, ideologically-captured imagination of the apartheid state, and perhaps one of the reasons that made it so hard to deal with us. Their brutal power, steeped in white supremacy and capitalist greed, could only conceive of violence. The dynamic that would drive the politics of the UDF was power not for domination, but for the fearless assertion and determined preservation of the dignity of the people so that their agency for the shaping of their own history would be awakened and owned.

It was what that giant among intellectuals and activists in the United States, W.E.B. DuBois, would call 'the politics of honesty, integrity, decency, courage and virtue' (DuBois 1957: 157). The politics that would stand up to, and resist the politics of vulgarity, of corruption, mendacity, and brutality.

'Our only hope', Martin Luther King said in that same speech, 'is to re-capture the revolutionary spirit and go out unto a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism' (King 1967).

III

This is the politics Mahatma Gandhi had in mind as he embraced the struggle for justice, equity, and dignity. On September 11 1906, thirteen years after that

kairotic, revelatory moment on a train station, Mahatma Gandhi spoke at a mass meeting in Johannesburg. There he called for mass nonviolent resistance to defy the new racially discriminatory laws of the Transvaal Boer Republic seeking to deprive Indians of their few remaining citizenship rights. Gandhi explained that the call for sustained nonviolent action, boycotts, marches, and other forms of protest actions was his idea, and that he had not taken it lightly. He was well aware of the risks.

> The step was grave, and unavoidable. In doing so, they did not hold a threat, but showed that the time for action – over and above making speeches – had arrived … It is quite possible that some of those who pledge ourselves may weaken at the very first trial [for] we have to remain hungry, and suffer from extreme heat and cold. Hard labour is likely to be imposed upon us in prison. We may even be flogged by the warders. [But] join me in pledging ourselves, knowing full well that we have to suffer things like these … (Gandhi, in Meer 1995: 295 - 296).

The moment was indeed grave, and so were the risks; there were no guarantees of victory, but the time for talk and making brave speeches was over. The time had come to make hard choices. The 'threat' Gandhi identified was not a threat of violence from the side of the revolution, but the threat which standing up for freedom always represents to the oppressor classes in any oppressive society. Gandhi knew that the choice to claim freedom would inevitably call forth waves of violence, unleashed with a ferocity that only the truly fear-filled can muster. Gandhi understood that not everyone would be ready to make those choices, and that even 'some of those who pledged' themselves would weaken 'at the first trial …'. He was honest about the dangers ahead, about the inevitability of the oppressor's grim determination not to give up power without a demand from the oppressed. Henry Highland Garnet, that fiery anti-slavery Black preacher said so in 1843 (Garnet, in Mullane 1993: 115-121). Frederick Douglass repeated it in 1857 (Douglass 1857). Gandhi knew it and said so in 1906. That wisdom was passed on by Martin Luther King Jr., Albert John Luthuli, and Nelson Mandela.

My generation listened and took heed when it was our turn to take to the streets in the final onslaught against official apartheid. The UDF was formed while the embers of the fires that was 1976 were still glowing everywhere and turned the country into a furnace of ungovernability the likes of which we had not seen before. By 1985, the first state of emergency was declared; by 1987 a

second. During that time 40,000 persons were held in detention without trial, 40% children under 18, 10,000 of them women. Our people were killed by the hundreds. Funeral after funeral marked the days of our lives, including the funeral of 27 persons, massacred in one day in Langa township outside Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape on March 21 1985 marching to commemorate the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960. Archbishop Tutu and I were the preachers that day. The threat to racist oppression in our march to freedom would not be tolerated.

Even though our innocence was permanently shattered in 1976, when in the massacre of the children we saw how far the apartheid regime was willing to go in order to preserve white supremacy, we could not really prepare the youth – 15, 16, 17 years old but in the frontlines of the struggle, for what was coming. But still, they all took the pledge at the launch of the UDF that 20th of August in Mitchell's Plain, firmly standing in the tradition Mahatma Gandhi recalled in 1906, 'knowing full well that we would have to suffer these things'. Not for the sake of *what*, but for the sake of *whom*. Not for some vague ideological slogan, but for the sake of life for the coming generations. It was the sacrifice of the living for the sake of the freedom of the yet unborn, and for what Biko would pronounce as the 'greatest gift' to bestow upon the world, namely 'a human face' (Biko 2017: 108).

IV

Recalling the tradition of nonviolence espoused by especially Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and the ANC of Albert Luthuli, we chose nonviolent militancy as a central strategy. The UDF would take nonviolent militancy to such high levels and simultaneously evoke levels of aggression, oppressive violence, and sheer terror from the state so intense that by the end of the 1980s would dwarf the violence unleashed upon the children in 1976. The debate about violence and nonviolence, the efficacy, practicality and morality of each, never far from our minds, was re-ignited, and it would remain a vexed and complex issue. Once again our people, in another generation, were placed before life and death choices.

When Martin King spoke of the spiritual power of nonviolence, we recalled Chief Albert Luthuli who reminded us of the seductive power of violence. Luthuli warned that if we, under pressure of the violence and intransigence of the oppressor, chose the road to violence, we would in process face the risk of becoming more like the oppressor than we had wanted to be or

could foresee. He was right. Nothing would make that destructive becoming clearer than our South African version of white Americans' lynching – the necklace. We remembered then that Luthuli told us that we should not succumb to the oppressor's invitation to join the oppressor's desperation. For him violence was a powerful seduction whose lure we should resist as much as humanly possible. He prayed that through all the temptations our soul would remain intact. So he pleaded with us not to give up the militant, nonviolent struggle.

Even when under severe pressure from his own movement, and from no less a charismatic, courageous and brave leader of the younger generation, Nelson Mandela, Luthuli nonetheless insisted that the oppressor's incessant violence was 'vainglorious', and that our imitating the oppressor would be equally vainglorious. That should not be the way for us. And so, leaning upon the wisdom of Albert Luthuli, it was possible for a new generation, after a decade of quiet despair, even while respectfully understanding the choices Nelson Mandela and his generation thought they had to make in their time, to return to those methods in the 1970s and 1980s, and build a movement of militant, nonviolent resistance that would ultimately break apartheid's back.

Never losing sight of the agonizing circumstances that forced our elders to make that decision, and never losing our respect for them and their reasons for making those decisions, we never passed judgment. Like Luthuli, we understood that the stakes were high, and the pressures almost unbearable. Nonetheless, we would define and defend our own choice for nonviolent militancy.

I readily concede that this view is, and has always been, a point of serious contestation among those engaged in struggles for freedom. As we meet here, African Americans are being slaughtered by police, security forces, and vigilantes in a veritable homicidal frenzy as if a new, brazen, and terrorizing display of their power and impunity has suddenly become a new necessity. And so it has, as it always is for any empire crumbling under the weight of its own violence, hubris, and God's judgment. There too, the debate has been re-ignited. In all these situations, we have found, one must respectfully weigh at least four questions: of morality, inevitability, positivity, and responsibility. Violence from the side of the oppressed is always counter-violence. As we have learned from Albert Luthuli, the moral question is not: why the violence from the oppressed? It is, rather, this: who is responsible for the causes of the violence, and who is it that made nonviolent change impossible? 'It was only when all else failed', Mandela reminded the court at his trial, 'when all channels of peaceful protest were barred to us, that the decision was taken to embark on

violent forms of political struggle …. We did so not because we desired such a course, but solely because the government had left us with no other choice' (Mandela 1963).

Albert Luthuli, in remaining steadfast in his own choice for militant, nonviolent resistance, nonetheless spoke of Mandela and the others as embodying 'the highest morality and ethics'. The apartheid regime and its beneficiaries 'have put the highest morality and ethics in the liberation struggle in a prison where it might not survive' (Couper 172ff). Luthuli was not referring to the decision by Mandela and the ANC to ultimately turn to violence, I think. He was referring to those high and impeccable moral standards, embodied by Mandela and the others, in fact by the oppressed people of South Africa as a whole for so long. That morality that, against all odds and in the face of the severest provocations has kept the struggle nonviolent for so long, that has honoured the noblest goals of the struggle for decades in the face of the immorality of unspeakable oppression. It was those high moral standards, clung to so tenaciously, which were now punished with imprisonment, where they 'might not survive'. And if those did not survive, where would South Africa go then?

Most importantly, moreover, this is a question that can only be asked by the oppressed themselves. Those who drive, maintain, and benefit from oppression, dare not ask this question. It simultaneously answers the 'inevitability' question. Over and over, Martin Luther King Jr. reminded Americans of the words of John F. Kennedy, 'Those who make peaceful revolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable' (Kennedy 1962).

So in making our choices in this regard, we made no judgement; rather we allowed the experiences of these freedom fighters to haunt our minds. This would remain a seriously contested issue, however, and not everyone would be persuaded. Nonetheless, we believed our choice to fundamentally be the right one.

Violence, I argued, and will continue to argue, has an awesome irreversibility. It destroys the chances of genuine peace and reconciliation in the irremediable destruction of the other. It casts the other in the mould of an unchangeable, incontrovertible enemy. It systematizes as well as depersonalizes the other as the eternal enemy. After the violent blow is struck, there are no more options left and the last word is already drowned in blood. Violence takes on a life of its own, feeds on human emotions far stronger than we realize, releases a relentless, deadly dynamic we are first not prone, then not able, to stop. It sweeps reason and better judgement aside as in ritualistic helplessness

not acknowledgeable to ourselves we respond to the call of blood to blood. Lifting the sword destroys the soul. Nonviolence appeals to something deep and irrepressible within ourselves, to the truth we know about ourselves as well as the other, but too often deny: that in our creaturely, relational existence and our common humanity we are created to affirm, choose, and celebrate life rather than death.

Nonviolence affirms the humble acknowledgement of the possibility that we might be wrong, that the other may be redeemable. Nonviolent militancy does not deny the existence of evil, and neither does it try to trivialize it. It purposefully seeks to open possibilities for our creativity in resisting, confronting, and overcoming evil. It opens the way for the choosing of another path, to the ubuntufication of the other, because it longs for the affirmation of our humanity in the redeemed humanity of the other. Violence, in its irreversibility, is a reach too far for mortals such as us. Nonviolence acknowledges the existence of holy ground: such as taking the life of another. We dare not tread upon it (Boesak 2009; 109 - 113; Boesak 2021; 168 - 179).

The story of the prophet Elijah in the Hebrew Bible is sometimes, not without reason, overwhelmed by the one event that seems to mark his life, the slaughter of the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Elsewhere, I have written extensively on this episode. Here I will highlight just one point I think is crucial for us to consider.

Hebrew Bible scholar Mordechai Cogan writes, 'With the people's help, Elijah *personally* carried out the purge of the Baal prophets', not on the mountain itself but down at the wadi Kishon. The Wadi Kishon was a distance away. That means that Elijah had the Baal prophets corralled and had the people herd them down to the wadi. It was a very deliberate mobilisation. Cogan quotes the late-medieval Jewish philosopher Gersonides: 'The site was chosen 'so that the blood would not pollute the land, and on this account, it was spilled into the wadi that would carry it far off'', is Gersonides' commentary (Cogan 2001: 444 - 445). This is a point I invite us to ponder for a moment. Elijah and the people actually thought that the water in the wadi would wash the blood from both the ground, their hands, and their soul.

That, however, is an illusion, and we are witnessing it: from that same holy land where Palestinian blood is being spilled every day for the last 75 years, to yet another manifestation of the for-ever wars now engulfing Sudan; from the killing fields of the Congo to the blood-soaked steppes of Ukraine. Day by day, moment by bloody moment, come the lessons we refuse to learn. The most enduring myth about violence is not that it is controllable, but that it

is redemptive. The most sinful reality of violence is not that it begets violence, but that it is idolatrous. The tragic deceitfulness about violence is not that it is toxic, but that it is intoxicating. The most devastating truth about violence is not its horrors, but its delusions.

V

I draw your attention to one more quotation, and it is from Nelson Mandela, from 1994.

> The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning (Mandela 2010).

Mandela did know how true these words would become 10 years after his death and thirty years into the democracy he had invested so much in, and how much his own organisation would betray his wise counsel.

For there was a time in South Africa forty years ago, when faith communities and educational institutions, universities and high schools, lecturers and students, workers and the unemployed, people from all walks of life, across the artificial barriers of skin colour, race, class, culture, religion, and language. We saw the world of apartheid through the eyes of those who suffered, and we rose up in resistance. Our protest was relentless and purposeful, and not in any way, as Adam Small cautioned us, a form of begging. We faced tear gas, and dogs, and guns. We were imprisoned, beaten, and tortured. We lived lives of self-sacrifice. We lived in selfless, revolutionary reciprocity. We felt the pain of our people, and we shared their dreams of freedom. Through their eyes, we saw visions of justice and equity. We were not content with an unjust world; we knew we were not a people meant for oppression, and tyranny, and destruction. Mandela, in prison, could not see it; Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Luthuli, and Martin Luther King Jr., no longer with us, could not see it, but their spirit lived in us, lifted us up and vaulted us forward.

But that was before the days of euphoria and illusion. Before we told ourselves that a negotiated settlement signified the coming of the reign of God.

Before we decided that honouring our people's sacrifices was too much of a hindrance to the profitable deals made with the old white, apartheid, capitalist class. Before we were so mesmerised by the wizardry of Mammon and the intoxications of power that we forgot the subversive memories of struggle. That was before we began to use parliamentary privilege to disguise our crimes, before we left the battlefields of justice to hide ourselves in the draughty caves of kleptocracy, self-aggrandizement and instant gratification.

It is no wonder that we ended up where we are today, as a country, and as a people. We are a people severely diminished by politics without principles, leadership without vision, policies without commitment, and hence by failure after failure. We are drowning in corruption, and lies, and cover-ups. We are plagued by deceit and confounded by subterfuge. Our disastrous choices in economic policies have deepened the generational impoverishment of our people while creating new millionaires every second week it seems, making us the most unequal society in the world today.

Steve Biko's fear, expressed back in 1970, that if we only strive to get a black face in high office, and nothing fundamentally changes, especially our economic system, South Africa would exactly be 'like yesterday (Biko 2017: 169. That is the return of unfreedom, the return of submission to oppression and authoritarianism, which is enslavement. It is, by the same token, the ongoing impoverishment of the vast majority of our people, the ongoing colonisation of our land, to say nothing of the re-colonisation of our mind.

Where do we go from here? With our country wracked by revived racism, re-invited colonialism, re-embraced tribalisms of every sort, and re-invented ethnic nationalisms on the rampage? Our people have lost trust in just about every democratic institution we have. Even as we speak, Parliament is paralyzed by an inability, or unwillingness, or political carelessness beyond belief, to hold anyone to account, spitting on the sacrifices of our people and shaking respect for their hopes like so much dust from their patent leather shoes. Perhaps Nelson Mandela, when he addressed the Cosatu conference in 1993, had known, more than we understood and found out only in the years following, how much the ANC he had loved, worked and lived and sacrificed for, was not the ANC that returned from exile. Hence his words at that conference: 'If the ANC government ever does to you, what the apartheid government has done to you, then you must do to the ANC what you have done to the apartheid government'. These are the words this generation are now calling to mind, if not yet taking to heart.

On March 21 this year, I was asked by the youth of the Uniting

Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa to be a speaker at their virtual conference on 'The Plight of Our Democracy'. I was to speak on 'What Have We Lost?'

In a riveting two-hour session, I exchanged views with those young people on what I thought we had lost. We had lost, I said, an opportunity to let South Africa's oppressed people see and enjoy the fruits of their struggles. We had lost the opportunity to give young people confidence in the belief that they have a future worth investing in; that this is how we honour the sacrifices of their parents and grandparents. That it is not inevitable that such great hopes for the future, such legitimate expectations would be replaced by such deep anger, disappointment and disillusionment. We had lost the opportunity to show white South Africa what true, inclusive, non-racial, egalitarian democracy is all about, and in the process allow them to live with a peace they had never known, because apartheid, racism, white supremacy, and exploitation do not allow for peace of mind. That *Ubuntu* is not some empty, idle, African philosophical utopia, but lived reality with the ability to restore our humanity. But it calls for renewed struggle. Indeed, the true test of our devotion to freedom has just begun.

But does that mean that we have lost all? That we, with all that is going on, must abandon all hope, walk away from the struggle, turn our backs to the future, and leave life at the mercy of the powers of evil?
Once more Gandhi in 1906:

> The struggle will be prolonged, but provided that the entire community [bravely] stands the test, there can only be one end to the struggle, and that is victory (in Meer 1995: 295 - 296).

Once more Martin Luther King, in 1968:

> For when people get caught up with that which is right and they are willing to sacrifice for it, there is no stopping point short of victory (King, in West 2015: 265 - 276).

And from India, a new, younger voice. This is author and activist Arundathi Roy**:**

> We … have, each in our own way, laid siege to empire. We may not have stopped it in its tracks yet, but we have stripped it down. We have made it drop its mask. We have forced it into the open. It now stands

> before us on the world's stage in all its brutish, iniquitous nakedness … too ugly to behold its own reflection (Roy 2003).

She is right. It is not yet the end, but this is a victory we should celebrate. This is one more reason why giving up is not an option, one more reason why we join that march, one bold, faithful, hopeful step at a time. There is not reason for stopping, short of victory.

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