From the End of Slavery to the End of Apartheid: Toward a Radical Break in African History?[1]

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> The Third World today faces Europe like a colossal mass whose aim should be to try to resolve the problems to which Europe has not been able to find answers.
>
> But let us be clear: what matters is to stop talking about output, and intensification, and the rhythm of work.
>
> No, there is no question of a return to Nature. It is simply a very concrete question of not dragging men toward mutilation, of not imposing upon the brain rhythms which very quickly obliterate it and wreck it. The pretext of catching up must not be used to push man around, to tear him away from himself or from his privacy, to break and kill him.
>
> No, we do not want to catch up with anyone. What we want to do is to go forward all the time, night and day, in the company of Man, in the company of all men. The caravan should not be stretched out, for in that case each line will hardly see those who precede it; and men who no longer recognize each other meet less and less together, and talk to each other less and less (F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 314-15).

What is at Stake?

As apartheid is being dismantled in South Africa, hopes and expectations for a radical transformation have risen to the point where one of the inevitable questions is raised: will the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid produce different results from what happened in other African countries, from Ghana to Zimbabwe, through Algeria and Mozambique?[2] The changes which could happen in South Africa are so momentous that it would not be unreasonable to ask the kind of questions and carry out an examination that go beyond South African history to encompass the whole history of Africans and their role in the reproduction of the capitalist system as we know it today.

The lessons from comparable transitions in the past do not warrant great optimism. Indeed, some were quick to predict (too quickly?) that what was going to happen in South Africa in the next few years would make the Lancaster House Agreements which led to Zimbabwe's independence appear as much more radical, if not outright revolutionary (*Southern Africa Political and Economic Monthly*, Special Issue on CODESA, February 1992). Some, however, may counter that the conditions are so different today that it is difficult to predict what will happen in South Africa. Others still, especially economists, (Gelb, 1991) are discussing the transition by assuming that it can only be done by not saying anything which might frighten the owners of capital.[3] This latter approach, with few exceptions, has dominated the transition from colonial rule to post-colonial rule from Ghana to Zimbabwe. However, one may safely predict that apartheid as was known in South Africa is indeed going to be dismantled, but as it is being dismantled there (remember colonial rule), new structures of repression (neo-apartheid?), or a modernized version of its South African model, are being put in place on a global scale, and, presumably there is no certainty South Africa will escape this trend.[4]

In order to better understand what the stakes are it might be worth re-examining and comparing (from a structural perspective) the historical transitions from slavery and the one which is currently taking place in South Africa. In political terms, in assessing the

changes in Africa from slavery, through colonial rule, to the end of apartheid, the balance sheet might be seen by some as (ultimately) positive. However, in socio-economic terms, the picture is much gloomier as the owners of capital have always tended to recoup their losses. Political changes have operated as safety valves so that the tenets of the socio-economic system could remain in place. The crucial objective was to insure that the owners of capital continue to determine the parameters of their relationship to labor. From such a perspective, the history of that relationship could be seen as one of unending modernization in which the structural relations of exploitation have not changed, but their forms have. However, the value of the current transition in which one could say "Apartheid is dead, long live apartheid" affords the possibility of a critical re-examination of how historians have contributed to the reproduction of silences which were first generated by those who most profited from the system. Put in another way, what Atlantic slavery inaugurated was the beginning of an enslavement process to a socio-economic system which has increased and intensified its grip, even as the formal and visible aspects of that enslavement were transformed and became less visible. Compared to the times of Atlantic slavery, the situation has grown worse because enslavement has now entrapped those who are supposed to be in control of the process. The owners of capital have become enslaved to the cycles of accumulation and reproduction of capital in ways that the slave owners were not. The best empirical proof of this trend can be observed from the world-wide increased consciousness of the destructive capacity of the system, particularly evident among those who have been on the forefront of the environmental movement.

As Toni Morrison shows in *Beloved*, re-membering the dis-membered 60 million must be cultivated regardless of the violence/pain/silence because only such a "rememoring" can create the basis for eradicating the pain/fear/silence. History is supposed to be about memory, and how it connects the past, the present and the future. It is supposed to be on how and who organizes and arranges the order in which one connects all these different time periods, for whom, by whom and for which individual and collective objectives. History, therefore, cannot be reduced singly to any of the above, but the currently dominating capitalist system has sought to standardize the "hows" and "whos" of thinking about history. From its presumptive universality, capitalism, or more precisely, its wealthiest promoters, seem now on the verge of proclaiming the immortality of the system.

Nevertheless, behind the boasting, blustering and

gloating triumphalism of the system's caretakers there is concern that the collapse of actually existing state socialism has been so severe that it has turned the ground on which capitalism sits into quicksand. In other words, with the disappearance of their mortal antagonists, capitalists can finally begin to see that, now, they may well be their worst enemies. During previous transitions, the system could always reform itself by jettisoning the rotting parts: slavery, the slave trade, colonial rule and, more recently, apartheid. What is to be done when the rotting parts are gone, but the rotting continues to spread?

The similarity to the previous transitions lies in the fact that some—very few—of the beneficiaries of the system are willing to acknowledge that, even in their own terms of reference (cost/benefit analysis?) the maintenance of the system is too costly (Frum, 1994). This is the kind of conclusion which led to the end of the previous eras of capitalism. Once previous slave-owners accepted that slavery was untenable, slavery was condemned for good. Likewise with colonial rule, and so too it came to be with apartheid.

Abolition of Slavery and the Creation of the Abolitionist Syndrome[5]

The historiography of the abolition of slavery has been dominated by the abolitionist (or philosophizing) mode which was to be repeated later during the era of decolonization and which is now being replayed as apartheid is being dismantled in South Africa, but being modernized for a worldwide application.[6] What is common to all these modes is that the forces which had profited from slavery, colonial rule and apartheid, seek to maintain their control. In the process of seeking to retain control they also seemed to have imposed on historians the questions to be posed. The issue here is not whether or not one can demonstrate and document how historians got their clues from the forces which guided all these processes. The issue which must be faced is why certain questions are preferred over others. In certain cases, the appropriate questions might be asked, but the answers always tend to fall into pre-conditioned responses.

So, from slavery through decolonization to the end of apartheid one could argue that the dominant historiography has been tuned to the abolitionist mode. By which it is meant that slavery is seen as the problem—an aberration—and not the socio-economic system which was being built on it. Therefore, while it became acceptable to condemn slavery, capitalism itself was never questioned. Slavery was/is condemned as morally unacceptable (the same with apartheid). Others may also make arguments for its uneconomic value. Whatever the arguments, the con-

demnation will never be couched in the terms which the victims of the system might have conceived. The history of victims, conceptualized and produced by those who have never been victims must be looked at with suspicion. At its best it will be paternalistic and condescending, at its worst it will deliberately deflect attention from questions which might undermine or challenge the dominant position. As change proceeds, those who control economic and political power are forced to change: their strategy will be to displace the line of demarcation between them and those who are pushing for change. From their perspective, the best way to protect their privileges is to share them with as few as possible, but enough to ensure some political and economic stability.

The limits of the abolitionist mode are best revealed when one examines the position taken by Thomas Jefferson on the matter. He saw himself as an abolitionist, but he was also hoping "for a total emancipation, and that this is disposed, in the order of events, *to be with the consent of the masters*, rather than by extirpation" (G. Nash, 1990:17, emphasis added).

In the case of slavery, David Brion Davis concluded that "a general consensus emerged in the three decades after 1760 'that black slavery was a historical anomaly that could survive for a time only in the plantation societies where it had become the dominant mode of production' " (Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, as quoted in G. Nash, 1990:20).

Perturbed by historians' vacillations, Gary Nash, one of the most radical voices on this topic, does ask "why were such compromises made to slavery at the constitutional Convention in 1787 and again in the last decade of the eighteenth century" (1990:25)? It is worth quoting in full how he explains historians' failures to deal with the question in terms other than those which were adopted by the revolutionary leaders who did compromise:

> Thus, they [historians] have assumed that slavery could not have been abolished and have justified what did *not* happen. Their explanations reek of inevitability, almost always in historical writing an argument put forward by those whose mistakes are being excused and virtually never by those victimized by the mistakes" (Nash, 1990:26; emphasis in the original).

The inevitability of the compromise position stemmed from the interpretation given to the militant position of the most adamant states—Georgia and South Carolina. The main objective of the "revolutionary" leaders being to forge a nation, the threat of Georgia and South Carolina was enough to provide the space for compromise. The role of the minority in forcing the majority to compromise is today also being repeated in South Africa, even if the

leaders of the majority are bending over backwards to point out that the minority is also compromising. The question is: on whose terms? Moreover, in economic terms the "minority" is in reality not in a subservient position as their control of capital allows them to dictate their terms for the transition. Nash suggests that closer examination of the situation of Georgia and South Carolina would indicate that these two states were in a rather precarious position and "had a far greater need of a strong federal government than the rest of the states had need of them" (Nash, 1990:33).

After showing how inadequately historians have dealt with the role of Georgia and South Carolina in the undermining of the abolitionist positions, Nash goes on to focus on the corollary question, i.e., what did the Northern states do with regard to slavery? The North may have cried loud and clear against slavery, but when it came to actually hastening its demise, it was a different matter. He illustrated his point by highlighting the contradictory behavior of prominent individual Northerners who could not bring themselves to reconcile their call for ending slavery with their holding on to their own slaves. Nash quotes a new Englander who accurately described the source of the contradiction: "slavery was 'one of those evils that it will be very difficult to correct—Of all Reformations those are the most difficult to ripen where the Roots grow as it were in the pockets of men' " (Duncan J. McLeod, *Slavery, Race and the American Revolution*, p. 75, as quoted in Nash, 1990:33).[7] In other words, the economic costs of maintaining slavery were resisted by a minority which grew smaller as resistance by slaves, religiously and morally motivated personalities, and technological changes made the maintenance of that form of labor/capital relationship increasingly difficult to defend politically. What was never in doubt was the dominance of capital. The crucial issue has always boiled down to how to preserve, in the process of these transitions, its privileges.[8]

Slavery in Africa: Blurring the Phases of the Capitalist System

The dominant approach to slavery in Africa is to dissociate it from Atlantic slavery in such a way that it gains a history which seems to have few connections with the Atlantic slave trade. The exercise, abstracting African slavery from the slave trade and from the expanding capitalist system, creates the basis for comparative speculations.[9] This is not dissimilar to those who framed the study of violence in South Africa in terms of those who were, in fact, responsible for its most lethal kind.

Miers and Roberts (1988) seem to suggest that African domestic slavery had its own dynamic of reproduction, completely separate from the industrialized form which was introduced with the raiding and trading of slaves across the Atlantic Ocean. Such a distinction is untenable given that domestic slavery eventually became part of the subordinated and exploited parts which fueled the expansion of capitalism. The comparison therefore is not valid since it is comparing two entities which, in reality, grew to become part of one world. Such a view of the end of domestic slavery in Africa draws its plausibility from the fictionalized view of colonial history in Africa which is said to begin at the time when the European powers carved it up among themselves.

Clearly, the basis upon which slavery in Africa was reproduced could not be but domestic. However, the nature and character of that domestic basis had been transformed by Atlantic slavery long before the European powers decided to occupy the continent. It is this transformation which is either omitted or downplayed. This was later reinforced by the introduction of the anthropological problematic of colonial times which sought to freeze colonial peoples into an abstract "historical present" so that they could be looked at "as they were before European contact."

The military and political takeover of the continent created the intellectual environment which later led to the dissection of peoples into categories and concepts akin to intellectual cannibalization. Divide and rule was not only a political and military motto; it became the recipe for how to scholarly digest alien societies.[10] The concepts and categories were to social scientists what the roads, railroads and harbors were to the administrators and businessmen: handles and grips to facilitate the most important objective: imperial hegemony.

As shown by the example of Gary Nash himself, scholars who can see through the abolitionist syndrome, may not necessarily be able to extricate themselves out of its historical legacies. One of the salient ingredients of the abolitionist mode is that abolitionist (abolition of slavery, colonial rule, apartheid) arguments grow more convincing the further we are from what had to be abolished. For example, it is not an accident that critiques of anthropology or colonial rule developed after the end of colonial rule. The other important ingredient of the abolitionist mode is that the arguments are more likely to gain prominence if they come from intellectuals whose practices are clearly identifiable as those of "insiders." The best and most recent example of this is the relatively warm reception of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* compared to the relentless hostility and condescension

which surrounded the appearance of any of Cheikh Anta Diop's work among European Egyptologists.[11]

"Apartheid is Dying in South Africa. Long Live Apartheid"

For all his criticism of earlier historians, Nash, however, falls short himself. In his view, those who wanted to end slavery were confronted with two questions, economic and social, respectively:

1. How would the slave-owners be compensated, and

2. How would freed slaves be fit into the social fabric of the new nation.

The first, argued Nash, could only have been dealt with properly if there had been a willingness to make economic sacrifices, and the second (social) would have depended on "an ability to envision a truly biracial republican society" (Nash, 1990:35).

If the end of slavery is presented as an economic loss to the slaveowner, is it logical to assume, automatically, that it would mean an economic gain for the slaves? If slavery is ended because it was overexploitative should one not then expect that the question of economic compensation should have been raised for the slaves too?[12] Instead, the problem of the slave is perceived as one of social adaptation to his/her new status. One of the reasons why Nash falls short stems from the double standard he employs in dealing with slaves and slave-owners. The latter speak directly for themselves, whereas the former have to be spoken for even though they might have their own ideas as to how they would like to see changes occur.

In all of these transitions, the central question for those who suffered was clearly not the same as that coming from those who had directly or indirectly profited from the system. Let us examine the former first. For them, the underlying desire was to bring about a radical transformation. Of course, this will be countered by those who argue that by virtue of the world they lived in, slaves could not possibly harbor such a radical view as total freedom (Mason, 1990:431). Basing his argument on a 19th-century incident between a South African slave holder and a slave by the name of Mey, who was freed, Mason concludes:

> When Mey charged Hendrik Albertus with having unjustly and illegally beaten him, it was indeed, an act of resistance to a beating. But it was a curious form of resistance. It did not involve striking out directly at his master or seeking to escape, for a time or forever, the bonds of slavery; rather it was a legalistic, institutionalized form of resistance, directed specifically at Hendrik Albertus' improper use of the whip. Mey's effort was an attempt to improve his life as a slave, not

to end his bondage. In resorting to the Protector, he could not have hoped to have been freed, since such a thing, in like circumstances, had never happened before. He sought a measure of revenge and some assurance that, in the future, his master would respect the moral economy of the lash.

There are at least two main problems with this kind of reconstruction of what went on in the minds of slaves. The first one, interestingly, is recognized by Mason when he admits that there is very little "known about the material facts of Mey's life." "There is no record of his family, if he had one, of his last name, of the name or residence of the man who employed him after he had been freed, or of his death" (Mason, 1990:426). Thus, Mason's argument rests on information collected entirely from the Day Book of the Protector of Slaves for Cape Town.

The second problem is related to the question of sources, but also to the problem of how one reconstructs and conceptualizes the consciousness of a member of the "far distant classes" (Mason, 1990: 426, quoting Lady Anne Barnard, 1952:5). For one like Mey who was able to, shall one say craft, his response with some chances of physical survival, how many did not live, and, more seriously, how many were able to articulate what they were really against? Mason seeks a middle ground explanation stating that "slave behavior cannot 'be fitted neatly into categories such as accommodation and resistance'"(Mason, 1990:431, quoting R. J. Scott, 1985:169).

Mason acknowledges all the problems related to the various filters which blurred the "Mey that exists in the Day Book." Mason's exercise of reconstructing the mind of the native is comparable to what anthropologists did later during colonial occupation. It is also comparable to the male response to women's narratives of rape: the necessity to reconstruct the pre-defined, predetermined conceptions of the inability of the victims to see beyond a limited horizon. The parameters within which Mason chooses to interpret—without much evidence to go by—Mey's actions remind one also of the colonizers' reactions to struggles for national independence which went more or less like this: the natives are too primitive to understand concepts of freedom and liberty. If they had not read about these ideas in Rousseau and Voltaire, they would not be calling for independence. Another variation of this line was to attribute the desire to fight for independence to either "outside agitators" or to a few malcontents.

All of the extrapolations are reconstructed within the logic of the dominant world view which assumes, by definition, that it is the only one capable of advancing a rational explanation. The world view of the slave can only be that of a slave regardless of which world view he or she might have had prior to being enslaved since, we are told, "slavery, for most slaves, was inescapable" (Mason, 1990:428). The other view, provided by Enlightenment philosophers: "what is the meaning of freedom and liberty" thus becomes part of the discovery arsenal. Unless it has been articulated and/or theorized by a voice from the dominant view (or one accepted as such by the gate keepers), an idea, a concept or even a story simply does not exist.

Mason's reconstruction provides another useful illustration of how paradigms and paradigmatic silences are constructed in African history. A destructive system like slavery could not but silence all of its opponents. Those who did survive and were enslaved knew the costs, just as the rape victims know what it means to be violated. Like rape victims, slaves did not live in a "slave friendly" society. In both cases they were/are operating in an environment which was/is hostile to denunciations and attacks against the system.

Why can one not contemplate the possibility that Mey execrated not only slavery, but also everything which went with it? Since, for lack of evidence, one is forced to speculate, why can one not speculate that the changes Mey wanted did indeed go beyond slavery? Even if Mey was born a slave, surely he must also have known that, before him, he had ancestors who lived in a different world where land was not owned by white people. "Beyond slavery" cannot be assumed to represent exclusively, as is obviously implied by Mason, the world according to the slave-owners. True, for slaves who had been shipped to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the ineluctability of slavery was much more real than in South Africa; but even there, we know of the insurrections which led to the maroon communities. It is therefore fallacious to advance the notion, as Mason implies, that freedom from slavery could only come from the slave-owners. The fact that alternative escapes to freedom were extremely difficult to achieve does not invalidate an argument based on that possibility.

To some it may appear that this critique is close to splitting hairs. It is not because it seeks to draw attention to a deeply embedded practice among historians dealing with capitalism which takes for granted the inevitability of its triumph, since, also through self-serving logic and arguments, it is presented as the best possible system ever conceived by human beings.[13] Once that inevitability is taken as a given, historians will fail to raise questions or think of answers to questions which do not take the inevitability for granted.

During decolonization, the most radical voices let it be known that it was not colonialism alone which was on trial, but capitalism.[14] Similar voices have been heard in South Africa, but, as during the transition from colonial to post-colonial rule, the main preoccupation of the government in power is to force its agenda on the opponents. The government in power will put its opponents through a sifting process at the end of which "responsible leaders" will emerge to negotiate the transition. In other words, there are limits to the ideological universality of freedom, especially if its advocates aim at breaking from socio-economic bondage and not just from political domination.

On the Limits and Restrictions of the Enlightenment

As has been pointed out by scholars who have analyzed the impact of the French Revolution on slavery and colonialism, an anti-slave trade discourse did not necessarily coincide with an anti-slavery discourse, and, finally an anti-slavery discourse did not necessarily translate into an anti-colonialist discourse. In fact, as a general rule, the Enlightenment philosophers who argued against slave trade and slavery (with the possible exception of Rousseau and Diderot) did so because these practices blemished European civilization (Bénot, 1981, 1987). The only thinker (but then he did not belong to the luminaries of the 18th century) who maintained a relatively principled position was Las Casas, whose opposition to slavery meant opposition to colonialism (Galeano, 1985; Orhant, 1991).[15]

The anti-colonialism of the Enlightenment philosophers was not based on a principled opposition, but was directed at the ways in which colonialism was being carried out (Guy Vermée, 1990:40-41). For them the ideology of universal freedom fomented by people like Diderot was understood to mean the spreading of this ideology under the tutelage of Europe.

Obstacles to radical transitions have also come from the maintenance of a conception of law and order rooted in the old order. For Condorcet, for example, his enthusiastic arguments for the abolition of slavery are dramatically moderated by his insistence on the modalities: the transition has to be orderly. Well, one might ask, orderly for whom (Jurt, 1990: 49)?

The problem of the end of slavery is also its mode of representation: to deflect attention from the main issue. So, a prominent historian of the southern United States like C. Vann Woodward, looking at one of the bloodiest clashes of the period which led to the

Civil War, Harper's Ferry, describes it as representing a "clash between two Americas, each struggling for dominance. Each of the antagonistic systems had its own set of interests, institutions, and values, and in the long perspective of nearly a century the clash between them takes on aspects typical of other historic struggles for power" (C. Vann Woodward, 1970:221). He is not referring to slaves versus slave-owners, but, in a typical paternalistic approach, to the ideological sides around which the fate of the slaves were being debated. The slaves are reduced to onlookers.

Interestingly, this perspective is similar to the way in which the struggles for the end of colonial rule and apartheid were subsumed under the "greater perils of humanity," i.e., the ideological confrontation between communism and capitalism. In both cases, it forces the confrontation of the main protagonists (slave versus slave-owners; colonizers versus colonized; whites versus non-whites in South Africa) into the background and replaces it with what is perceived as the greater crisis. Pitting two Americas against each other, meant that capitalism itself would not be called into question since the issue became how to humanize it.

Transitions, Law and Order and Definitions of Violence

During the last few years of formal apartheid in South Africa, a phenomenon similar to the above "autonomy of African [domestic] slavery" could be observed in the transformation of apartheid violence into "Black on Black violence." Once the phenomenon had taken root, seeded by apartheid, it could assume a life of its own. Thus, the peculiarities of the Apartheid system were analyzed not so much in terms of the necessity to root out the source of its brutalization and dehumanization as in terms of putting an end to brutalization and dehumanization. For example, when the Frontline States sought to describe apartheid as the nazism of the 1980s, they were generally ignored, and in those cases where they were not, some scholars were quick to point out that the similarities which might be observed between the Apartheid system and Hitlerian fascism were not sufficient ground for making the comparison.

The reasons for describing apartheid as the nazism of our time was directly related to the efforts by the heads of the Frontline States to put an end to the suffering of the peoples in the region. It was an attempt to make the Apartheid regime's Western allies understand that the scale of destruction did indeed bear a resemblance to what had happened under Hitler. It was an attempt to trigger a moral and political response. The unstated assumption was, if the

comparison were valid, then the logical response should have been dictated by the principles which were established at the Nuremberg tribunal.[16] A precedent that Western powers have preferred systematically to forget: winners can never be wrong.

The response from the Western states confirmed one of the canons of colonial history: only the dominant power has the right to decide what has universal applicability and what does not. Even though one of the objectives of the Nuremberg trial was to prevent any reoccurrence of the Holocaust, the signers of the Nuremberg Principles, it could be argued, were the very first to violate that principle when the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and compounded the crime by dropping another one on Nagasaki.

In his otherwise thoughtful article on the subject, Allister Sparks may have unintentionally misled his readers when he praised the US government for having lived up to the Nuremberg principles by compensating the Japanese who were kept in concentration camps during World War II (The Star, Johannesburg, June 17, 1992). The US government has never come anywhere near to apologizing, let alone atoning and compensating for the land taken away from the Native Americans or for the enslavement of millions of Africans. Allister Sparks was right in his criticism of how the apartheid leaders shied away from "confession and reparation," but he reproduced the same thinking when he failed to understand that the US past goes beyond WW2. It starts with a constitution which had been written by slave-owners, by people who borrowed their constitutional model from the people whose land they had stolen (Mander, 1991).

Today the US happens to be at the center of the world economy, and the question might be asked: what would happen if the leaders of this nation suddenly recognize that the wealth which has been built over the centuries is irredeemably stained with crime? What would happen to the political and moral legitimacy of the whole system?

It is not difficult to imagine why de Klerk would not entertain a Nuremberg trial type of situation for it ran the risk of eroding any semblance of legitimacy that the government still held. The US equivalent to what Allister Sparks was asking of the South African government should have been confession and reparation to the Native Americans and African Americans, and, among other things, opening of the CIA files to the victims of US-sponsored wars in foreign countries.[17]

From Slavery to Apartheid: Low Intensity Genocide

Historical analogies are easier to make than to prove, but they can help provide insightful frameworks. Referring to the earlier part of the discussion on slavery it is possible to say that Africa is on a world scale what the US South was to the North, and the North is being represented today by the "Western" industrialized states. Anti-apartheid movements in the North played an important role in forcing the beginning of the transition. But, once, so to speak, they thought the ball got rolling, the Western governments were just as quick to rescind the economic sanctions, thereby encouraging the South African government to drag its feet by openly fomenting "Black on Black violence," and attributing its cause to conflicts between ANC supporters and Inkatha members. This is far from a new practice. A similar strategy was concocted in the 1950s by John Foster Dulles, then US Secretary of State, who argued that the best way to maintain American power in the Pacific was to let Asians fight Asians. By the 1980s this strategy had acquired the name of "low intensity conflict" (LIC) (Richard J. Barnet, 1988: 207). "Low" referred to the financial costs and visibility from the perspective of the main sponsors. As defined by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, LIC means:

> a limited politico-military struggle to achieve political, social, economic, or psychological objectives. It is often protracted and ranges from diplomatic, economic, and psycho-social pressures through terrorism and insurgency. Low-intensity conflict is generally confined to a geographic area and is often characterized by constraints on the weaponry, tactics, and the level of violence (US Army Training and Doctrine Command, US Army Operational Concept for Low Intensity Conflict, TRADOC Pamphlet # 525-44 [Fort Monroe, Va. 1986], p.2, as quoted in Klare, 1988:53).

The concept of crime against humanity and its corollaries of genocide and the holocaust were born out of the history of World War II. There is an exclusivist interpretation of the holocaust which argues that there is no other event in history which is comparable to what happened to the Jews under Hitlerian rule in Germany.[18] The defenders of this view are right in so far as the history of the Jews is concerned, but in light of the precedent of the Nuremberg tribunal deliberations and judgment, which defined the holocaust as a crime against humanity, the exclusivist interpretation is contradictory and encourages the very opposite thinking which the Tribunal was trying to establish, namely to use the precedent as a means of preventing the recurrence of similar, comparable crimes.

Ever since the Nuremberg Tribunal, the fear of those who stood as victors and judges was that it could be used as a precedent against any one of them (Minear, 1971:10-14; Arendt, 1964:264; Kuper, 1981:46). That is one of the reasons used by the exclusivists to argue that it is ahistorical to look at Atlantic slavery as a crime against humanity because, at the time it happened, there was no such concept. Of course the exclusivist interpretation coincides with the abolitionist mode of thinking when it comes to the question of violation of human rights. The powers which acquired colonies and trampled over human rights to make them profitable have now propelled themselves to the forefront of human rights advocates. The success of this will depend, among other things, on whether they also succeed in totally eradicating popular memory. Momentary silence of the victims should not be mistaken for acquiescence.

Racism, Capitalism and the European Universal Mission

The context under which apartheid is being dismantled at the end of the 20th century bears resemblance to other periods of transition. The most important characteristic is the maintenance of the idea that Europe (more precisely the group of nations which has now constituted itself as the Group of Seven) has the mission to civilize the rest of the world. The dominant leitmotif has remained to universalize European history. And at the present time, this means universalization of the triumph of capitalism.[19]

Apartheid did not only operate on the landscape, it tainted the way one conceptualized terms which were central to its reproduction such as state (political and economic) instigated violence. Linguistically, it is not difficult to detect the ways in which apartheid had literally imposed its way of thinking. Although one would like not to use the racial groups, practice has shown it to be difficult to do otherwise.[20] Linguistically, apartheid also affected the way in which one writes about violence. For example, should one describe the violence against hostel dwellers as political violence? Furthermore, to characterize violence described by these hostel dwellers as the "human face" of violence raises more problems than it answers.

In her essay, Lauren Segal (1992) approached the violence in the hostels in the same manner anthropologists, during colonial rule, approached the violent confrontations which immediately preceded independence. The main problem was the abstraction of these confrontations from their historical context. It is difficult to accept the premise that the more detailed evidence one collects from those actually involved in violence, the better one will understand violence. In the anthropological study of violence greater attention has been paid to the victims of violence than to those who are at the root of it. Why was it easier to be appalled by the violence committed in the townships than by the "non-violent" activities of those who did not physically wield the weapons? Could it be that the study of violence has been slanted because it is easier to study the victims than the planners and instigators? Such acceptance of situations which are taken for granted or as given, automatically means that social scientists will not even bother to ask the questions which should be asked. And staying away from such questions can only be seen as an obvious self-protective reaction against those who wield power.

Violence and the Definition of Power: Transition to What?

The definition of violence carries with it the definition of power. Mike Morris and Doug Hindson (1992) sought to trace the origin of the 1980s violence in South Africa to the demise of the Apartheid state: "The roots of the violence must be sought not in the implementation of apartheid forms of social control but in the collapse of these forms; not in the continued maintenance of apartheid but in the attempted institutionalization of a new social basis on the foundations of a racially divided society" (1992:45-6). This assessment is only partially correct. It is true that in the process of redrawing the battle lines, racism will continue to be a powerful ingredient, but what has been reasserted in South Africa is that while race should no longer be the dominant criterion, class will be. Morris and Hindson, after stating their opposition to a "reconstruction which accentuates class distinctions," agreed in their discussion of the solutions that such class divisions will have to be accepted.

Theirs is an echo of the abolitionist mode so well criticized by Gary Nash: it is easier to see history through the eyes of the likely victors than through the eyes of the victims. In addition there is a deeper similarity: the class and racial distinctions which were forged under slavery and apartheid had to be maintained. Only the most offensive aspects had to be removed. The thornier question of how one should address and redress the divisions and distinctions created and deepened by apartheid were debated within abstractly constructed parameters rather than on the basis of specific demands made by the groups which most suffered from it.

Although Morris and Hindson tried hard to distinguish their position from that of neo-liberals, they did come very close to the latter's when they suggested an approach which "recognizes the continued existence of class contradictions but which attempts

to contain the excesses of the market/private property system, rather than trying to eliminate them" (1992:56). In other words, they were willing to change, but the changes could not be so drastic as to do violence to the world of accumulated privileges. How could they call for deracialization when at the same time they were calling for tax implements and expenditure systems which, in their view, were going to reduce "class residential differences *without radically undermining existing residential configurations*" (Morris, Hindson 1992:57, emphasis added).[21]

This is a reformulation of the abolitionist syndrome in which the producers of wealth were not allowed to specify how they would have liked to be compensated. An alternative approach would start from the premise that one of the possible outcomes of the whole process will be the demise of a system which has reproduced itself through reforming and restructuring the mechanisms of repression and exploitation. This approach, however, could only be articulated from a position which does not look at state power as the ultimate goal. The strength of such a position would come from refusing to enter on to a terrain where the rules continue to be written by the beneficiaries of the currently dominant socio-economic system.

The line of argument advanced by Morris and Hindson was clearly aimed at demonstrating the reasonableness of the progressive forces in South Africa: "We must proceed from the position that to some degree class division will replace racial division rather than racial divisions being replaced by a classless society." Whether they would admit to it or not, they were engaged in the same exercise that all nationalist forces from Nkrumah to Mugabe were forced to engage in: demonstrate that they will be responsible leaders, that is, responsible to the previous rulers and not to the coalition of forces which had pushed them to the forefront of the battle lines. As long ago as 1961, Fanon analyzed this very process in which native intellectuals changed their roles from leaders of the wretched to intermediaries and pacifiers.[22]

Until the negotiation process got under way there were indications in South Africa that the relations of forces had changed so dramatically that previous mistakes would be avoided. In previous histories of national liberation, there always came a moment when a movement had to change gear from building an alternative power to seizing power. In all cases, this has been the most difficult and problematic transition, because despite explanations to the contrary, it invariably led to the transformation of the struggle. In a nutshell, the movement went from calling for the dismantling of colonial or apartheid power to negotiat-

ing how it could take control.[23] No matter how this has been rationalized, it is contradictory: it leads to taking control of alien and alienating structures of economic and political power, and automatically, slows down the process of transformation.

The question of an alternative path cannot be avoided even if in its triumphant stupor capitalism denies such a possibility. It will have to come from those who have been silenced. But the problem is not so simply resolved for, how can one repair something which has been damaged beyond repair? In his book, *Foe*, J. M. Coetzee makes the case quite pointedly by the description he gives of Friday. The slavers cut his tongue so that he could not express himself. When his would-be rescuer/freedom-giver Susan seeks to find ways of getting him back to Africa, she realizes that given the state in which he is, such a return would not be possible because the world is dominated by vultures ready to pounce on Friday the minute he is on his own, and sell him back into slavery. Although Coetzee is unable to build a novel free of paternalism, he does show that after slavery, it is illusory for those who enslaved to give freedom back: freedom cannot be given back, it can only be taken back. Coetzee's impossibility is further heightened by the image of Friday belaboring to express himself by writing in English, the language of the slavers and not the language of his ancestors. The most positive interpretation one could put on such an ending is that the road to recovery is going to be a very long and tortuous one indeed.

By Way of a Conclusion—Notes from a Diary

Around 1992, Winnie Mandela was virulently condemned in the Western press, specifically in the *New York Times*. "From Saint to Sinner" read one of the headlines. According to which judicial system? The one operating in South Africa? If so, and if one were to resort to the same standard of reference, where would one place de Klerk, Buthelezi and company? Or are we to be satisfied with the fact that since these are recognized sinners, one does not even have to be bothered with judging them. But therein lies the problem: it is precisely because de Klerk is still in power and supported by the Western powers that he is not judged on the basis of the same premises as Winnie Mandela. Buthelezi and de Klerk, to just focus on these two, can hide behind the shield of the state. *It is not necessary to be an unconditional supporter* of Winnie Mandela to see that there is something obscenely wrong when her alleged crimes make her a pariah in a country which, at the time, was still being run by a dictatorship whose criminal record was still growing.[24]

"Was the legend of Mother of the Nation ever true?" asked *The Weekly Mail* of April 16-23, 1992, and then proceeded to answer negatively. At the political and ideological level, there is no issue in South Africa today which better illustrates the devastating consequences of apartheid rule than the apparent total loss of the capacity to judge and choose outside of self-defeating historical parameters. This essay has argued that such an exercise has become nearly impossible because there is an implicit and sometimes explicit refusal/fear to put on trial the economic and historical foundations of the capitalist system.

Looked at from such a historical perspective, would it be far-fetched to suggest that, despite the obviously different historical circumstances, Winnie Mandela is to Stompie Moeketsi Seipei what Sethe was to the character of Beloved in Toni Morrison's *Beloved.* To be sure, Winnie Mandela was not the mother of Seipei as Sethe was the mother of the child born as she was running away from slavery in 1873. The novel was constructed around a real life incident which happened to a runaway slave by the name of Margaret Garner. When she saw white men coming for her, she killed the child born out of slavery (Beloved) because she could not bear the idea of her returning to a state she had not even known. In real life Margaret Garner (Sethe) was tried not for killing her child, but for running away (Darling, 1988).

But Morrison was not so much interested in the real life events as in the central question of who is to judge Sethe: "I got to a point where in asking myself who could judge Sethe adequately, since I couldn't, and nobody else that knew her could, really, I felt the only person who could judge her would be the daughter she killed" (Darling, 1988:5). Who could judge Winnie Mandela but her peers, of whom Seipei would be the first, heading a list which would also include Ruth First and thousands of well known and not so well known victims of apartheid. But given the specificity of what Winnie Mandela has endured, who are her peers?

Beloved is a novel which poses historical questions and suggests answers that few archive-ridden historians would dare deal with. Constructed around individual characters, it seeks to bring out the collective memory which had been buried. The killing of the daughter is so horrifying that no one was interested in remembering it. For Morrison, such a death which led to silence is reminiscent of the Middle Passage. That kind of death can only be judged in relation to the Middle (silenced) Passage.

In addition to who is to judge, the other important question which interested Morrison was not so much

who is to be judged as what is to be judged. She does so through Baby Suggs' (Sethe's mother) assessment of slavery: "[T]here was no bad luck, but white people. They don't know when to stop" (Morrison, 1987:104). For Morrison, Baby Suggs acts like the conscience/memory of the African community when she calls upon its members to fully love every single part of their body:

> And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love it, you! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. You got to love it. Yonder , out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put in it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they don't love your mouth. You got to love it (Morrison, 1987:88).

Metaphorically, Winnie Mandela, however grave her sins were—and they were grave—was undoubtedly part of the body which rose against apartheid. The survival of an individual depends on him or her loving every single part of his/her body regardless of what might be said about it. On the basis of what is known, it is fair to assume that this is the assessment which led Nelson Mandela to conclude that, as far as he was concerned, she was not guilty. Re-membering the dis-membered is not an easy task, the easier solution is to run away from it and pretend that horrifying episodes did not occur. A radical transformation in South Africa will depend much more on how the past is re-membered than on how the future is plotted. As Morrison said of slavery, the same can be said of apartheid: "There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive" (Darling, 1988:5).[25]

Notes

[2] A slightly different version of this essay was prepared for the Ruth First memorial symposium at Western Cape University (August 17-18, 1992), South Africa, celebrating the tenth anniversary of her death by parcel bomb at the Center for African Studies, Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, Mozambique (August 17, 1982). The Presidential election of 1994 had not yet taken place. The transfer of political power will not necessarily mean the transformation of deep-rooted social and economic

relations.

3 Notable exceptions to this trend could be found (in 1992), among other places in debates and articles which have appeared in *Work in Progress* (e.g.#77, 78) and in the *South African Labour Bulletin*.

4 See Susan George's article "Un apartheid planétaire," in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, juin 1993. On how apartheid is being modernized in France, see Sami Naïr, *La lettre à Charles Pasqua de la part de ceux qui ne sont pas bien nés* (Paris: Seuil, 1994). Without using the word Serge Latouche describes the same phenomenon on a global scale in *La Planète des naufragés* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991). However, this time around, much more than under "classic" apartheid, power will be concentrated in the hands of global corporations, and, initially, with fewer avenues for political recourse. See Richard J. Barnet and John Cavanagh, *Global Dreams: Imperial Corporations and the New World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

5 The abolitionist syndrome is a manifestation of the syndrome of discovery. Slaves had revolted against the institution long before the abolitionists (not slaves) called for its end and got enshrined in the literature as the ones who brought it to an end. The lesson: slaves could not have "invented" the end of slavery. These syndromes are also the product of power relations, and they are kept alive through these power relations. The journal *Slavery and Abolition* exemplifies how historians preferred the view from the slave owners as opposed to, say, slave revolts or resistance to slavery. Abolition does not encompass slave revolts, but the latter does encompass the former, and, more importantly, according to the terms of those who were enslaved and fought to end it.

6 Abolitionism is used here in a broad sense, not taking into account the distinction between, say, William Lloyd Garrison who advocated total, complete and immediate emancipation without compensation and someone like Jefferson who vaguely wished for some ultimate emancipation with compensation. The former would be called "abolitionist" and the latter, "emancipationist." However, for the purposes of this paper they would be both abolitionists. Eric Foner's *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) shows how the parameters of those who control economic and political power can also limit the parameters and questions posed by historians. How historians can free themselves from such limitations is shown, among others, by the works of Eugene D. Genovese (1976, 1979), Merton L. Dillon (1990), Jacqueline Jones (1985), Sylvia R. Frey (1991), and Barbara J. Fields (1982). But this is only a minute sample of a literature which has exploded and, in part, accounts for the bewilderment of those who continue to think that history can only be written by those who controlled the written word and the archives. As Gretchen Gerzina (1995:2) has pointed out with regard to another emblematic figure of the abolitionist movement, Granville Sharp, advocating racial justice never meant calling for racial equality, something which continues to be problematic to this very day.

7 See also A. Leon Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process. The Colonial Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), which documents the slow, if not outright recalcitrant pace toward abolition of slavery.

8 In her *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), Sylvia R. Frey shows how the radicalism of anti-slavery particular from the slaves themselves forced slave owners to discover the horrors of the system they had created, but also how, according to one scholar, slave owners pressured mediating institutions like the churches to pull back from their "overt opposition to bondage" (James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of the American Slaveholders* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982], p. 108, as quoted by Sylvia Frey, 1991:243).

9 Of which J. C. Miller's *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830* (1988) is exemplary. It is this fudging which first led Philip D. Curtin (1969) to focus on the numbers game, and later P. Lovejoy (1983) to claim that the Sokoto Caliphate was the largest slave holding society in world history. One of the most persistent and pointed critic of these approaches has been J. Inikori (1992a, 1992b, 1992c). The common endeavor behind the dominant demographics of the slave trade scholarship is ultimately similar to those scholars who have tried to argue (downward) over the number of Jews who were killed during World War II. As Umberto Eco has pointed out (with regard to the Jews), the problem is not that it is not worthwhile to get more accurate figures, but "What is intolerable is when something which might have been a work of research no longer has the same meaning and worth, and becomes a message suggesting that 'if a few less Jews than we thought were killed, there was no crime' " (As quoted from Umberto Eco, "Tolerance and the intolerable," *Index on Censorship*, 1/2 1994, p.53).

10 In his *Logiques Métisses* (1990), Jean-Loup Amselle makes this point quite well and is much more critical of the anthropological problematic than he was willing to be earlier in *Au coeur de l'ethnie* (with E. M'Bokolo, 1985).

11 The most recent being a review article by W. MacGaffey in the *Journal of African History*, 32 (1991), pp. 515-519 entitled "Who owns Egypt." See also the description of R. Mauny's reactions to one of C. A. Diop's lectures in Dakar in James Spady's "Afterword" to C. A Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa* (1988:231-2).

12 As the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s were to show, economic compensation never materialized, and even if it had, it was clearly intended as a means of subjugation rather than one of promoting true emancipation.

13 For a good discussion of the question of inevitability see Pierre Raymond's *La résistible fatalité de l'histoire* (Paris: J.-E. Hallier; A. Michel, 1982).

14 In addition to the usual voices of Fanon, Cabral, Rodney, one should also add the lesser known ones of Osende Afana (1966), Ruben Um Nyobe and the various anonymous resisters (in Africa as well as outside) who may not have known the monster by name, but experienced firsthand its lethal powers. See Fredi Perlman, *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!* (Detroit: Black and Red Press, 1983).

15 It is interesting to note that Las Casas' approach to the Indians was historical and not ethnographic as is well pointed out by A. Pagden in "Ius et Factum: Text and Experience in the Writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas," *Representations*, #33 (Winter 1991), p.157. It has been argued that Las Casas' exemplary behavior was not totally pure, since he showed greater sensitivity to the plight of the Native American population than to that of the slaves from Africa.

16 This took place especially between 1981 and 1984. In Mozambique posters were produced with the caption "Apartheid is a crime." Interestingly, a white South African scholar visiting Mozambique at the time claimed she did not understand the poster.

17 "Reasons of state" continue to be the most powerful means of silencing, but even there, a different treatment may occur depending on the class and national origins of the plaintiffs as the case of the murders of an American citizen and a Guatemalan husband of an American citizen at the hands of a Guatemalan colonel employed by the CIA has shown (*New York Times*, first week of April 1994). Clearly, for reparation to be meaningful and long-lasting to the victims and/or descendants, its criteria would have to be defined and determined from their perspective and in terms which avoid the pitfalls of rewards related to the currently dominant signs and seals of economic and financial wealth.

18 On how this exclusivist interpretation is constructed, see Frank

Chalk, 1989 and Steven Katz, 1989. One could argue that the work of L. Kuper (1981, 1985), particularly with his emphasis on using historical precedents as a means of enforcing prevention, would fall in the inclusivist tradition, as would Yves Ternon's work (1995). However, the current assault by finance capital on the nation-states as shackles to its global expansion demonstrates that approaches which fail to question the nature and character of the states will also fail to see the relationship between the intensification of genocidal events and the continued need for capital always to seek to recreate conditions of primitive accumulation. How else would one explain the resurgence in (among other places) Los Angeles and New York, of sweat shops similar to those described in London by labor inspectors in the 19th century?

[19] Dealing with a different, but comparable situation, T. Swedenburg illustrates this point very well in his "Popular Memory and the Palestinian National Past" (1991).

[20] On a lighter side, some writers used to expose the absurdity of the apartheid system by either refusing to use the state-dictated categories or by extending its application to the white tribe. The difficulty of changing the usage is more an indication of the strong correlation between words, concepts and the concrete realities from which they arise than the intrinsic nature of the former. Authoritarian dogmatic practices do not only come from economic and political systems, but also from relations of domination which operate at social, cultural, linguistic and cultural levels.

[21] For a good critical response to Morris and Hindson, see Rok Ajulu, "Political Violence in South Africa: A Rejoinder to Morris and Hindson," *Review of African Political Economy*, 55, (1992):67-83, in which the author points out how the rulers of apartheid sought to undermine the transition by suddenly converting to privatization after 40 years of intense interventionist policies. See also M. Szeftel, "Manoeuvres of War in South Africa," *Review of African Political Economy*, 51, (1991).

[22] Particularly the chapter "Concerning Violence" (1991:35-106).

[23] This is well documented in Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, (Boston, NY, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994, 1995).

[24] Since this essay was originally written, more and more evidence has surfaced to show that Winnie Mandela, while seeking to represent the voice of the voiceless and the downtrodden, has done so in ways which may end up undermining that claim. I have opted not to change what was written in 1992, not because I condone Winnie Mandela's practices, but because, in a sense, her behavior could be seen as the embodiment of a stalemated transition. Her behavior aside, what she says about and for the voiceless is still creditable and credible among them. Moreover, assuming the corruption charges are proved, one must again ask according to which norm of reference?

[25] "Digested" might not be the most appropriate term since one of the central issues of memory rests with how it is nurtured into a reactive process of putting an end to the sources of suffering inflicted by human beings bent on imposing their domination by all means and forever. A mere digestion of memory would not necessarily create the conditions for resurgence and renaissance.

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