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Review Article

Silences and Voices

A Review of Jacques Depelchin's *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition*

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The last time I saw Jacques Depelchin I drove him around the townships of Cape Town. We drove along a road bordered by shacks in Khayelitsha and Jacques commented, 'this is worse than anywhere I have seen in Africa'. Some of those shacks were the so-called QQ section of Khayelitsha that, along with a number of areas in the Cape Town metropolis in the winter of 2005, rose in revolt at the lack of delivery of services and housing, putting up barricades of burning tyres to close the road that Jacques and I had driven on, and throwing their garbage across it. A few weeks later I held a workshop for youth there. We talked about their situation, and about capitalism, and I encouraged them to write letters to the mayor of Cape Town, Nomaindia Mfeketo, or to Thabo Mbeki. One youth, Yanga Gregan Sawula wrote to Mbeki:

I'm writing this letter in the pain and the poor living that our, or even your, people in Site B QQ section are living, situated, and making life in. Our people are living in the danger zone under the electric poles that can explode any time. Some of us are in the squatter settlement that are not even proper made, these houses are ever flooded. We don't even have electricity, toilets or running water.

Mr President we are coming to you because our ministers and mayors are not listening to our complaints. We've tried by all means to talk to them but they show no response.

We want serviced land with electricity, toilets and running water. We are demanding this thing because it is our right as the citizens of South Africa to have a better house. You have promised us a lot of things and know we demand houses

so if you are not responding to our complaints then prepare for our action, what actions you will see when it happened, and you know we are capable of doing any thing. We want and demand HOUSES! QHINA [power] !!!¹

I will return later to the significance of this voice.

The Book

I was put in mind of this voice by Jacques Depelchin's book, *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition*. It is a rich, erudite, wide-ranging, profound, and thought-provoking book. As practicing historians, it forces each one of us to confront ourselves and our own practice of historical writing. In searching for truth in Yoruba thought according to Emmanuel Eze:

I put myself at risk: I expose my preoccupation and beliefs – in search of that which may well challenge or reshape them ... This is a challenge at once threatening and exhilarating, for it is a situation where *who* I am is as important as *what* I know.' (p. 31)²

These are words for all of us historians. Historical writing, for Jacques, involves ethics and morality and not just 'evidence'. This book, moreover, is not just about African history as its title suggests, but about world history. Indeed it is not just about history, but about anthropology, economics, politics, philosophy, literature. It challenges our thinking on all the big questions – on fascism and the Holocaust, on capitalism and socialism. It provokes not just one's thought but one's emotions, because it is a reasoned book underpinned with strong emotions. Some of it – not being a philosopher or a literary critic but just a simple historian – I found difficult to grasp.

Let me begin by trying (at the risk of over-simplification) to state its underlying message. It is a critique of the dominant trends of 'Africanist history', produced by outsiders to the continent, and with it, of their economics and their anthropology. (Fictionalized 'Africanist history' is in contrast with a genuine history of Africa.) 'Relations of domination', asserts Depelchin, 'produce scientific disciplines which deal with social reality from the perspective of the dominant group' (p. 123) – not only in the content of those disciplines, but in their form and structure, their grammar, their rules of evidence and so on. And the relations of domination shaping the history of the world and of Africa have been, since the commencement of the Atlantic slave trade, those of capitalism:

From enslavement, through pacification campaigns, *Red Rubber* (Morel, 1906) and its variations, colonial occupations, the continuation of colonial rule by other means through destabilization, and low intensity warfare, the common thread has been the promotion and defence, by any means necessary, of one socio-economic system: capitalism. (p. 4)

What are the silences between the syndromes of discovery and abolition? What are the syndromes of discovery and abolition? Like Wamba-dia-Wamba's

account of the palaver (pp. 177–80) there is not one specific definition of these, but a multi-layered one, developed through the book. The ‘syndrome of discovery’ is essentially the belief promoted by outside writers on Africa that they have ‘discovered’ everything about Africa (the syndrome of ‘explorers’ back to Columbus now practiced instead by academics), rather than recognizing that what they have discovered has long been known to Africans:

The central characteristic of the syndrome of discovery ... is the conviction among its carriers that knowledge as defined, understood and practiced by them cannot be modified by knowledge contained in the ‘discovered’ societies ... Reproducers of the syndrome will consciously and unconsciously silence, prevent and cover up any facts which may interfere with the notion that they are the only possible discoverers. (pp. 2, 7, 144, etc.)

The syndrome of abolition is closely linked. It is the moral condemnation of slavery as if the abolitionists had ‘discovered’ its immorality, ignoring its condemnation from the beginning and the revolt against it by its victims, the slaves. The syndrome can be given a more generic meaning: ‘the abolition of any degrading human condition presented at first as a discovery not made by the sufferers or the victims but by the degraders and humiliators moved by remorse or something less noble’ (pp. 6, 8, 56, 72, etc.). Thus, by extension, the anti-colonialism of the metropolitan ‘Africanists’ embodies the abolitionist syndrome, since it was a belated ‘discovery’ of an exploitative immorality long condemned by the colonized. Both syndromes at the same time cover up the core relations of exploitation and domination – those of capitalism. Thus, ‘while it became acceptable to condemn slavery, capitalism itself was never questioned’ (p. 56) – and the same for colonialism: ‘Nothing is “discovered” until such “discovery” can become part of the arsenal of the reproduction of the superiority of the discoverers.’ (p. 12)

Just as the abolitionists believed the slaves had no concept of freedom, that it was ‘discovered’ and ‘brought’ by them, so the colonialists and the ‘Africanists’ believed that the idea of ‘democracy’ was brought to Africa from the outside – ignoring all the evidence of democratic practice in indigenous Africa. (pp. 60–1)

Both syndromes clearly create silences in history, or, more accurately, perpetuate the silences of the voices of the victims that have already been created by repression – rather than liberating the historical truth (pp. 9–10):

The very process of expansion of capitalism through the Atlantic slave trade, followed by territorial occupation by European powers, has been at the root of the most systematic reproduction of that denial [of African history]... Military violence and economic interest were the twin pillars which ensured permanent silence ... Those who tried to fight against it [the logic of capital accumulation]... were crushed by methods which were aimed at instilling a paralyzing fear among the survivors. (p. 14; cf. pp. 9–10)

The exploitation of Africa, its domination by the metropolitan powers, did not begin with territorial occupation (as is asserted by ‘Africanist historians’)

but with slavery (p. 84). 'By the time Europe took possession of colonial territories in Africa one was not dealing with two separate entities, economically speaking. By then European economic wealth and political power were, at least in part, the result of its exploitation of the continent.' (Here Depelchin correctly follows Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* [1972], his contemporary at the University of Dar es Salaam before his return to the Caribbean and tragic assassination – and is influenced also by the pioneering works of C.L.R. James *Black Jacobins* [1938] and Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery* [1944]). The real history of Africa is a *part of the history of the northern powers' rise to dominance in the world* – a 'crucial ingredient in the prosperity of the West' (p. 77; cf. p. 84) – and this is elided from the history of those powers as well as the history of Africa as well as from development economics. (pp. 18, 88, 96, 132) Though I believe Rodney's book would have been more correctly titled *How European Capitalism Underdeveloped Africa* – to place responsibility squarely where it belonged and not on those Europeans who did not own the means of capitalist production.

Ideologically, with enslavement, the African became a non-person with a non-history – a 'savage'. Then came colonialism, to 'civilise' the savage without a history. The continued denial of a history to Africa served to cover up the crimes of enslavement and colonialism (p. 85). The 'discovery' of African history by the 'Africanists' came only with the ending of colonialism – in order to shape that history with further cover-ups (pp. 2, 12). The 'history' subsequently written – by the Africanists – is filled with silences. The achievements of 'Black Athena' (Egypt) discovered by Cheikh Anta Diop (1978) are denied to Africa (pp. 2–3, 6–7, 15, 59, 73, 93, 101). 'Pre-colonial' history, for those such as Jan Vansina (1966, 1994) and John Iliffe (1987), is everything before European territorial occupation – thus covering up the metropolitan powers' exploitation of Africa during the slave era. (pp. 142) The history of slavery and the slave trade is sanitized by writers like Philip Curtin (1969), Joseph Miller (1988) and John Thornton (1992) – by claims that the Islamic slave trade was worse than that of the Atlantic, that the Atlantic slave trade was unprofitable, that Africans were implicated in their own enslavement (failing to separate some rulers from the slaves) and so on (pp. 93–6, 112, 116). 'Resistance historiography', pioneered by Terence Ranger (1968), has focused merely on the facts of resistance: 'very little attention was devoted to defining what was resisted' (pp. 4–5, 15) – thus covering up again the presence of capitalist exploitation.³

Depelchin quotes Fanon's indictment of 'abolitionist' 'humanism':

That same Europe where they were never done talking of Man, and where they never stopped proclaiming that they were only anxious for the welfare of Man: today we know with what sufferings humanity has paid for every one of their triumphs of the mind. (1965, p. 312)

Depelchin then paraphrases Fanon with one of his many elegant and telling aphorisms: 'Europe went everywhere in the name of humanity, but massacred it wherever and whenever it ran into it' (p. 89).

Clifton Crais, writing of the British takeover of the Cape Colony after 1806, similarly writes of the ‘Janus face’ of liberalism – of the missionaries who favoured the abolition of slavery but also on the whole welcomed the conquest of the lands of the Xhosa and their subordination as indentured labour, a paradox identified more generally by Cooper and Stoler: that, from the late 18th century, conquest, exploitation and subjugation by European powers coexisted and coincided with increasingly powerful claims in political discourse to universal principles as the basis for organizing a polity.⁴ And the one missionary who opposed the conquest of the Xhosa was to be subsequently celebrated by the liberal historian W.M. Macmillan as the ‘first and greatest segregationist’ – and the same W.M. Macmillan is still regarded by white South African social historians as a straightforward progressive historian!⁵

A model for Jacques is Patrice Lumumba who at the ceremonies for the independence of the Congo confronted an astonished King Baudouin’s ‘harmonious’ treatment of the handover with an impassioned spontaneous speech on the crimes of colonialism: ‘it is too early to forget’. Depelchin compares Lumumba with Toussaint L’Ouverture, leader of the Haitian slave revolt from 1791 putting enlightenment philosophy into practice (compared with the pure contemplation of the philosophers themselves). Lumumba wanted a rupture with colonialism, not a negotiated continuity, he asserts (pp. 11, 80, 85–6, 156). Depelchin compares Baudouin’s views with those of the historian Braudel (1994) who, writing in the era of decolonization, was trying to restore the French sense of grandeur and magnanimity, as the selfless civilisers who now desired to transform their colonial subjects into equal partners and to ‘forgive and forget’ the past (pp. 78–80). Braudel puts forward the ideas of multiculturalism – of a ‘plurality of civilizations’ – yet these will still be ‘defined, ordered, ruled and studied from Europe and for Europeans’. As Depelchin points out, in the current vogue of ‘multi-culturalism’ the histories of the oppressed (Africans, Afro-Americans, women, Native Americans) are marginalized so that the dominant history is not that of capitalism (silenced) but that of ‘the triumph of the human spirit’ (p. 88). It reminds me of a book I read upon first going to the United States in 1964, by W.H. MacNeill, titled *The Rise of the West*. Like Braudel, it purported to treat plural civilizations and I was intrigued by its presentation of the history of Chinese and Indian civilization, and of the nomads of the Eurasian steppes – but appalled by its final sections on the triumph of ‘Western civilization’.⁶

Depelchin – following Ben Magubane’s exposé of anthropology (1971) (p. 109) – also identifies the ‘anthropological syndrome’ – denying history by freezing colonial people into an abstract ‘historical present’ so they could be looked at ‘as they were before the European conquest’. ‘Anthropology abstracts from history by pretending that all that counts is the past frozen into the present’ he writes, in another elegant aphorism (pp. 58, 130).⁷ He also reminds us that the earliest anthropology was physical anthropology – the measurement of colonial skulls to demonstrate they did not measure up to those of the

whites: 'Once slaves were categorized as not human, it was not difficult for any science to approach Africans as objects' (p. 106). Indeed, as he also reminds us, in the period of the partition of Africa, 'specimens' of Africans were put on display in the imperialist powers, in circuses and even in a zoo in New York City (pp. 165–7).⁸

Depelchin's treatment of economics parallels that of Marx – penetrating beneath the fetishization of commodification to the realities. He rightly pours scorn on the fetishization of measurement, of numbers, at the expense of a qualitative treatment of history – pointing out how 'numbers' exclude the marginalized, women no less than Africans (pp. 116–20). He points out how the concept of 'development' has become the equally paternalistic modern version of the civilizing mission, combining the abolitionist and the discovery syndromes. Thus, prior to the 'developers' Africans are supposed to have had no notion of nor desire to improve their economic condition. But just as it was Europeans who first 'discovered' and then 'civilized' the 'savages', so development has 'discovered' and will get rid of 'the poor' (pp. 128–9, 135).

For Depelchin, the elevation by historians of the Holocaust to a unique experience has also generated silences. Firstly, it denies the 'low intensity genocidal' (p. 32) experiences which were the prelude to fascism which 'came as the end product of centuries of capitalist bestiality, exploitation, domination, and racism – mainly exercised outside Europe' (p. 34) – including the near extermination of Native Americans. Secondly, it has distracted attention from such subsequent genocides as that in Rwanda, where Depelchin (with many others) accuses the United States of preventing timely UN intervention to halt the genocide and accuses the 'Africanist' establishment of echoing that apathy, and reducing the genocide to a spectacle (pp. 27, 36–7, 48). Moreover the presentation of the Holocaust as a unique experience which can 'never happen again' numbs consciousness of the potential greater genocide contained in the existence of nuclear weapons, or for that matter in the military horrors of US imperialism in Vietnam in the 1960s and in Bush and Blair's genocidal war in Iraq today. Contradictorily, but exhibiting his dialectical method, Depelchin however praises the silence of the barber regarding experience of the Holocaust in Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, over the mawkish sentimentality of Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (pp. 41–2).

The Way Out

Depelchin is not a positivist who believes the historian is a neutral appraising an objective world. He celebrates the insights of quantum physics – that observation impinges on that which is observed (p. 121, 6). Atomic-level matter shows only a tendency to exist in a definite place at a definite time. At the same time Depelchin shows his materialism in repudiating the narcissistic self-indulgence of the post-modernist approach, that history is merely texts: 'historians

do not produce history. It is already there, but given their profession – discoverers of history? – they cannot but continue to propagate the notion that it is they who are the first producers of history’ (p. 77).

That is all positive. Where I question Depelchin, however, is in his apparent leaning towards orality and performance as the sole way of breaking out of the silences. What he writes on the palaver as a ‘way of living democracy’, his account of Karen Barber’s analysis of Yourba ‘oriki’ (1989), his stress on the production of history as a creative act and hence constantly undergoing change is all exciting. It is also true, as he writes, that:

In a continent which has been raided for slaves, then partitioned and raided for its material wealth, objective histories will continue to be incomplete as long as the impact of those violating processes among the population is ignored on the spurious grounds that it cannot be documented. (p. 158)

Hence the fact that fiction – Sembene Ousmane’s magnificent *God’s Bits of Wood* (1970) or Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) – can tell us things about a railway strike in Senegal and slavery, respectively, that ‘factual history’ cannot.

But does this mean there is no place for written texts based on the archives and oral texts? What about Depelchin’s own *From the Congo Free State to Zaire, 1885–1974* (1992)? Does not that also break the silences of ‘Africanist history’?

Socialism

Depelchin rightly roots the problems of our time, and the force that has shaped history since the 16th century, as capitalism. For a period, the Russian revolution appeared to present an alternative way forward for humanity – in the overthrow of capitalism. Now capitalism has been restored in the Soviet Union, and in all the other countries (save Cuba) that modeled themselves on that experience. But what are the lessons to be learnt from this?

Trotsky – someone whose thought has been silenced not only by capitalist historians, but also by those of the bureaucratic Stalinist system which developed in the Soviet Union – regarded the Russian revolution as a model for the colonized world. Generalizing its lessons as those of ‘permanent revolution’, he explained that socialist revolution did not have to take place in the most ‘developed’ countries first. The working class had become saddled with solving the unfinished tasks of ‘bourgeois-democratic’ revolution as well as those of socialist revolution, through taking power in a democratic way. But socialism could only be completed on a world scale.

Depelchin writes that ‘Abolitionists were for the abolition of slave labour, but not for the abolition of the exploitation of labour by capital, which is what the most radicalized slaves fought for’ (p. 63). Until the 20th century it was possible for slaves to achieve this only through withdrawal from the global system – along the lines of maroon communities, or the revolution in Haiti.

The Russian revolution changed all that – although for reasons there is no space to go into, its promise was fulfilled only in distorted ways, in the revolutions in China and many other countries after the Second World War – including Mozambique and Angola – revolutions which ended capitalism but put in their place not workers' democracy but bureaucratic rule.

Depelchin explains the failure of the Soviet Union in these terms: 'The alternative attempts at building socialism by borrowing from the same-thinking arsenal (out-compete capitalism in the production of commodities, and do it through state decrees) could not but fail' (p. 76). Along with this, Depelchin appears to oppose the Marxist idea that the development of the productive forces of society has a liberating power (pp. 77, 99). In Africa, he opposes to this 'what is central is the human being' (p. 144). Permit me to disagree with Depelchin on these points. Yes, state decrees were bureaucratic. But it is in my view capitalist production of **commodities** (defined in Marx's sense of exchange-values, produced through the market) which today **fetters** – holds back – the development of the forces of production – thereby ensuring both the impoverishment of the majority of humanity, mass unemployment even in the imperialist powers, and the uncertainty of booms and slumps. The productive forces are not comprised solely of machinery and so on – their principal component is human beings, the working class. To liberate the productive forces – and ensure the greater production of use-values which can eliminate poverty and eventually create abundance for all – is the task of the working class, through taking control of production and building socialism.

Despite the ending of capitalism, state ownership of production, and planning, what was built in the Soviet Union was not socialism, because rule was usurped from the working class by a bureaucratic elite. Though initially the productive forces were developed at breakneck speed, in the end the relations of production in the Soviet Union (the bureaucracy, the national-state) equally fettered the development of the forces of production. Hence, in the end, capitalism was restored. Socialism, in my view, can only be developed on the basis of workers' democracy and cannot be achieved within a single country.⁹ I return to this below.

South Africa

I first met Jacques in Dar es Salaam in December 1975 at a conference on South Africa, which was also attended by the late lamented Ruth First and Harold Wolpe, and others. It was just after the liberation of Mozambique and Angola, which were big steps forward for the continent of Africa – though while we were there the news came through of the apartheid regime's first invasion of Angola. It was just months before the Soweto uprising.

From 1976 onwards, with only momentary pauses, the working class and youth were active in mass struggle in the country through the 1980s. At the same

time the apartheid regime – like Reagan in Nicaragua – waged a vicious genocidal proxy war against the non-capitalist regimes in Mozambique and Angola through RENAMO and UNITA. Then came the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and PAC, and the negotiations that resulted in democratic elections and an ANC government.

Although I did not encounter Jacques in South Africa until later, he had already attended a Ruth First memorial symposium at the University of the Western Cape in 1992. His paper, reprinted in *Silences*, was very prescient. He wrote that, ‘the transfer of power will not necessarily mean the transformation of deep rooted social and economic processes’ (p. 71). He could already see at work the compromises of the ‘abolitionist syndrome’ and the consequent propping up of capitalism – and he criticized ex-Marxists like Stephen Gelb, Michael Morris and Dave Hindson for warning against ‘frightening the owners of capital’ and for acceptance of continued class divisions in society (pp. 53, 64–5).

The causes of the negotiated compromise, in my view, were because of a stalemate of forces resulting from the fact that the ANC had no realistic strategy for overthrowing the state, and (through the South African Communist Party) was in fact ideologically holding back the only force which could have achieved this, the working class.¹⁰ Together with this, there was in the early 1990s the counter-revolution in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which demoralized many, together with a huge increase in state-sponsored vigilante violence against the masses (mainly by the Inkatha Freedom Party) in an attempt to terrorize them to accept compromise.

The consequences have been dismal. In 1996 the ANC government adopted the neo-liberal GEAR economic policy, of cuts in the budget deficit, privatization and trade liberalization. A recent book by an economic adviser to the presidency boasts that this was done to ‘protect South Africa’s sovereignty’ against the dangers of IMF-World Bank intervention! Implement an IMF-World Bank structural adjustment policy to pre-empt them implementing it!!¹¹

Under GEAR, a million jobs were lost from the formal sector of the economy, and over the first ten years of democracy there is substantial evidence not only that inequality has **increased** but that the numbers of the impoverished and of the unemployed has risen. On a realistic definition, more than 40 percent of the economically active population are unemployed, and among youth and women the percentages are higher. Despite the building of 1.5 million houses, the number of those living in informal settlements (shacks) has increased from 1.4 million to 2.4 million, according to the Housing Minister herself. Thousands of people in shack settlements either have no toilets at all or have to use the infamous and undignified ‘bucket system’, depositing nightsoil in buckets, which are collected periodically. In Cape Town there is a backlog of 260,000 houses, with some 16,000 joining the queue a year – yet the other day the city’s Director of Human Settlement Seth Maqetuka declared it was possible to build only 8000 houses a year.¹² What an admission of defeat!

The main beneficiaries of the last 10 years have been South Africa's big monopolies and banks – Anglo American, Old Mutual, South African Breweries – allowed to freely invest overseas for the first time and taxed less than under apartheid. Recently Barclays Bank has returned to South Africa, buying up ABSA bank. There is a court case against Barclays and other foreign banks in New York for their role in propping up apartheid – but the South African government is taking an active role in opposing any reparations. Banks in South Africa, by the way, have a rate of profit 'consistently higher than that of major banks in most other parts of the world'.¹³

The inequalities are becoming obscene. Wages of employees as a percentage of GDP has fallen from 51 percent in 1993 to 45 percent in 2004 while profits have increased from 25 percent to 30 percent. Between 2003 and 2004 alone the average gap between the remuneration of executive directors and the wages of workers on the average minimum rate across all sectors increased from 111:1 to 150:1.¹⁴ The Oppenheimer's wealth is estimated at R30 billion and the Rupert's at R11.5 billion, but the black beneficiaries of BEE are not far behind with Patrice Motsepe (shares worth R3.5 billion) and Tokyo Sexwale (shares worth R1.5 billion). Tokyo Sexwale benefited by R140 million through a deal with ABSA and Cyril Ramaphosa by R103 million through a deal with Standard Bank, both in 2004.¹⁵

The succession dispute currently tearing the ANC apart is a red herring. Despite the fact that he is backed by COSATU and the South African Communist Party, Jacob Zuma offers no alternative economic vision, and is by no means a 'friend of the workers'. COSATU and the SACP instead of pursuing this chimera should break from the Tripartite Alliance with the ANC and launch a mass workers' party with a programme for democracy and socialism.

The Way Out: Again

Depelchin, in his 1992 paper on South Africa, written at the time of the capitalist triumphalism of the 'end of history', wrote that 'The submission to the rules dictated by capital at the end of the twentieth century is probably more total than it has ever been' (p. 54). But what history is once again showing is that working people oppressed and exploited by capitalism will again and again seek the road of struggle and change.

Despite the US-led occupation of Iraq – and despite the dead end of Islamic fundamentalism, which is in fact a response to the historic twentieth century failure of Communist Parties in the Islamic world to present a way forward – there is hope again: in Latin America for example. In Venezuela the Bolivarian movement led by Hugo Chavez – who has won nine elections and currently enjoys 70 percent popularity in the polls – is being looked to from around the continent. Chavez has declared: 'There is a new logical alternative to capitalism, which is no other than socialism, and we are building our own socialist model without emulating the ones from the past' and 'It's impossible for capitalism to

achieve our goals, nor is it possible to search for an intermediate way ... I invite all Venezuelans to march together on the path of socialism of the new century'.¹⁶

The revolution in Venezuela still hangs in the balance. Nationalization of unproductive industries, regulation of the banks is proceeding. There is a movement for *cogestion* (workers' control) that presages workers' democracy. Workers' democracy, as Depelchin points out in *Silences* (p. 66) is the question dealt with by Lenin in *State and Revolution* – the means of dismantling the capitalist state. (True workers' democracy, in my view, is little different from how Wamba-dia-Wamba characterizes the palaver (cf. pp. 177–8). But let us remember the fate of the Chilean revolution in 1973 – the bloody US-sponsored coup of General Pinochet. The 'Hands of Venezuela' solidarity campaign which has been taken up in the United States and Europe is important to all the oppressed of the former colonized world. And if the Venezuelan revolution is consummated, it must become an example for people to find their way to socialism world-wide.

Khayelitsha Again

It is not only in Latin America that people are moving into struggle. The worsening situation in South Africa, described above, has also – as pointed out at the start of this paper – stimulated the development of social movements outside the ANC. Against the spin doctors of the ANC who are attempting both by repression and ideological denial to silence these voices, it is equally the task of the contemporary historian to liberate and amplify them.

Let me then finish with another letter from QQ section, Khayelitsha, from a school student, but not the voice of book learning but of experience gained from struggle:

Dear Thabo Mbeki – we demand development in QQ section and decent housing for all and I don't want capitalist GEAR policies. I don't want a bucket system because it was meant to be abolished in 1996 but it's still existing in SST section in Town Two. Our local councillor Makaleni don't give a damn about QQ section. Mbeki you said you create jobs for all but there is no such.

He concludes in the words that are also spoken at all mass meetings of the social movements in Khayelitsha: 'Phanzi the banks, phanzi! Phambili socialism forward! Smash capitalism smash!'¹⁷

If liberating history is a way of advancing the struggle for socialism, so equally the struggle for socialism is the only lasting guarantee of the liberation of history.

Notes

1. Quoted from 'Sikhalela izindlu', 2005.
2. Page references in the text are to pages in *Silences*.

3. I made a similar point in a review of Rodney's book in the *Journal of African History*, XVII, 3, 1976: 'If the nationalism of the new classes does not essentially challenge the process of peripheral underdevelopment, then perhaps the colonial and precolonial activities of the "masses" should be re-examined not, following Ranger, in terms of their contributions to "nationalism" but as premature and so far abortive struggles against the inequalities of world capitalist development'.
4. Crais, 1992a and 1992b; Worden and Crais, 1994; Keegan, 1996; Legassick, 1993; Cooper and Stoler, 1997. See also the essay on 'The Janus Face of Merchant Capital' in E. Fox-Genovese and E. D. Genovese, 1983, pp. 3–25.
5. Macmillan, 1927 and Bozzoli and Delius, 1990.
6. Checking on Google for this book, its edition of 1963–4 does not seem to be available, and its title has subsequently metamorphosized as *A world history* and/or *A history of the human community*!
7. Ben Magubane and I together attended a seminar on 'pluralism' run by Professors Leo Kuper and Michael Smith at the University of California, Los Angeles, probably in 1965 or 1966 which contributed to our dislike of the anthropological approach. See Ben Magubane, 1971 and Legassick, 1977.
8. For examples of this in the South African contest see C. Rassool and M. Legassick, 2000; M. Legassick, 2006.
9. See on these questions Legassick, 1991 and forthcoming.
10. Legassick, 2002.
11. Hirsch, 2003.
12. *Sunday Times*, 12 September 2004; *Cape Times*, 17 November 2005.
13. *Cape Times Business Report*, 16 May 2005.
14. Bheki Ntshalintshali, deputy general secretary of COSATU, *Business Report*, 13 July 2005; *Sunday Independent*, 24 July 2005.
15. *Sunday Times*, 27 March 2005.
16. 'Socialism, the Only Alternative to Capitalism, Says Chavez', *Prensa Latina*, Havana, 27 April 2005, [<http://www.plenglish.com>]; *New York Times Magazine*, in *Sunday Times*, 13 November 2005.
17. 'Sikhalela izindlu', 2005.

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