SOUTH AFRICA AND DEVELOPMENT

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Some time in the eighteenth century the Xhosa prophet Ntsikana once predicted that a group of people would come to the land of his people from the sea carrying a gun on the one hand and a book on the other. No more prescient warning was ever issued about the double assault of military and cultural conquest that would be visited on the Xhosa people of the Eastern Cape by the British colonial government throughout the nineteenth century. For literally a hundred years the British hunted the Xhosa up and down the hills and valleys of the Eastern Cape hinterland.

To be sure, the first white people to arrive in South Africa were the Dutch in 1652, but for a period spanning well over a century they moved into the interior following rumours of a wealthy cattle-owning people deep in the territory otherwise known as the Transkei. Chief Hintsa once asked of the colonists: "What have the cattle done that you should want them so much?" The Transkei was the seat of Xhosa paramount sovereigns going back to the founder of the modern Xhosa nation, Tshawe, who himself usurped power from his brother Cira in the seventeenth century.

From Tshawe's time the history of the Xhosa would be characterized by similar attempts at the usurpation of power, the most important of which took place in the middle of the 18th century between paramount chief Gcaleka and his brother and pretender to the throne, Rarabe. Gcaleka repelled Rarabe's attack, and Rarabe was thus forced to flee westwards across the river Kei into what became known as the cis-Kei (meaning this side of the Kei). It was in this westward flight Rarabe ran straight into the eastward-moving Dutch settlers. That initial encounter resulted in the frontier war of 1781, the first in a series of nine frontier wars over the next one hundred years. As historian Noel Mostert observes in his book *The Frontier*: "It was to be the Rarabe and those chiefdoms which preceded them across the Kei River who almost exclusively were to fight the century-long sequences of wars with first the Dutch and then the British ".[1]

However, the Rarabes were also to become the main focus as well for missionary activists who were not happy with the practices of the colonial government. British missionaries such William Shaw and John Philip of the London Missionary Society set up mission schools among the Xhosa, often undermining prevailing customs and rituals as "uncivilized". Some of the more prominent of those schools in the Eastern Cape included Lovedale College and Healdtown College. But the missionary institutions were also an entry-point into the modern world, and served as incubators for critical consciousness among the

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[1] Noel Mostert, *The Frontier*, A History of the Xhosa People, p.181.

young black protégés attending them, "and all of this together was to set them distinctly apart, in literature, in political and academic life and in their traditions of resistance."[2]

Now, all you need to do is to substitute the names of the characters and you would be describing what was unfolding across the Indian Ocean to the Indigenous Yolnu people of Australia. According to Richard Trdugen[3] the Yolnu had always existed as independent producers and traders with the Macassans. As a sign of deference for the Yolnu, the Macassan traders ended up at the beach after they landed. As their kith and kin had done in South Africa, the first white people to arrive walked right onto Yolnu estates and subdivided the among themselves and used them for grazing for their cattle.

One day the pastoralists offered the Yolnu horsemeat, which turned out to be poisoned meat that killed the Yolnu in droves. The white people were defeated by when they came back they had recruited the Yolnu to their side, a tactic that the colonialists had adopted in the conquest of South Africa and the rest of Africa. In his classic *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe captures this dynamic. The main character Okonkwo laments that: "It is already too late. Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger... If we should drive the white men out of Umofua we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us.

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his own religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act as one. He has put a knife to the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." [4] Richard Trudgen uses another phrase to describe the condition of things falling apart, and that phrase is the title of his book, *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die.*

It is a reflection of an overwhelming sense of despondency that comes from centuries of political oppression, economic exploitation and cultural denigration. Indeed, had the white people stayed at the beach instead of walking on the estates the past five hundred years might have been different. We must know the past, and as the title of this conference suggests, learn from it and know how to use it to construct alternative futures. If we do not then we shall be caught up in what sociologists call path dependence- being stuck in a path that was started by others.

What then are the implications of this historical preface for how we think about development? In his wonderful book, *The Great Transformation* Karl Polanyi argues that the process of colonization was not necessarily an economic process as is often assumed but a basic assault on the cultural institutions of the victims. Destroy the institutions of a people, and then you have destroyed all

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[2] *ibid*, p.210.
[3] Richard Trudgen, *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die*, Open Book Publishers, 2000.
[4] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 1958, pp.144-145.

potential of those people. It is clear then that one of the major developmental challenges of oppressed people is to protect their institutions and constantly build new ones. Institutions are important not purely for instrumental reasons, but because they are the repositories of memory and values. That's what distinguishes institutions from organizations.

As Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu has eloquently put it: "My identity is linked very intimately to my memory... What I know is what I remember, and that helps to make me who I am. Nations are built through sharing experiences, memories, and a history. That is why people have often tried to destroy their enemies by destroying their histories, their memories, that which gives them an identity."[5]

The French intellectual Ernest Renan described the nation as a soul, a spiritual principle whose origins lie in the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories. Renan goes on to suggest that a nation is a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices one has made in the past and of those one is prepared to make in the future."[6] Indeed, nothing preoccupied Steve Biko grappled with this issue of self-definition for nation building, under very trying circumstances of un-freedom, circumstances that ultimately laid a claim on his young life. And memory continues to affect how we act in the present and in the future.

The struggle for memory through institution building is how South Africans survived the onslaught of apartheid. At every epoch after the apartheid regime decimated black political organizations, people would at great personal risk and sacrifice, stand up to establish new ones. Indeed, much of our work at the Steve Biko Foundation is predicated and informed by what we remember of Biko, as much as Biko's work was formed by what he remembered of Mandela and Sobukwe before him, much as Mandela and Sobukwe's work was informed by the warriors of the nineteenth century. It is this intergenerational learning that we must keep on igniting, for that is the only way that Indigenous people of Australia can begin to challenge the denigration and stereotypes that have been manufactured about them in Australian society.

In addition to the erasure of memory, the destruction of community institutions and their replacement with colonial institutions was also intended to create a culture of dependency among the colonized. And so it is for example that in South Africa the colonists destroyed some of the most successful farming communities in Africa by dispossessing them of their lands, and in turn demanding that they pay taxes to the colonial government. The only way to pay those taxes was of course by leaving the land and the rural communities to work on the newly established mines.

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[5] Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *Preface to Reflections in Prison*, by Mac Maharaj, Zebra Books and the Robben Island Museum, Cape Town, 2001.

[6] Ernest Renan, " What is A Nation " in Homi Bhaba, *Nations and Narration*, Routledge, New York, 1990, p19.

I believe a similar process happened here in Australia and other developed countries. The bargain was simple- they are better as dependants than competitors. And that became the bargain of the welfare state in Australia and elsewhere in the developed world. New bureaucracies burgeoned to support the new dependants. In fact development became less and less about the people and more and more about how rulers would position themselves for the newly available funding and job opportunities for themselves and their kith and kin. Even so-called civil society organizations learned the game of being service delivery agents, and ultimately huge bureaucracies.

However, things have begun to change in the past twenty-five years or so as social movements all around the world started to challenge the welfare model. This challenge is of course different from the rightwing challenge started by Maggie Thatcher and Ronnie Reagan, a challenge that sought to cut off any funding to poor communities while siphoning the share of the wealth to the already wealthy. No, the challenge I am talking about was informed by the writings about self-reliance that came from people such as Mahatma Gandhi, Julius Nyerere, Paolo Freire and Steve Biko. In our own country no one spoke more about self-reliant development than Steve Biko. During the darkest days of apartheid, with the police hot on his heels Biko initiated community projects in our little township of Ginsberg and the surrounding areas.

Together with Mamphela Ramphele they literally started the tradition of community-based public health in South Africa by establishing a rural clinic called Zanempilo Clinic. As a tangible example of that pioneering work one of our youth leaders here with us on this trip, Thabisa Bata, was born in that clinic. Biko also initiated an educational fund that sent the first crop of university graduates from our community. He raised funding from international donor agencies for labour intensive industries such as bricklaying, poultry farming, and leather works.

Always conscious of the importance of ideas in any struggle, Biko and his colleagues published community newspapers and journals such as *Black Review* and *Black Perspective*. Now these are things that I saw with my very own eyes. As a young boy I sold *The Voice* on the streets of King William's Town, and I went along with Steve Biko on the back of his van to the clinic where he worked. We would peep through the windows to see him at work on the patients with Dr Ramphele. That had a tremendous impact on me, even as I have travelled the world.

It is our challenge to give our young people those memories, so that those memories can do for them what memories of Steve Biko have done for me. This is something we owe to all our children whether they live in the Eastern Cape or among the Indigenous people of Australia. One practical way of doing that is to open our respective worlds to them, so that they can learn our respective histories, and from that construct alternative common futures. That is why I will end therefore by calling for an exchange programme among our respective

communities to look at history, culture and development. For starters we can call it the Australia-South Africa Youth Leadership Exchange Programme.