

The liberation legacy: literalist and normative torchbearers battle for the post-society economy

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The nationalisation of the mines, banks and monopoly industries is the policy of the ANC, and the change or modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable.

— Nelson Mandela¹

The legacy of historical narrative

Racism is a product of capitalism.

— Michael Parenti²

Apartheid is classified by some as a system of exploitation by capitalist forces of production, by which racism is a by-product of class conflict, used by the oppressor as a justification for oppression.³ The ANC emerged to take power after South Africa's peaceful negotiations in 1994 following a legacy of rhetorical appeal that backed a socialist-oriented alternative to the apartheid system. The economic manifestations of it were understood as capitalism or the open market.⁴ Any acceptance of the capitalist system in a post-democracy period would, in the light of this trajectory, constitute a continuation of the effects of oppression, whereby the starting point for economic behaviour is a legacy of an unjust structural arrangement.⁵

The transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa remains fraught with perpetuating levels of socio-economic inequality according to critics, despite legal equality and Constitutional freedoms granted in law.⁶ Into

¹ Nelson Mandela, "ANC leader affirms support for state control of industry" (London, *Times*, January 26, 1990).

² Michale Parenti, *The culture struggle* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007): intro.

³ William Mervin Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the battle for the soul of the ANC* (Cape Town: Struik Publishers, 2005): 33-39, 69.

⁴ Ismail Vadi, *The congress of the people and freedom charter campaign*, foreword by Walter Sisulu (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1995); also see: <http://www.sahistory.org.za>: accessed April 2011.

⁵ Nelson Mandela, "ANC leader affirms support for state control of industry", *The Times* (January 26, 1990).

⁶ Mark Horton, "Role of fiscal policy in stabilisation and poverty alleviation," in *Post-apartheid South Africa: the first ten years*, Michael Nowak and Luca Antonio Ricci, eds. (Washington D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2005): 84.

this context, how has the South African government successfully tied economics realities and fiscally conservative macro-economic policy to the overall notion of justice in a post society, given the historical pledges?⁷ This paper seeks to present the rhetoric as one of ends versus means, whereby the Freedom Charter becomes a statement principle as opposed to one of action. The question is asked as to how the rhetorical normative socialist notions imbued in ANC speech and legislative proposals in the pre-1994 period gain widespread acceptance of macro-economic liberalism since 1994?

Lending populist appeal to macro-economic liberalism

In Aristotle's *rhetoric*,⁸ the ethos⁹ of the market-based macro-economic framework was a critical component of rhetoric making. Nelson Mandela's reconciliatory moment¹⁰ was a basis for which economic concessions to the principles of the Freedom Charter's demands for state control could be adequately accepted as legitimate in the eyes of ideological opponents within the tripartite alliance. Coming to the view that South Africa could not succeed in a globalisation economy without an open market economy,¹¹ the basis of the Freedom Charter evolved to that of a policy objective, not a policy statement.¹²

Has "opportunity" in the context of democracy replaced the social democratic promises of guaranteed basic deliverables as a starting point for material (economic) justice? And how do proponents of economic policy on both sides of the economic debate advance a rhetoric of justice in their policy orientations?

This paper will argue that the government has by necessity increasingly sought to advance a mildly refined definition of justice to match a macro-economic context demanded by the global economy. To achieve this

⁷ In order to qualify success in the political context of voter support.

⁸ Johann De Wet, *The art of persuasive communication: A process* (Cape Town: Juta, 2010).

⁹ Ethos as one of the three artistic proofs refers to the moral competence of the speaker in advancing the persuasiveness of the message. See: De Wet, *The art of persuasive communication*.

¹⁰ Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *An African Athens: Rhetoric and the shaping of democracy in South Africa*. (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹¹ Accounts collected by journalist Naomi Klein from academics like Patrick Bond indicate the change in Mandela's economic opinion was laid at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 1993. In William Gumede's account, when Mandela pointed out that South Africa's state-driven economic plans involved nothing more radical than what Western Europe had done under the Marshall Plan after the Second World War, the Dutch minister of finance dismissed the parallel. "That was what we understood then. But the economies of the world are interdependent. The process of globalisation is taking root. No economy can develop separately from the economies of other countries".

¹² Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the battle for the soul of the ANC*, 33-39, 69.

balance between descriptive policy and normative goals, the ANC has been required to satisfy legitimacy.

The problem facing ANC discourse was the need to meet the expectations of socialism with the necessary economic measures to ensure the country's successful transition into the global economy. Successive leader Thabo Mbeki was required to affirm the normative values of the Freedom Charter while communicating the principles of the market economy. Nelson Mandela did so by using his status as a reconciliatory symbol to persuade audiences of the necessity of broadly economic liberal principles as part of the principles for the attainment of democracy.¹³

Mbeki's prerogative was undermined by a continuation of the old logos inherent in the socialist appeal¹⁴ and the failure to improve micro-economic conditions alongside a new rhetoric of upward mobility. This prompted popular opposition and a battle to reclaim the notion of the Freedom Charter as a plan of action, not an ethos. The divisions within the ruling government between two split views emerged in conflict over economic policy positions.¹⁵ Thabo Mbeki however sought to advance the about turn of Mandela on economic policy and centralised leadership in the party in order to do so.¹⁶

In his address to the trade union FAWU (the Food and Allied Workers Union), Thabo Mbeki moves away from the Freedom Charter as a structured political policy, but rather envisages it as an ethos for which he congratulates his audience: they have upheld it.¹⁷ Thus in this context, the Charter becomes a matter of principle that has already been achieved, implicitly without the required procedures nationalisation or any socialist policy that had previous been understood as integral to the attainment of a post-liberation socio-economic end.

He tells his audience that the advances made in South Africa's democracy are indeed part of the struggle, ensuring they understand the ANC's legitimate continuation of the grievances of worker exploitation for which the union was established:

¹³ See 'Behind the rainbow', <http://multimedia.timeslive.co.za/trailers/2008/11/behind-the-rainbow/>: accessed April 2011.

¹⁴ Understanding reason as the constructed reaching of conclusions on the basis of accepted premises, the notion of logos in this context refers to the socialist worldview or understanding of reality. In it the logic of capitalist oppression could only be solved by its elimination in favour of a socialist state. See: The Manifesto of the South African Communist Party (SACP), 1921, <http://www.sacp.org.za/main.php?include=docs/history/1921/manifesto21.html>: Accessed April 2011.

¹⁵ See <http://www.leadershiponline.co.za/articles/other/273>: accessed April 2011.

¹⁶ Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the battle for the soul of the ANC*, 33-39, 69.

¹⁷ Thabo Mbeki: <http://www.polity.org.za/article/sa-mbeki-66th-anniversary-and-2007-national-conference-gala-dinner-and-award-ceremony-of-the-food-and-allied-workers-union-address-14092007-2007-09-14>: accessed April 2011.

“These achievements should not be seen outside the continuum of the historical struggles and events in which FAWU took an active part. The gains we have made are a manifestation of the vision espoused and advocated by the founders and leaders of FAWU”.

Mbeki attempts to do what James Boyd White is attempting, he “is trying to construct a new world and persuade his or her readers to share in it”.¹⁸

Rhetoric: aid to the divided interpretation

I argue that the debate that has emerged in public discourse between two essential readings of the Freedom Charter. One which saw it as a normative goal and prescriptive statement, and the other which backed the ethos of the document but did not accept it as a description of policy, but rather as a guide. A document offering a spirit by which laws could be made.¹⁹ The second reading came to dominate the ANC under the three successive presidents, while the literal interpretation remains a point of contention. While not always in political harmony, the ANC Youth League is the most prominent organisation holding to the literal reading of the Freedom Charter as a plan of action.²⁰

The ANC’s challenge to communicating a normative or what I shall term spirit-based reading of the Freedom Charter was complicated by initial stages in the movement’s rise to power beginning in the 1990s. Nelson Mandela wrote from prison shortly before his release that there could be no liberation without the nationalisation of the mines, financial sector and key resource areas of the economy.²¹

“The nationalisation of the mines, banks and monopoly industries is the policy of the ANC, and the change or modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable. Black economic empowerment is a goal we fully support and encourage, but in our situation state control of certain sectors of the economy is unavoidable”.²²

¹⁸James Boyd White, *When words lose their meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

¹⁹ See Leon Louw, “Analysis of the ANC Youth League’s nationalisation proposals”, in *Nationalisation*, Temba Nolutshungu, comp.

²⁰ See Malcom Rees, “Nationalisation gains traction”: <http://www.citizen.co.za/citizen/content/en/citizen/business-news?oid=171145&sn=Detail&pid=146820&Nationalisation-gains-traction>: accessed, April 2011.

²¹ Patrick Bond, *Unsustainable South Africa: environment, development and social protest* (London: Merlin Press, 2002).

²² See Naomi Klein, “A democracy born in chains”, in *The shock doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

These words are not lost on a literalist reader of the Freedom Charter. The ANC government rose to power understanding that the principles of its economic policy would be encompassed in a socialist plan of action: the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The policy however was short-lived and from the office of Nelson Mandela the announcement of a new growth trajectory emerged. GEAR, created under the close eye of then future president Thabo Mbeki, proposed spending through investment, a balanced budget and a sound economic environment that was business-friendly, consistent with the requirements of international finance and the incentives required for foreign direct investment.²³

What then extols a re-emergence of the rhetoric of nationalisation given the two decades of macro-economic liberal policy? Acquiring popular support on the basis of audience perception becomes a key tool for the literalist reading of Julius Malema. The pathos is to a document birthed in an historical struggle, ethos is the appeal of the Youth League leader to his intention to follow the words of struggle leaders and pathos is achieved in the appeal to unjust economic conditions still present amongst the poor in the country.

Left-wing academic Patrick Bond's explanation of the reality of a failure to follow the literalist reading of the Freedom Charter, regardless of disputed methodology and conclusions, does represent an understanding of what may allow for popular appeal of a socialist objective in the post society of South Africa.

"To promote a peaceful transition, the agreement negotiated between the racist white regime and the ANC allowed whites to keep the best land, the mines, manufacturing plants, and financial institutions. There were only two basic paths that the ANC could follow. One was to mobilise the people and all their enthusiasm, energy, and hard work, use a larger share of the economic surplus (through state-directed investments and higher taxes), and stop the flow of capital abroad, including the repayment of illegitimate apartheid-era debt. The other was to adopt a neoliberal capitalist path, with a small reform here or there, while posturing as if social democracy was on the horizon".²⁴

²³ Asghar Adelzadeh, "From the RDP to GEAR: the gradual embracing of neoliberalism in economic policy", *Transformation* 31 (1996), in Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the battle for the soul of the ANC*, 72.

²⁴ Patrick Bond, *Unsustainable South Africa: environment, development and social Protest* (London: Merlin Press, 2002).

Original intent

In the view of the ANC Youth League therefore, the economic trajectory formed part of the negotiation and necessary compromises required for a temporary period in order to gain the peaceful transfer of powers.

Julius Malema tells an audience at the Mining for Change convention last year that “those of who oppose nationalisation of mines, are in actual fact opposing what Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and many others were imprisoned for”.²⁵ While Nelson Mandela’s rhetorical moment emerges as the basis for a non-nationalisation agenda, Malema draws on the logos of history²⁶ and the ethos of struggle²⁷ emotion to drive home his point, the belief that nationalisation is an economic end that cannot be legitimately opposed.²⁸

“Those who oppose mines nationalisation in the ANC are opposing what O.R. Tambo, Robert Resha, Patrick Maoloa were exiled for. They are opposing what Chris Hani was killed for. Chris Hani was killed because he was not ready to sacrifice the Freedom Charter, and we will never betray him.”²⁹

The relationship however between the actual post-democracy framework, GEAR and South Africa’s economic failings does not merit the failure of economic liberalism necessarily the official opposition points out, given that micro-economic reforms to stimulate new businesses that drive economic growth were absent.³⁰

But the rhetorical device which remains central to advancing Malema’s objective is powerful. If Palmer could write that modern states commemorate the dead as Pericles did in order to maintain their own sur-

²⁵ Julius Malema, speech delivered on 7 September 2010, Sandton Convention Centre: <http://www.ancyl.org.za/show.php?id=5579>, accessed April 2011.

²⁶ The Manifesto of the SACP, 1921: <http://www.sacp.org.za/main.php?include=docs/history/1921/manifesto21.html>: accessed April 2011.

²⁷ By Malema’s message, the persuasiveness of the nationalisation proposals rest on the moral credibility of its proponents, namely those figures recognised as integral to the legacy of the fight against apartheid.

²⁸ Julius Malema, speech delivered on 7 September 2010, Sandton Convention Centre: <http://www.ancyl.org.za/show.php?id=5579>, accessed April 2011.

²⁹ Julius Malema, speech delivered on 7 September 2010, Sandton Convention Centre: <http://www.ancyl.org.za/show.php?id=5579>, accessed April 2011.

³⁰ Tim Harris, Democratic Alliance (DA) shadow minister of trade and industry’s statement, 15 September 2010: <http://www.polity.org.za/article/da-statement-by-tim-harris-democratic-alliance-shadow-minister-of-trade-and-industry-on-cosatus-growth-path-15092010-2010-09-15>: accessed, April 2011.

vival,³¹ it is clear that actors who want to advance a particular version of the state undertake the same exercise.

The problem ultimately facing the ANC discourse was the need to meet the expectations of socialism with the necessary economic measures to ensure the country's successful transition into the global economy. Regardless of the outcomes relating to these economic matters is the perception of the traditional ANC left who were required to understand fiscally conservative macroeconomic policies as a necessary measure to achieve the normative goals of socialist discourse. Evidently the case of the ANC Youth League is that not all have successfully integrated the new understanding.

The ongoing battle that emerges within the ANC, in the instances of individuals like Malema, sees principal references to the Freedom Charter as a fundamentally literal document and not as a statement of normative ends which it becomes under the post-1994 ANC leadership. This literalist reading brings a core element of the socialist leaning pre-1994 narrative to the fore against the pushing of a post society trajectory.

According to Jeremy Cronin of the SACP, the basis for Malema's argument rests on the inspiring clause in the Freedom Charter: "The people shall share in the country's wealth!" It asserts that: "The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people; the mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole..."³²

Bond cites the decisions by the ANC during negotiations: to drop "nationalisation" formally from ANC rhetoric, to repay the \$25 billion of inherited apartheid-era foreign debt and to grant the central bank formal independence in an interim constitution.³³

Conclusion

Essentially the term "nationalisation" is a contested term, and is absent or present based on the outcomes sought in the clear sense with which Kenneth Burke describes "New Rhetoric". Since argumentation aims at securing the adherence of those to whom it is addressed, it is — in its entity — relative to the audience to be addressed.³⁴ In each instance we observe competing versions of the Freedom Charter wholly dependent on the desired speech acts demanded by the audience.

In a similar vein Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca draw

³¹ Kathryn Palmer, "Trauma and the memory of politics", *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8, 3 (2005): 516–519.

³² Jeremy Cronin, "Should we nationalise the mines?", *U姆sebenzi Online* (November 18 2009): <http://www.moneyweb.co.za/mw/view/mw/en/page295025?oid=331647&sn=2009+Detail>: accessed, April 2011.

³³ Patrick Bond, in Klein, *The shock doctrine*.

³⁴ Kenneth Burke, *A rhetoric of motives* (San Francisco Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962)

partially for their theory of argumentation on the two concepts: universal and particular audiences.

While every argument is directed to a specific individual or group, it is the agency of the orator that determines what information and what approaches will result the largest degree of adherence, according to an ideal audience. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca offer something of an understanding towards how particular audiences are addressed with universal concepts.³⁵

Thus, as in the case of particular audiences, the universal audience is not fixed or absolute but is dependent on the orator, the content and goals of the argument, and the specific audience to whom the argument is addressed. Based on these considerations, “facts” and “reasonableness” are determined by the orator and thus help to constitute the universal audience that, in turn, shapes the orator’s approach.

It is due to this that the economics principles, which refute the claimed outcomes of the nationalisation process consistently gain traction in audiences where economic process is either ignored or misunderstood.

Overall facts and reasonableness in the case of the literalists and normativists take universal terms, like the “Freedom Charter”, “struggle” and “liberation” and contextualise the meaning specific to the meaning desired. Thus, when the term occurs in a different context, either before or after the speech is given, it is understood in the context of the meaning given to it in the particular speech.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue that all argumentation must proceed from a point of agreement; contentious matters in particular cannot be introduced until sufficient agreement on prior or related issues has already been established. There are two divisions on the basis for agreement: the first covers with facts, truths, and presumptions; the second encompasses values and hierarchies.

The basis for agreement for the blueprint to South Africa’s liberation remains the Freedom Charter. The first basis for agreement is disputed: was the Freedom Charter a policy proposal document or one addressing policy objectives.

Like the battle over the interpretation of scripture that existed between the fundamentalist and the progressive at the turn of the 19th century, the issue will be fought out through rhetorical acts so long as the conflict between widely accepted market economic principles globally, and the notion of economic justice locally, remain unreconciled.

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³⁵ Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *New Rhetoric: a treatise on argumentation*, John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver, trans. (Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).