

# THE LAND QUESTION – A REVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE – MISREPRESENTATIONS BY LIBERATION MOVEMENTS IN AZANIA

## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The land is the most fundamental of all the productive resources or means of production that nature has endowed mankind with. All over the history of mankind through the various stages of Historical Materialism, land has been the source and basis of life. It is little or no wonder then that all the struggles and revolutions of mankind and humanity over the years were fundamentally about the land.

Dominion, sovereignty, independence, self-reliance and self-determination are all signs, symptoms, indications and manifestations of land ownership and possession. Societies and communities of different cultures, sub-cultures, ethnic groups, clans and even cliques have always expressed their essence and being through the ownership and possession of 'the land'.

## WHAT IS "THE LAND"

For purposes of the occasion of the World Wide Pan African Convention and the Africanist revolution, "the land" has traditionally been referred to as that which is above, inside and below the surface of the soil. An extended and additional definition would be: fauna and flora, soil, minerals, waters of rivers and the oceans, the fish in the oceans and the atmosphere.

## INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The advent of industrialisation in the West prompted countries of Europe to go out in search of raw materials and markets. Various attempts were embarked upon to explore and conquer foreign land. For the continent of Africa, these attempts culminated into the Treaty of Berlin 1884-85 where the European countries took the map of Africa as provided by extensive explorations from as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century. They divided the continent among themselves by drawing boundaries that would satisfy their geo-political appetites.

This Treaty ushered in the colonial period of the African continent. The first imperialist war in 1914 – 1918 confirmed this when it became known as the Era of the Great Powers. Britain, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Germany spread their imperialist wings by colonising Africa and Latin America. While Spain and Portugal focused their attention more on Latin America, Britain and France concentrated more on Africa. Britain went on to spread its conquests to North America and Asia. To the extent that a maxim was coined that went "The sun never sets in the British Empire".

## LAND CONQUEST AND DISPOSSESSION

The primary and most fundamental contradiction of colonisation is **land dispossession**. The most permanent and effective mode of maintaining and retaining dominance over the indigenous people and their land is subjugating them to the authority and power of the foreign coloniser through the state and its apparatus like the police and army. The entire political, economic and social order is designed and orchestrated to oppress, exploit and degrade the indigenous people for the sole purpose of exploiting their productive resources – in this context, the land. The most outstanding example in Africa occurred at the time when Britain, through the Sand River Convention, gave independence to the Orange River Sovereignty. A few years later, as soon as diamond was discovered in Kimberly, Britain came back hurriedly to re-colonise the province. Again, a few years later gold was discovered in the Reef or Transvaal. Britain re-conquered the province after having jettisoned it earlier.

From the arrival of Jan van Riebeck and his entourage in their three ships in 1652, the French Huguenots in 1785 and ultimately the British settlers in 1820, the European settlers from three different countries at that time, usurped the land of the Afrikan people in the southern tip of the continent.

Experiences of the dispossessed, oppressed, exploited and degraded African masses will always be sourced from the more than nine (9) frontier wars that were fought in the Eastern cape between the British and isiXhosa speaking African people, the Battle of Blood River between the Boers and Zulu speaking, Isandlwana between the British and Zulu speaking people, Thaba Bosiu, Sandile's Kop, Slagter's Nek Rebellion and ultimately Bambata

The entire history of the suffering of the African people due fundamentally to land **usurpation and dispossession** is well documented and chronicled. It is a subject that has to be told persistently, relentlessly, unambiguously and authoritatively from generation to generation. Justifiably so.

## **THE LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND THE LAND QUESTION**

From 1912 with the consolidation of the small resistance movements that led to the formation of the ANC, the land question was not articulated as primary, fundamental and critical. It was Anton Mziwakhe Lembede who after intensive and extensive research declared "In every revolution there is an item of conflict. From 1912 up now, we have not identified the item of conflict in our struggle. Now we have: the "item of conflict in our struggle is the usurped land".

The ANC Youth League, under the leadership of Anton Mziwakhe Lembede and Solomzi A. P. Mda drew the Nation Building Programme of Action. After four years of struggle to have it adopted at successive ANC conferences, it was ultimately adopted at the 1949 Conference in Bloemfontein as document 80 of the occasion. One of the notable and significant aspects of the Programme of Action was and still is the fact that is recognised the usurped land as

- The item of conflict and
- The basis of the Azanian struggle.

It went on further to recognise and acknowledge African Nationalism as the banner under which the African people should be united and rallied in order to repossess their land. That analysis and synthesis were, still are and will always be potent in denotations and connotations

The Freedom Charter reversed this revolutionary ideological position in 1955 when it alleged "**that the land belongs to all who live in it, Black and White**".

It took the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania in its 1959 Manifesto to reclaim the authentic position on the land as was originally stated in the Nation Building Programme Action of 1949.

The formation of the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania was a PAC project. The essence of their philosophy was the "dispossessed land" as a source of destruction and alienation of the Black Personae. They were also hell-bent on the repossession of the land.

## **LIBERATION MOVEMENTS - ARTICULATION OF THE LAND QUESTION**

After the Sharpeville and Langa massacres of the African people in 1960, the Liberation Movement in the ANC and the PAC were banned by the minority colonial settler regime. They went into exile while some of those remaining were mandated to form underground structures. Military wings came to the fore. Outside of Azania, the Liberation Movement had the mammoth task of convincing the so-called international community to appreciate, understand and agree with the struggle and its essence. The ANC propounded what the Freedom Charter said and went on to adopt the elusive view that "White people own and possess 87% of the land while Black people own a paltry 13%. We want to share the land". The PAC and Black Consciousness Movement were saying originally "The

land belongs to the indigenous people. We want our land back". The majority of the so-called international community was attracted to the position (the A-APRP was an exception) that said "the land belongs to all who live in it" as contained in the Freedom Charter. Hence the abundant support that the ANC enjoyed from the Soviet Union and some of the Scandinavian countries.

Let us park these two positions for the time being and examine the meaning of "White people own 87% of the land and Black people own only 13%".

The conquest and dispossession process was systematic, vicious, ruthless and bloody. It oppressed, dehumanised, exploited and degraded the African people. It made them slaves in their own country as indigenous people. All that they originally called their country had become the sole ownership and possession of the European Settlers. The Settlers thought of a strategy of making African people believe that they also own land. They created what they euphemistically called "homelands" which became notoriously known as Bantustans to the liberation movement and the masses.

Now here comes the nub of it all.

## **ORIGINS OF MISREPRESENTATION AND MISINTERPRETATION**

The Settlers take all of the fauna and flora, the soil, waters of the rivers and oceans and the fish therein, minerals and the atmosphere. They relegate the masses of the African people as the indigenous people to some parts of the country that they either believe were too difficult to annex due to traditional system of government or were too arid and unproductive for their ownership. In some instances they would group some townships together and declare them a homeland or part thereof. Some of these Bantustans were hardly ten miles or sixteen kilometres wide.

When a foreigner dispossess the indigenous people of their land and relegates them to some parts of the land that he does not require or need, do the indigenous people own the piece that they have been relegated to? The maxim is simple "**Partial and piecemeal allocation after total dispossession and usurpation does not equate or constitute ownership**". The fact that the settlers decided to allocate the Bantustans to the African people after dispossession, does not render the indigenous people owners. The acts of dispossession and usurpation supersede any piecemeal allocation thereafter. A favour will never be equal to or mutate into a right.

## **MISREPRESENTATION OF THE LAND QUESTION BY THE LIBERATION MOVEMENT - EFFECTS AND IMPLICATIONS**

- It relegated the land to the visible soil that people see and trample on daily. This made the Land Question to assume a quantitative position of relative obscurity in the Azanian Revolution. The fauna and flora, waters of the rivers and oceans and the fish therein, the minerals and the atmosphere were completely unsighted and not internalised by the masses. In a word, they completely escaped their consciousness. Resultantly, the masses of Azania did not perceive the need to fight for **independence**. They were made to believe that it was premium and first prize to fight for "**freedom**". This dilemma was well summarised by Robert Mugabe when he addressed the South African parliament in 1995 "**while you were fighting for "freedom" we and the rest of the African continent were fighting for independence**".
- This erroneous position took the Azania out of the range and radar of the Africanist revolution. It deflected the struggle to "colonisation of a special kind" and thereby alienated Azania from the rest of the continent. The intensity of African consciousness became a casualty within the bounds of Azania. Azania was no longer viewed and regarded as part of Africa but an extension of the West. It was left to the PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement to fight the tedious battle of restoring African dignity and humanity among the indigenous masses.

- When the masses learnt of the message of 'the land' from the PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement, the question would be "What are you going to do with the land when you cannot even plough it. You do not have the expertise to work the land that the Boers do?"
- Where a semblance of understanding and appreciation of the land prevailed, the masses would think and believe that they and their Liberation Movement do not possess the military capacity and potential to repossess the land as the settlers are just too rooted and established in occupied Azania.
- Much as the PAC and Black Consciousness Movement were very clear in terms of the ideological position that Settler Colonisation was the problem in Occupied Azania, the land question was not articulated in the revolutionary and qualitative manner that the dispossessed, exploited, dehumanised and degraded would attribute the entire misery and constant agony of their lives to the usurped land.
- Evidence points that very few if any, countries, especially in Europe, outside of the African continent, were prepared to support a struggle by any of the liberation movements whose primary intention was to repossess the land from the settlers. The Soviet Union, as a Socialist hegemony, had its own selfish agenda for supporting the liberation movements in Africa.
- By short-circuiting the revolutionary definition and interpretation of the land, the Liberation Movement deprived the Azanian and Africanist Revolution of the critical element of settler colonisation. Therefore decolonisation was not seen and viewed as an essential and primary prerequisite for fighting for independence. The entire morass of the operational failure of the New South Africa can be traced and attributed solely to the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the Land Question as a determinant of power relations
- Finally, the class contradictions that are embedded in the issue of land as a fundamental productive resource or means of production, got blurred and lost in the unclear, ambiguous and unauthoritative presentation of the land question in the Azanian revolution

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