

The youth of our time, constitutionalism and the future of 'South Africa'

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"Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it." – Frantz Fanon

Introduction

Any historically legitimate analysis of the condition of the youth of 'post-apartheid South Africa' must commence with the conquest of 1652 by European conquerors of Dutch descent who became white settlers of 'South Africa' through land dispossession and epistemicide. The point is to underscore the historical fact that following this conquest, the youth of our time is divided into the youth of Azania¹ and the youth of 'South Africa'. The latter is the successor in title to conquest since 1652, while the former comprises the descendants of the indigenous conquered people without title to territory lost in the wars of colonisation and racism/white supremacy according to Frances Cress Welsing in *The Isis Papers* (1991). This essay will endeavour to demonstrate the fundamental antagonism between this divided youth as reflective of the nature of our time and the vision of the future. This antagonism is also the premise on which the image of the future and tomorrow rests.

The youth of the generation of Muziwakhe Lembede in *Freedom in Our Lifetime* (2015) and A.P Mda in *Africa's Cause Must Triumph* (2018) formulated African nationalism to negate white settler colonialism as it manifested itself during their time. According to Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism* (2000), the Black Radical Tradition pursues the negation of Western civilization and seeks to remake the world

¹ Azania is considered the original name of the Southern tip of Africa.

in terms of African ontology and epistemology. This is how Robinson (2000: 112) states it, ‘The transport of African labor to the mines and plantations of the Caribbean and subsequently to what would be known as the Americas meant also the transfer of African ontological and cosmological systems; African presumptions of the organization and significance of social structure.’ African nationalism, as formulated by Mda’s and Lembede’s youth, is a manifestation of the Black Radical Tradition in ‘South Africa’, thus an Africanist tradition. This youth was pursuing ‘historical being’ by formulating and translating into political praxis African nationalism in the form of the Manifesto and the Programme of Action. In so doing, this Azanian youth was challenging ‘the terms of order’ (Robinson 1980) of white settler colonialism in ‘South Africa’ of their time.

The genealogy of ‘the terms of order’ of white settler colonialism is traceable to the conquest of 1652 which eventuated in land dispossession and epistemicide (Ramosé 2007). The European conquerors who conquered the indigenous people through a series of genocidal wars of colonisation brought about ‘in the wake of’ this conquest the generational split and antagonism between the youth of the European conquerors and the youth of the indigenous conquered people (Sharpe 2016). This racial generational split and antagonism centred on the contestation around the sovereign title to the territory (Ramosé, 2002) and thus constitutes what Sobukwe (1957) called the ‘nature of the struggle’ of the youth of our time. This contestation which the living-dead of the current youth of Azania embarked on within the native sphere was incorporated into the white settler sphere through constitutionalism since 1853 in the Cape.

The contestation in line with ‘the terms of order’ of the native sphere was premised on the rejection of the entire white settler world and its constitutional order, such as the Nongqawuse moment in favour of *Isizwe sa Bantu/Sechaba sa Batho*. The fervent pursuit of the restoration of sovereign title to territory was an attempt to re-institute the Azanian world which was conquered by the European conquerors and their successors in title to conquest. It is important to note that the youth of Azania in every generation since the 1652 conquest was characterised by those who pursue ‘historical being’ and those who pursue ‘actual being’. Lebelo (2020: 49) states the following: ‘The distinction made between historical being an actual being corresponds to ka Plaatjie’s *amathamba* and *amagogotya*, respectively. It is also about distinguishing between the uncompromising and total rejection of colonial imposition as opposed to seeking forms of cooperation with colonists. Such was the contrast between Ndlambe and

his prophet Makana on the one hand and Nggika and his prophet Ntsikana on the other. At the risk of oversimplifying Robinson, *amathamba* renounced actual being for historical beings as did Ndlambe and his prophet Makana.'

The generation that accepted 'the terms of order' of white settler colonialism were categorised as 'civilized natives' in terms of the Cape Liberal constitutional order and Rhodes's slogan of equal rights for all 'civilized men' as Magubane states it in *Social Construction of Race and Citizenship in South Africa* (2001). These 'civilized natives' who pursued 'actual being' chose to agitate for civil rights in terms of the constitutional order as 'instituted' by white colonial settlers since 1853. This is the generational conflict within the youth of Azania which persists to this day in 'post-apartheid South Africa'. In other words, as far as the youth is concerned, we have a generational conflict within the youth of Azania and an antagonism between the youth of Azania and the youth of 'South Africa' as successors in title to conquest since 1652.

The conflict of the youth of Azania is a 'secondary contradiction', while the antagonism between the youth of Azania and the youth of 'South Africa' is a 'primary contradiction'. The conflict of the youth of Azania manifests itself as between those who pursue 'historical being' in the sense of negating the white settler world in line with the native sphere and those who pursue 'actual being' in the sense of assimilation into the white settler world in line with the white settler sphere and its constitutional order, as 'instituted' according to Castoriadis in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975) by European conquerors and maintained by their successors in title to conquest since 1652.

The condition of possibility for the conflict of the youth of Azania between those who pursue 'historical being' and 'actual being' is the conquest of 1652 by European conquerors and the 'institution' of the constitutional order from 1853 to our time with the final constitution. It is, however, the 'primary contradiction' that emerges 'in the wake of conquest' since 1652 which defines 'the nature of the struggle' of the youth of today who are of historical necessity the descendants of the indigenous conquered people and the successors in title to conquest since 1652.

This 'primary contradiction' as the foundation of the fundamental antagonism between the youth of Azania and the youth of 'South Africa' takes the political form of the fundamental antagonism between Azania of *Abantu* and 'South Africa' of *abelungu*. It is *abelungu* as white settlers who invented 'South Africa' and regard it as 'the white man's world'. Thus 'South Africa', whether at the beginning as the

Boer Republic and later juridically as the Union of South Africa, as a Republic of South Africa under apartheid and in our time as post-apartheid South Africa, is by *abelungu* and for *abelungu* as white settlers. The youth of Azania have an ethical and historical obligation to restore Azania by bringing about the demise of 'South Africa'. This means that the youth of Azania has a revolutionary role to restore sovereign title to territory, while the youth of 'South Africa' has a conservative role to maintain the status quo of conqueror South Africa (Ramose 2018).

The Rhodes Must Fall movement, just like the 76 youth of BC, was premised to a certain extent on the Azanian tradition of the youth since the time of Lembede and Mda thus represented an attempt to bring about the demise of 'South Africa' and the 'institution' of Azania. The youth of this movement was to a certain extent beginning to pursue 'historical being' until this movement became the 'Fees Must Fall' movement, thus a pursuit of 'actual being'. Therefore, these two movements represent the 'secondary contradiction' as a conflict within the youth of Azania. For the Rhodes Must Fall movement, Cecil Rhodes was an archetypical white settler who symbolised land dispossession and epistemicide in the form of conquered Azania and the emergence of the 'secondary contradiction' and the pursuit of 'actual being' in the sense of 'equal rights for all civilized men'. Thus, the Rhodes Must Fall youth of our time was beginning to 'reimage tomorrow' in the form of post-conquest Azania which must succeed conqueror South Africa according to Ramose in *Towards a Post-conquest South Africa: Beyond the Constitution of 1996 (2018)* 'in the wake of' the restoration of sovereign title to the territory to the indigenous conquered people conquered in the wars of colonisation since 1652 by European conquerors such as Rhodes. However, the condition of possibility for Rhodes to fall and the restoration of sovereign title to territory is the abolition of the final constitution (Modiri 2018; Dladla 2018), thus the demise of post-apartheid South Africa as a heritage for the youth of 'South Africa' as the successors in title to conquest since 1652. In conclusion, for the youth of Azania today who are pursuing 'historical being' to 'fulfil their mission', the fundamental question of historic justice remains to be 'answered' *in the revolutionary sense* in favour of the indigenous conquered people, namely 'To whom does the land belong?'

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