

Analysing Anatomy of Violence After Apartheid

WHEN people are quick to celebrate the end of apartheid in South Africa, Rich Mkhondo, Reuters correspondent, tells the story of how his friend Johannes died.

Arriving home from work one day, Johannes was shot by a group of men from the nearby migrant labour hostel who had just wiped out his family. They bundled him into the trunk of his car, and then set it alight.

Mkhondo reached the house several hours later and as a journalist was allowed past the police gathered outside.

He found the family's dog lying dead in the yard, shot and stabbed. Inside the house Johannes' wife's body lay covered in blood. In the bedroom their 14-year-old daughter had been stabbed in the chest and shot in the eye. Her 10-year-old brother was inside a cupboard, hacked with a cane-cutting knife before his throat was cut. Finally Mkhondo found his friend's mother in the visitor's bedroom, behind a pile of clothes and blanket. She had been shot.

The assailants broke furniture and made off with clothes, jewelry and a television set. Neither Johannes nor the rest of his family belonged to any political organisation.

This kind of violence has become a daily occurrence in South African townships like Kaitshong, where Mkhondo has spent his 37 years. It is

one of the biggest threats to the achievement of a peaceful settlement at the multi-party talks, which are the focal point of Mkhondo's first book, *Reporting South Africa*.

As a journalist he has travelled up and down the country and interviewed most of the leading figures involved in creating a new South Africa. He has produced a thoughtful and detailed account of the past four years, which fills in many of the gaps in local as well as international coverage.

Mkhondo dismisses simplistic explanations for the violence that is ravaging his country.

President F W de Klerk likes to talk of "black on black" violence, but Mkhondo has spoken to victims who say their attackers were brought to the area in vehicles driven by white men. Others report that while their attackers had covered their faces, some had white hands.

Chief Mongosuthu Buthezi, head of the mainly Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), declares his followers are the victims of "ethnic cleansing". But where the violence began, in Natal, Zulu fought Zulu.

The African National Congress (ANC) has spoken repeatedly of a "third force" orchestrating the violence. But there are so many different strands to the conflict that no one has been able to pin point any third, fourth or fifth

Alexandra Zavis writes from London

Drawing on nearly 10 years experience as a journalist Rich Mkhondo has published a book which sheds new light on evolution of South Africa's problems. He spoke to Gemini News Service about the complexity of the country's continuing violence, and the possibilities for peace.

Shedding light on a turbulent transition



Journalist Rich Mkhondo
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forces, Mkhondo says.

There are plenty of police and army members who are unhappy with De Klerk's reforms. Informal surveys suggest 60 per cent of junior and 50 per cent of senior officers

in the Defence Force support the pro-apartheid Conservative Party.

And police action in the strife-ridden areas has been far from even-handed. Mkhondo has himself witnessed Inkatha

attacking communities while the police simply looked on, and the ANC is quick to point out that their followers make up the vast majority of arrests.

De Klerk, for his part, has failed to take decisive action to bring the security forces under control, despite mounting evidence of widespread corruption, covert funding of pro-apartheid organisations and death cells set up to eliminate political opponents.

The ANC accuses him of pursuing a double agenda of talking to them while allowing the violence to continue in a bid to weaken them. Whether or not this is the case, Mkhondo points out in his book that De Klerk is under enormous pressure not to antagonize the security establishment.

"There was the fear that if his vision of power sharing in South Africa failed, he might not only have to rely on them, but could also end up being ousted by them," Mkhondo writes.

Meanwhile the police complain of insufficient resources and a lack of cooperation from the community. Township residents, however, have not noticed this sort of problem in tracking down the black killers of white farmers, for example.

Mkhondo insists the causes of the strife are multi-faceted and complex. All sides admit that their followers are "not angels." But underlying it all

are fundamental social and economic imbalances.

He writes: "Millions of blacks are caught in a spiral of landlessness, homelessness, unemployment and poverty. Add to that a clash between modern political structures and traditional tribal ones. Mix in a struggle for hegemony in the region between major political players... Stir in the security forces in all their guises. Add faceless, apparently trained killers such as the 'third force'... Sprinkle all that with ancient and recent political or social grudges, and you get a deadly brew."

A settlement must be reached before these problems can be seriously addressed, he argues, but the perpetuation of the violence makes such a settlement all the more difficult to achieve. Meanwhile, more and more people are becoming disillusioned with their leaders and with the whole negotiating process.

"They get tired of hearing about 'breakthroughs' which are reported every day in the press, while they can't see anything tangible coming from the negotiations," Mkhondo says.

Now when Mandela tours the townships to offer support to survivors of the carnage and spread his message of peace, he is met by crowds demanding arms to protect themselves.

It is a dangerous situation, one which Mkhondo believes has impressed most negotiators with the need for a speedy resolution to the talks.

But the process drags on, because there were no winners or losers in 1990, and all parties are still trying to get as much as possible out of the negotiations.

In one sense, however, Mkhondo believes the continual delays may have been a blessing in disguise, as there has been much convergence of ideas between the different sides.

De Klerk began by opposing the election of a constituent assembly, wanting a constitution to emerge from the multi-party talks, while Mandela resisted the notion of "power sharing." Now an election date for an interim government of national unity has been set.

But far right groups still threaten to sabotage the process. They are demanding their own white homeland and insist that if all constitutional avenues are exhausted, they will have no choice but to resort to violence. Their numbers are small in comparison with the vast majority who accept the transition to a democratic society, but their military power is disproportionate to their electoral strength.

Meanwhile expectations of what a new government can achieve are high, and the inevitable disappointments could fuel more violence.

Mkhondo is excited about casting his vote for the first time, but he knows that when he walks out of the polling booth on 27 April, he will confront the same violence and deprivation for some time to come.

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Interpreting Scriptures

BOOK REVIEW

ERROR THY NAME IS THEOLOGIAN

by Muhammad M R Abdullah

Published by Vantage Press, New York

Price 15.95

Reviewed by Khan Ataur Rahman

ERROR, THY NAME IS THEOLOGIAN!



Muhammad M. R. Abdullah

SOMETIMES you come across a book which, after you have gone through it with some attention, leaves you stunned. And you begin to ponder over all the points the author tries to establish against the centuries old notions held fast as faith by the believers all over the world including yourself, concerning the meaning of the deliberations of God Almighty in the Scriptures delivered to Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (SM), the three messengers who were chosen by the Lord Himself to be the recipients of the divine books.

If you happen to be acquainted with any of the translations or the interpretations of the theologians who endeavoured to reveal the meaning of the Scriptures, you are sure to be in a fix failing to decide whether any of the earlier interpretations or the present one is to be accepted. Such is the wide gap between Mr Abdullah's interpretations and those of the others.

The book I am referring to is "Error Thy Name Is Theologian", by Muhammad M R Abdullah, and although the book has not been released by any book-seller of Dhaka, a few copies are available with Sheba Publishers, CB 110, Mohakhali, Rajshahi, Dhaka.

To be honest, most of the believers remain content with just reciting the verses of the holy Books, the old and the new Testaments and the Quoran in the original languages, in which they were delivered by God Almighty. Some of us who try to understand the meaning of the verses take recourse to read the translations and the interpretations of the learned theologians and consider that we have grasped the meaning of the verses. This has been the practice with the millions of Jews, Christians and the Muslims all over the world.

The contents of the book "Error Thy Name Is Theologian" offer such new interpretations of the Scriptures that one is confounded with a sense of awe.

Say for instance when the author, with adequate quotations from the Bible and the Quoran, establishes with precise exegetic arguments that Jesus was not born just by the wishes of God alone but he was born as a normal human child to a human couple and he was neither crucified nor raised to the heavens and as such his

second coming is a fanciful idea, the believers may be shocked and will declare that the pronouncement of the author is insane and sinful. Similarly Mr Abdullah's explanation of the episode of God's creation of Adam is so very different from all the interpretations produced till now, that this will also not meet the approval of the vast majority of the believers. But to persons having the basic knowledge of the biological process of procreation in the living beings and who are capable of thinking for themselves, the proposition may trigger a new trend of ideas.

According to Mr Abdullah, many of the conventional concepts based upon the inadequate explanations forwarded by the theologians are thoroughly wrong and this has been proved with profuse quotations from the three Scriptures, offering his own interpretations which are indeed different from those of the others.

The author maintains that if the Scriptures are the direct dictations from the Infallible God why then should there be so many divergences and confusions over the meaning of the verses. And he concludes that it is the erroneous interpretations of the theologians that have given rise to such contradictions over the sum and substance of the holy Books. Probably this is why he vents his anguish by naming the book in the Shakespearean sarcastic style.

The author who is a Bangladeshi citizen and now a resident in Canada, has obviously gone through an arduous and, wholesome study, research and enquiry of Bible and the Quoran. It is a milestone in the studies of the holy Scriptures and will, I am confident, regenerate interest in religious learning and will convince every discerning reader who has been endowed with divine gift of reason and is capable of thinking for himself/herself that the holy Scriptures are not mere fables of the former times as they were and are even now disdainfully considered by some. They indeed are storehouses of knowledge and fountain of learning.

In fine, the book deserves the attention of those who have the yearning for knowledge. It may give some clue to a newer dimension of the Scriptures.

HAVING failed 5 times in 11 days, I ventured upon taking the children to Gulistan — probably the first air-cooler fitted cinema hall of this part of the sub-continent, to witness a much awaited movie. Right in front of the hall, tickets were available! One did not have to approach the hall counter. As I had already made up my mind, I did not hesitate to get hold of the tickets. But lo! The ticket counter of middle stall and DC were open! The DC tickets were priced taka fourteen only.

Gulistan cinema hall has a historical background. It is best not to repeat that fact — at least, not now. What is more important for the authorities concerned to take note of is ... the hall needs a thorough renovation, which I feel certain, is not too difficult or impossible. This much neglected hall needs the 'screen' to be 'washed' if not wiped with care and out of true love. After all, it is always the name and the fame which draws viewers to a certain cinema hall. The sound system was so 'horrible' that during the 'interval' a handwritten 'slide' appeared on the 'soiled' screen: "The audio of the film has been recorded in computerized sound track. Therefore, the hall authority is not responsible for the faulty sound" — (in Bangla).

The seats were more than half broken down — putting me to wonder if the concerned authorities ever bothered to visit the inside of the hall. The chair I was sitting on, had no 'foam' or the 'softness' one is sure to expect. The chairs — or the much prestigious seats were very, very, unsafe. So dangerously unsafe that as I stretched my arm to hug my daughter I cut my arm. Although I use spectacles since a boy of class four — there was nothing wrong with my glasses; and yet I felt the light on the screen was not enough for which the movie appeared rather unclear or somewhat dull as though the whole movie had been 'shot' on a moon-lit night — or was being shown during one. To make sure, I asked my daughter and my niece if they felt all right about the clearness of the picture that appeared on the screen. They declared promptly that the picture was clear but there was not enough 'light', something must be wrong with the 'machine'. Well, I guess by machine they meant the 'projector' that 'rolled' the film. So, the roof did not fall down upon us nor did any 'fire' break out. We came out happily! The children were filled with bliss. They, on their first visit to a cinema hall, had witnessed as excellent movie. Whoever said: Bangladesh can

Large Screen Viewing

by Mujibul Haque

not make artistic and enter-taining movies, and in this country there are no genuine movie goers ought to think to ponder upon a new thought. Do we have a cinema hall that give us the expected atmosphere in and outside of the cinema halls?

These days the ticket counter at the movie halls do not in general allow advance booking over the phone — a practice in the past which allowed the "reserved" tickets to be collected by the caller or an authorised person. In fact, these days one cannot even book two days in advance as was once customary. Cine-goers would also point out that it is very difficult to even "see" the booking clerk! Nowadays, the glass that allowed a full view of both sides — those in the queue and the ticket sellers — has disappeared to be transformed into iron grille and hard board! There is a hole large enough for a burly person to thrust one's hand with the cash and withdraw with the ticket. To "see" one would have to crouch and peer; a procedure most find embarrassing. Others, of course, could not have cared if the ticket was being dispensed by a Martian or a Venusian: all they are interested in viewing are the tickets and the movie.

Again, the counter is opened perfunctorily just before show time to fulfil some sort of formality. Its plus point is that one maybe lucky enough to get tickets at the normal rate. Some film fans, however, avoid this queue as well because of unpleasant scuffling incidents that often break out. In one case, there were a few moments of intense fist-cuffs. The ardent fans were not scared off, but the faint-of-heart giggled on seeing in the "raw flesh" what they had been so used to enjoying only on the screen — large and mini. They ended up buying their tickets in the 'black'. Sometimes the stick wielding khaki-clad guard at the gate also stands at the side of the counter, seeming to be a "threatening" figure more to the occasional viewer than those in the business of re-cycling tickets!

The ticket dilemma can be solved in a manner of speaking. Re-cycled tickets are ALWAYS available, including hours and hours before the movie, but at the "appropriate" price, which is not actually inappropriate considering the nominal price of the ordinary tickets and the marketplace of other recreational facilities, and essentials! But the dilemma of providing an aesthetically uplifting environment is yet to be solved.

Previously, the audience was decorous and in the case of the third class — very discerning. With them quality matter a good movie with dialogue in English or in any other earthly language, causes them no displeasure. But a so-called art film in any language moves them to protest in various ways including being vociferous or failing to buy tickets, thus causing the film to be removed in a few days. Today there is little distinction; majority of the viewers is practically an unadulterated mass. And the vendors of chips, cold drinks

behave accordingly — as if they were in a football stadium! The inside of a cinema hall matches the outside. At one time the audience waited for their time at the toilet. These days they make their own arrangements in addition to those existing in the halls. Pathetically, this is true both inside and outside the hall.

Smaller and new movie halls are projected for the future. They are to be part of a complex: restaurant and a shopping arcade; movie seats for only 50 to 100. The size is to enable the complex authorities to cater to the sophisticated and the family movie-go-

ers, including car owners. The lure is a large screen and a congenial atmosphere, booking over phone, the children can be watching a movie while the parents conduct a business conference meeting. The construction of such places in shopping arcades are being held up in this region by urban blights like hartals, bombs, flooded streets and hijackers.

At the moment, far from being on the wane such occurrences are flourishing to an extent that is deterring economic growth. However, prosperity is on the rise world-wide and it is a tide which cannot be restrained for long. And with

prosperity certain, urban dangers, would decline and the rest can be tackled.

But what of existing halls ... surely they can be revamped, at least in terms of cleanliness and renovation — restoring their former glory. No open drains, no pot holes, no puddles, no smeared walls.

Neighbourhoods and the viewers cannot be changed but they can be given a chance to grow along more favourable lines.

After all, when our movies have caught up with the outside world, so as to be indistinguishable as far as qualities like colour and acting, why can we view them in peace only in pirated or other video versions?

Why not on the large screen as some movies can only be viewed, including the one mentioned.



A Memorial Theatre

One of the most acclaimed figures in the history of the British theatre was Dame Eileen Terry (1847-1928). She was highly regarded not only by discerning audiences but also by the theatrical establishment.

Her memory lives on today in the form of a museum and barn theatre, pictured here, at Smallhythe Place in Kent, southern England, the sixteenth-century house she bought in 1899. She lived in the house whenever she was not away working, and died there in 1928. The museum and theatre were opened as a memorial just one year later. Over the intervening years some of the most respected names in British theatre, such as Sir John Gielgud, Dame Sybil Thondike, Paul Scofield, Emlin Williams, Dulcie Gray and Michael Denison have played there.

Visitors to Smallhythe Place are able to view the thatched barn theatre, among other outbuildings, and absorb its atmosphere, but audiences for performances are subscribers belonging to the Ellen Terry Barn Theatre Society.

In this picture members of the society are seen at a dress rehearsal of 'The Dresser' by Ronald Harwood.

Despite the passage of time and various incidents, Smallhythe Place has managed to retain many of its original features and is considered a solid testimonial to the soundness of early Tudor Kentish construction. It served first as the Port House to what was then a thriving shipyard, acquiring its new name — The Farm — and purpose when the sea receded and agriculture took over.

The house is now owned and run by the National Trust, a charitable organisation that helps to conserve historic houses and parklands all over Britain.

LPS

Surya Sen

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Lallor, which Surya Sen used to quote: "Somehow, somewhere and by somebody a beginning must be made and the first act of resistance is always and shall ever be premature, impudent, unwise and 'dangerous'."

ANANDA GUPTA a surviving fellow comrade of Masterda Surya Sen participant in the Chittagong Armoury Raid. The above are edited excerpts from a piece he was asked to write for Surya Sen Birth Centenary Celebration Committee, Calcutta University.

A Criticism of Modern Society

In an important book, "La Societe contre l'Etat" (Society against the State), Pierre Clastres questions the essential: the nature of power, its origin and the transformations that history imposes on it depending on the types of societies in which it is wielded.

REFUTING the generally accepted assumption according to which archaic societies are classified into societies without a power and societies with a power (or with a State), P. Clastres takes the example of the American Indians organised in archaic societies led by chiefs who do not have a political power, that is to say do not have a power of coercion.

Thus, the Indian chief, whose power, controlled by public opinion, depends on the good will of the group, practically lacks authority.

In that case, what "role" does he play?

He is a person who has to be generous with his possessions and cannot, without going against his position, reject the unceasing demands of those under his administration.

He is a "peace-maker", the mediating authority of the group who settles disputes arising between individuals and families, and re-establishes order through the use of speech and thanks to the prestige invested in him by the society.

But, although speech is the only power that the chief holds and although it is, in fact, a duty for him (being good orator is an essential condition for becoming chief), he is not a judge and his word does not have the force of law, except in a state of war.

That is why primitive society is a society without a State and against the state, as it prevents an individual, central and separate power from emerg-

ing. Society itself and not the chief holds the real power.

Moreover, the essential feature of this society is to exert absolute, complete control over everything making it up, preventing the autonomy of any of the sub-groups in it, and directing all conscious and unconscious internal movements, which arise in it, to the goals that it has fixed for itself.

"legitimate violence"

However, the state, that is to say the authority of hierarchy, the power relation and the subjection of men, made its appearance. It is this phenomenon which brought about the topological distinction between savages and civilised peoples by creating a break beyond which time becomes history.

For this reason, a parallel is generally drawn up between the birth of the state, which was a political revolution, and the shift from nomadism to sedentarisation which appears to be the most important consequence of the neolithic revolution, leading to a concentration of a stabilised population, the creation of towns and social organisation (5,000 to 2,500 BC), and the setting up of state systems.

The latter appear to have had the capacity of imposing alienation by having recourse to a force which is the very substance of the State, the "monopoly of legitimate violence".

This force of coercion, which is identified as being political power, is external to the social body. It gives birth to a taste for accumulation by

compelling people to give up leisure and denouncing the refusal to work.

It thereby destroys primitive society as such, as the latter is egalitarian in essence. In particular on the score of exchanges. Indeed, in that society, the equal capacity of everyone to satisfy material needs and the constant exchange of goods and services make the private accumulation of production useless and the desire for possession impossible as it is simply a desire for power.

Moreover, the birth of the State appears to sanction the legitimacy of private property which appeared earlier. The State thus appears as the representative and protector of proprietors.

But then why did private property appear in a type of society which, because it refuses it, knows nothing of property?

For Clastres, the relation of power precedes and founds the economic relation of exploitation. Thus, before becoming economic, alienation is political and property is the seed of what these societies do not know: authority, oppression, and the State.

This is all the more the case as the breaking up of the population leads to provisional alliances and the atomisation of the tribal world is surely an effective means of preventing the setting up of large sociopolitical groupings. This is a supplementary way of preventing the emergence of the State which, in its essence, is a unifying force.

— Catherine Mariani