

This is a passage with which Kogi strongly disagrees.  
I love it. What do you think? W.

430. E6.2

The Comfort of Victimization

Why do professionals and relatively privileged persons, the main constituency of the extra-institutional alliance, eschew the politics of compromise in favor of an often self-destructive commitment? What feeds an absolutist stance of revolutionary identification that is prepared to suffer the consequences rather than sacrifice a moral purity for less heroic accommodation? What moulds a revolutionary and a successful revolutionary movement?

One answer suggests that the middle-class protesters can afford their abstention from compromise. The collaborating compromisers, on the other hand, are said to need the patronage of the state, because of their material handicaps in lower class positions. This materialistic explanation overlooks important psychological motivations: symbolic grievances, concern with dignity and status that triggers political resentment.

Generally speaking, there are basically only two major preconditions for radical political activism: (1) a clear perception of the source of misery, (2) an expectation of success to triumph over the enraging cause. While the first condition persists in South Africa, the expectation of likely victory remains doubtful. Despite the rhetoric of crisis in the ruling groups, most apartheid opponents realize that Afrikaner overlords are not going to give in to genuine power-sharing for the time being, let alone democratic majority politics. Hence, the unfocused rage against all symbols of authority, particularly collaborators, prevails.

This surprising hostility against "sellouts" in their own ranks, not only among Africans, but also among middle class Indians and coloureds in the wake of the constitutional reforms points to a phenomena that could be called the "status of victimization". Paradoxically, uniform racial debasement provides at the same time unadmitted psychological gratification.

For one, racial discrimination allows the attribution of individual failure to a collective fate. In this sense, common victimization generates a new identity of the oppressed. To be part of a larger whole, singled out for unequal treatment, relieves the anxiety of having to cope alone against overwhelming odds.

Above all, racial stigmatization grants moral superiority to the victim, particularly when the oppressor is on the defensive. With the worldwide condemnation of Apartheid, even among political conservatives in the West, the self-legitimation of South African rulers is affected. Most educated whites are embarrassed about obvious racialism. Their victims, indeed, have history on their side and both sides know it. The intellectual territory that Afrikaner nationalists occupy in defense of bureaucratic racialism is slipping away with their very policies implemented to entrench it.

This moral imbalance frequently makes the Apartheid opponents revel in their righteousness. Christopher Lasch has observed a similar rhetorical highlighting of plight in the United States where "interest group politics invites competitive claims to the status of victimization" by the rhetoric of moral outrage. The Israeli novelist Amos Oz senses the same self-gratifying piteousness in the relationship between Jews and Palestinians, worth quoting at length:

"Even if one day all of us arrive, we and they, at a searing compromise over the Promised Land, there will never be a compromise - never a concession, not one inch - on the right to be considered the victim. Never on the joy of the oppressed. Or on the bittersweet warmth of the feeling that the whole world is against us, and nobody understands us, and that we are little David facing the giant Goliath.

Over and above reality float, like a sweet clout of

hashish, the pleasures of piteousness and self-indulgence  
And in this the two peoples are indeed as similar as brothers."

Even when South African liberals have settled abroad, they love to be pitied about the "ordeal" they went through. Some say they were traumatized. Those staying behind in the SA concentration camps "hang in". Nadine Gordimer, for example, is regularly marketed in North America under the label of "Survival in South Africa". She speaks of writers and "everyone else living in South Africa" as being "up to the neck". In reality, all whites, regardless of their political feelings, inevitably lead the lives of a privileged upper-caste. The difference among them lies between the complacent and those sensitive about their undeserved rank. It is this latter group that needs to dabble in agonies. In the Indian and coloured segment the self-enriching collaborators spoil this illusion: the image of drowning in a sea of evil that reconciles privilege and political passivity with the aura of moral superiority. No question pleases the literate Apartheid opponent more than the foreigner enquiring: "How can you stand it?" In this respect the white liberals in the UDF and the blacks complement each other. They both experience the comfort of victimization, although the price for the gratification is far higher for the black than the white beneficiary. Political purity is the power of the powerless.