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BLACKNESS WITHOUT LAND IS SOULLESS

Blackness is our being as Afrikans; and that being derives meaning from its organic relationship with the land. Blackness is our cultural essence and expression as a people. Settlement is critical in the formation and development of culture. The habitat for human settlement is land. If land is the necessary resource for settlement, and settlement for culture, then Blackness is unthinkable without land. Therefore, land is the soul of our Blackness.

Settlement gives rise to community and solidarity. It is communal settlement that provides us a mutual platform protection and development because of the pooling of our numbers, skills and resources. You have to survive to develop and prosper. Therein lies the need for Black Solidarity, which offers us mutual protection and confidence to strive towards shaping our common destiny.

The term “Black” is found in at least two dimensions, which are the Descriptive Black and Political Black. A number of the names of Afrikan countries denote that they are “the land of Black people”. Some examples are Azania (South Africa?), Ethiopia, Nigeria, Khemit, Niger, Sudan, etc. The naming of these countries relies on the Descriptive Black. In this instance, Blackness is anchored to the land, settlement, culture, solidarity, identity, self-determination and development. You take away the land, all the mentioned values crumble. The only force that offers some support and keeps some values in place is the liberation struggle.

As a people, our collective connection to the land is fundamental. That is the National Question out of which Afrikan Nationalism is born. White settler-colonialism and racism make us qualify that Afrikan Nationalism as Black Nationalism to embrace our Blackness as Afrikans. The South African Students’ Organisation (SASO) – the pioneer organisation of the BCM, used to have a slogan that said: “Before you are anything else, you are Black first”. Before you are a worker, business person, lawyer, priest, scientist or student; you are Black first. That means before you gained all the other descriptions, you must be conscious of the fact that you have been dispossessed of your land. This is a call for Black Solidarity or Black Nationalism, to be more emphatic. This raising of the national consciousness constitutes the character of the Azanian liberation struggle.

Conscious of the fact that the modern society is divided into social classes, we conduct social theory and analysis to better understand this society. That social theory brings us to the conclusion that the agents of change for our liberatory efforts are the working class. In the Azanian context, racism has imposed a vertical line that cuts the working class into two segments. They are the Black and white sections of the working class. It is that racism that disqualified the white section as workers in the ideological sense of the word. The privileges accorded to the white section by racism deformed them into a labour aristocracy. Put differently, racism distorted the white section's relations to the means of production. That is how AZAPO came to the inescapable conclusion that the Black working class is the agent of change that should lead the liberation struggle for the repossession of the land both as the heritage of Black people and as the primary means of production. We are now in the domain of the Social Question. In terms of the paramountcy of the interests of the Black working class, all other social classes of Black people have to rally behind the Black working class. The persistence of the white settler colonialism in the form of neocolonialism in the era of democracy, has given us concrete reasons to retain and pursue our political analysis in AZAPO.

In recent times, the application of the Agents of Change theory has tended to be revised in order to divert the struggle for land repossession, total liberation and socialism. The revision manifests itself at three levels. First, it seeks to use religion to drag Black people away from the liberation struggle. They are indoctrinated to stay clear of "Earthly" things and work for the "Heaven". Instead of fighting for a liberated Azania, they should worship for the "Kingdom of God". This revision is designed to retain the status quo. It is reactionary and anti-Black. It must therefore be rejected. We must not be misunderstood as calling for the rejection of religion. As a matter of fact, religion is the integral part of a culture of a given people. We consider religion as an attempt by those people to develop an understanding and a relationship with what they deem as their Supernatural or Supreme Being. Properly understood, religion makes spiritual sense when it is practiced and expressed through the culture of the indigenous people. However, we know how colonialism and racism have forced the colonised people to practice a foreign religion at gunpoint. We also know how an attempt was made through Black Theology to develop a radicalised version of the foreign religions. This was a progressive attempt to work towards the restoration of the Black Soul, so to speak.

The second revision is the attempt to elevate Women's Liberation Struggle over and above the struggle for Land Repossession, Total Liberation and Socialism. The analysis of the triple oppression of women is correctly made. That is in terms of Gender, Race and Class. The theorisation moves from here and place women as the "agents of change" above the Black working class. What the theory forgets is that women are more of a social group than a social class with a definite relationship to the means of production. In this regard, it is a grave mis-analysis to locate women as the agents of change. Like the religion revision above, the crude version of this revisionism forces the people away from the struggle for Land Repossession, Total Liberation and Socialism. It soon mobilises Black women against Black men. The system sees the unfortunate rift and use it to instigate for the weaponisation of rape and sexual harassment against Black men. This polarity has the effect of disorganising the fighting masses and undermining Black Solidarity. By the same token, it goes further and trivialises the oppression and pain of Black women. To be sure, femicide, rape and sexual harassment are part of a misogynistic scourge. Society must rise and ruthlessly fight this scourge. However, this struggle cannot supersede and replace the struggle for Land Repossession, Total Liberation and Socialism. In fact, the Women's Liberation Struggle is an important part of the struggle against landlessness, colonialism and racism.

The third revision is the identification of an issue like electricity or evictions and mobilise the people into a social movement to fight the issues. This is a progressive and viable strategy for as long as it does not elevate the social movement above the Liberation Movement. The social movement should never pity itself against the Liberation Movement. The shortcomings of the issue-based struggles are that they tend to defocus the people from the real and fundamental questions of the liberation struggle. If the issues were to be addressed, that spells the “end of the struggle”. However, the struggle against the identified issue ought to be interwoven into the fundamental demands of the overall liberation struggle.

Like it has been said, Blackness and Land are inextricably intertwined. The loss of Soul by Black people has to be associated with the loss of land. The repossession of the land amounts to the restoration of the humanity, soul and dignity of Black people.