

William Gumede: Harold Wolpe Lecture 30 August 2009

Introduction: 77th session of Harold Wolpe Memorial series for rigorous analysis. Tribute to Harold Wolpe and the importance of independent thought

Gumede biography was read out.

Gumede starts:

Thank you for your introduction and thank you all for coming. My interest has been: Why do African independence and liberation movements after fighting liberation struggles with very high ideals, when it comes to government, do they all disappoint?

This question has different levels. The first level is: why do these liberation movements not get it right on democracy? And the second is: why do these movements not transform their economies into equitable ones?

Most liberation movements start off with extraordinary legitimacy because they had fought liberation struggles. This meant that they had popular support to transform their societies and it hence it was easy for them to mobilize. But they wasted their legitimacy. This also meant that they could get away with failure for a long time.

So then we need to ask; why did they fail?

They don't get the transition right from liberation movement to governing party. The way that a liberation movement operates is totally different from the way that a democratic party does. The characteristics that made these movements effective as liberation organizations undermined them once they got into government and made it difficult to pursue democracy and economic management.

To be successful as a liberation movement, you were normally fighting against a brutal colonial/white minority government and the way that you battled against these governments was that your organizational structure was such that decision making was never done in a broad democratic sense. You have to make decisions on the hoof. Fair enough, this makes the liberation movement flexible because the leaders make decisions and then the followers/activists follow. But, once you are in government, unless you immediately break with this kind of culture, it is very difficult to undo it.

Liberation movements have huge legitimacy which means that when they come to power they have the ability to broadly mobilize people. In order to become successful, you must make yourselves the embodiment of the people, to stand for the people. The problem is that once you are in government and you then see yourself as the only representative of the people, you struggle to see opposition as legitimate (both opposition within and without). Also, coming out of a back ground of a liberation struggle, there is always the danger of infiltration. Hence, these movements are always very well internally policed. Internal criticism is only allowed to a small degree. The problem then comes in

when you are in government and you are still in that kind of culture (where dissent is seen suspiciously), where all criticism is infiltration or an attempt to undermine.

Liberation movements want to transform societies totally. They see the state as an extension of the party itself and in the bid to transform that society they start to cross the line between the political party and the interests of the state/nation. Related to that, is that because liberation movements have such a huge degree of legitimacy, what they can do is that they can delegitimize opponents. There is nothing necessarily wrong with that, but if one is building opponents in a new democracy and then the opponents are delegitimized, it undermines your attempts to build a democracy.

Many liberation movements fought wars of liberation and in order to do so, you need to structure your organization to become effective in that struggle, like an army. That army-like way of operation becomes internalized. With this kind of organization, you cannot build democracy, based on ideals of openness and transparency. To fight wars, these organizations had to break themselves into units to fight campaigns. When you come to power, you need to break with this culture or it becomes too difficult to do in the future.

Colonial struggles are brutal and required harsh internalization of how to operate in this kind of environment. These are the military-like ways of doing things referred to above. That kind of culture becomes the culture of these movements once they come to power – Angola, Mozambique, ANC – because of the danger of opponents who are able to infiltrate the movement often results in some members of these organizations being assassinated. People who were under suspicion were isolated and checked out. This war of liberation allowed these killings to take place.

Once coming to power, opponents can be seen as people who can be eliminated, which is very dangerous.

Many of the liberation movements fail because while they want to transform society, but they have not managed to transform their own political parties. Their path is then to transform their own political movements first in order to build a sustainable democracy.

These liberation movements are so influential and have such legitimacy that whatever they do/how they manage themselves internally spills over into society at large. So if there is a certain kind of political culture, this spills over into the way that politics in that country operates.

Liberation struggle was never really about democracy (even if there was talk about this in the slogans and songs of these movements), it was about independence. Even though there were songs about democracy, this was not the fundamental goal. Many liberation movements held a suspicion towards democracy, saying that it was a luxury – ‘development first’ was the slogan, then only can we think about democracy.

There were only two African countries that were serious about democracy: Mauritius and Botswana, and comparatively, they have done better than their peers over the past 50 years. On a different level, some leaders and thinkers have viewed democracy in a very limited way – independence/elections is democracy. You can also see it after elections in the way that African continental structures rubber stamp elections in countries saying that ‘democracy has been fulfilled’. Donor countries in 60’s, 70’s and 80’s also used elections as the only test of democracy and a tool to decide whether democracy had been fulfilled, reinforcing this focus on elections as the marker of

what a democracy is. Amartya Sen says that democracy is universal. In every element of African society, there are democratic elements. One argument has been made is that democracy is liberal/western and un-African.

Botswana is not a 100% democratic but they have used democratic elements of their tradition to build democracy in the country. Look at the concept of the legotla – the chiefs never had unilateral powers – there was an attempt to build a consensus at a community level. The legotla then allowed the community to hold its representatives accountable. They did not make the argument to say that democracy was un-African, but innovated using their own culture to pull the values of democracy and tradition together.

Now, looking at Mauritius, there are some similarities to South Africa. The Labour Party was similar to the ANC (set up in 1920, fought a liberation struggle). But, what happened 5 – 10 years after independence? The Mauritian Labour Party split into two. Overnight, two movements were created with the same legitimacy. The rump of the legitimate Labour Party had to contend with its opponent, a group with the same kind of legitimacy, creating a healthy contest between the left and the centre left. Neither side could allege that the other was less legitimate.

Botswana was much more conservative kind of liberation movement, but they had made an attempt to make democracy work – without trying to make excuses (it is un-African, 'development first' etc)– they tried to make it work from the beginning.

The opposition movements, when they come to power in Africa, have traditionally been very ineffective in a number of ways. Some of them were compromised from the beginning because they were linked to groups that were a part of the colonial government (illegitimate) or if they are totally new, they didn't organize like social movements (gives the example of the National Party which also had the Broeder and Sisters bond and other elements of an expression of a group of people that went beyond a political party). Opposition parties did not build branches/put their roots very deep into society: like taking people to apply for an ID, going beyond the political, linking themselves to the church and civil society. This is the only way to build legitimacy if you are a new movement that has never had a history.

Why do liberation movements struggle?

Many people try to say 'look at Asia' – the frequent argument of looking at Ghana and South Korea by referring to their similar levels of development in 1958 and so why, in the past 30 years, has South Korea industrialized and Ghana gone backwards. South Korea got a lot of aid – from the last 1950s to late 1980s, it got an equivalent amount of aid to all African countries combined (according to the World Bank). But, if you put that aside, some countries like Botswana and Mauritius played the Cold War more pragmatically (same as South East Asia).

Everyone remembers the drought in Ethiopia in 1970s and 1980s. Over the same time, there was a drought in Botswana of the same severity. Yet, in Ethiopia, over 1`million people died, while in Botswana, no one did. The cabinet meetings of the Botswanan government show that while some countries went for emergency aid to wealthy countries or to the IMF, they went to the Scandinavian countries to ask for partnerships – playing the Cold War pragmatically.

Perhaps another way in which Botswana was different was that it was under threat when it became independent in the 1960s and 1970s – it had South Africa in the South, Mozambique in the East, the old Rhodesia next to it (white minority government) and the old Namibia (controlled by South Africa). They were squeezed, just like South Korea, with that fear that if you don't develop you will be overrun because you were surrounded by enemies who were much bigger than yourself. The only way to get out is through economic development. Most African countries did not have the same kind of fear and when they did have that sense, they thought that they could get themselves out of this crisis by arming themselves, in comparison to the Botswanan example (economic development). Mauritius was the same – an island economy that was vulnerable and unless there was development, it was open to attack.

These two countries were clear that they wanted to develop economically – they wanted to be like Singapore. They set themselves targets of where do they want to be in 20 years, in comparison to other African countries that wanted to discuss going back to traditional ways of communal living (which did not address the dilemma of how these countries 'get themselves out').

To sum up, many African countries wanted to be like the East Asian countries, they all wanted to develop. They had 5 year programs, but why did they fail? African countries did not have the same kind of commitment to develop. In African countries, there were maybe a few people committed to economic growth, in comparison to East Asia where entire societies were dedicated towards those ends – Japan had dedicated teams (MITI). There were no arguments about 'going back' to a traditional/communal style of economics. African countries were caught up in ideological debates between Maoists, nationalists and free marketeers that did not allow a clear development agenda to be created. But, Botswana and Mauritius were much more pragmatic around economics and economic development.

Questions

Piper, affiliated with COPE: Do you think that the emergence of COPE is a sign of the normalization of the South African political landscape and how would you judge COPE?

For an opposition movement to work, you need to have legitimacy. This is what COPE had initially. But they lost the battle. Jacob Zuma and the ANC managed to cast them as being responsible for the past 10 years of poverty. The attempt was to point to Mbeki and business as the reasons for the failure to serve poor people during these years. It was a different ANC, a totally different party. COPE was not able to fight this fight for legitimacy. People were angry in these past elections with the ANC and each time that they directed their anger at the ANC, Zuma would say, yes you should be angry with the ANC, I am also angry with the ANC. But, this was a different kind of ANC because those guys are out. COPE's legitimacy was thrown out of the window and it did not have the kind of flexibility to respond to these allegations.

People are saying that they want to see change and this is the pressure that is going to be on Zuma. This is a major change in our democracy because we have ended the indefinite success and legitimacy of the liberation movement. The ANC got elected on a performance mandate not only one based on liberation credentials. The people are saying that here is a mandate of performance. Now you, the ANC, has to deliver.

Anthony Silberberg. One thing that you did not touch on is the difference in skills required from running an independence movement in the bush versus skills needed to run a modern country. What can be done to develop these skills in Africa? How can we do this?

African states after liberation were crisis states. The typical African countries were so diverse, had no real private sector and a very narrow middle class. Often during the last days of the colonial movement, they favoured one ethnic group (the old divide and rule strategy). After independence, there was an immense amount of resentment. There were also no democratic institutions, even though they may have been there in form, but they were only really tools that the colonial government used to oppress people (eg parliament buildings). As a new government, you need to recreate all of these things. You then need a special kind of leadership, but liberation movements are structured in a way such that the leadership that these movements have can never come out.

For example – take the ANC. When Mbeki was elected as the deputy ANC leader and he could assume this position because he was the kind of leader that the movement wanted during exile, he could 'tick all of the correct boxes'. He went to Moscow, he was in exile. He had enough military support and had the different areas of the ANC wrapped up. Then compare Mbeki to Ramaphosa, an outsider. He was a foreigner within the ANC itself. This was the way in which the liberation movement was structured that made it very difficult for someone who had not watered all of the correct pots to make it to the top (patronage networks). These movements made it very difficult to allow talent to rise through the ranks.

The UDF and all of the other movements defer too much and have demobilized themselves. This was one of the biggest mistakes of South African democracy and the transition as a whole.

Perhaps, if we could turn the clock back, if you were a part of the internal wing, you would have better been able to manage the economy. If you look at someone like Ramaphosa, who had engaged with the economy through the union movement, you had a much better understanding of how things worked. The UDF managed to mobilize such a wide variety of people showed that we did have the skills necessary to create and run a democracy, but these skills were marginalized.

Then the people themselves just deferred – like Ramaphosa – who just left and deferred to the will of the party are also to blame for allowing certain kinds of leaders to emerge and remain entrenched in their positions (it is not just the structure of the movement, nor the demobilization of the UDF, but the decisions of individual actors too).

Ruth Hobbes: Botswana and Mauritius are both were very small countries with small populations. Would this not make it easier to develop democracy there?

Most African countries are small, with small populations. Botswana and Mauritius are therefore average African countries. Yes, the size and complexity does make it more difficult, but not impossible. Look at Mauritius at the first 5 years before and after independence was a bloodbath. No one thought that this country would hold. But, they managed to sit together and create a country together. You can make the case that Botswana was slightly more homogeneous (all spoke Tswana), but there were many independent and diverse communities.

Even South Korea had clans, with strong ethnic components. Yes it is more difficult, but it is not impossible.

Sindney Locket (works for provincial government). In South Africa, we had a well organized grass roots and democratic organizations in COSATU and the UDF. These were democratic in their processes. Many leaders who emerged from this process left these movements then went into government. But why, when they went into government, did we get a different kind of governance?

QUESTION WAS NOT ANSWERED DIRECTLY

Locket family: What is the link between democracy and development? There appears to be a cradle that Fidel Castro created and hence the question arises as to whether it is possible to achieve high levels of development at the expense of democracy?

This is a long term debate. Democracy is needed for development. Some African leaders will try and point to South Korea as an example of how a lack of democracy allowed them to develop. Take South Korea, which did not have a strong civil society or labour movement and did not have a big business sector. South Korea managed to create a social pact which was more complex than just democracy. They created the pact between people, government and business. They structured this pact from the starting point that 'we are all in this together'. If the labour movement were to agree on concessions (no striking for 20 years), then business can make the environment a profitable one (government will also reduce taxes), but then business in turn has a responsibility. Government said to business that they would have a business friendly environment, but then business needs to look

after their workers through training and skills, paying them a living wage and increase productivity. Government also said to business that it would need to guide them into areas where it thinks that it can become competitive. The pay off for the union movement was that they would be looked after. Government was then committed to acting in the social interest at all times. This social pact meant that everyone had responsibility. The pact broke in the 1980's once the country had achieved industrialization and the labour movement/civil society had become that much stronger in South Korea. Other developing countries did not manage to do this - take Brazil over the same period. If they tried to get into these kinds of pacts, business always benefitted more – lack of living wage and skills development while government was corrupt and the pact was broken.

In South Africa, we could try and create a social pact. We could say that we are in the midst of the current economic crisis and the only way to get out is to create a pact together. The unions could commit to 5-10 years of lower wage increases but in return you will get benefits. Each role player would act in good faith, with the government acting in the public interest, not siphoning off money on the side.

South Korea did not have a big business sector in the 1950s. They also had to embark on an empowerment program, which is one of the lessons that we can learn from this period.

If you are a South African Ramaphosa and you get your R1 billion empowerment deal due to your connectivity. But, now that you have it, you have a responsibility. You had to create jobs and you had to commit to creating, for example, a 100 000 jobs, and if you did not do, it, then could even be executed. The responsibility was yours to sign up to. This is why black economic empowerment is going to fail in South Africa (lacks this element of reciprocal responsibility).

Mabaso from the Pan Africanist Movement. I have 2 questions.

Q1: As an African in South Africa, I am a bit worried about the examples of Botswana and South Korea. We know that both of these are under American influence. Are you saying that in order to be successful, we must take that route as South Africa?

QUESTION WAS NOT DIRECTLY ANSWERED

Q2 (Mabaso): Difference between liberation and democracy. Can you expand on this further because both of these have to do with economic power which is a problem currently in African countries? You also did not mention what Nkrumah said that political power without economic power is meaningless because Africa is still suffering from neocolonialism.

QUESTION WAS NOT ANSWERED

Samir Lumguni (local government and housing). You said that the liberation movement seemed to be militant and it needed to change from that kind of leadership to a more democratic kind. Do you think that there are other factors that contribute to liberation movement's inability to achieve economic growth?

QUESTION WAS NOT ANSWERED

AnnMarie Wolpe

Several questions and here are two which are linked. I have no idea what kind of economy South Korea had before industrialization. Was it rural, what was the community like? You suggested that the community idea within African societies that continues irrespective of the rural urban divide. The notion of 'they organized/instructed' but who was the 'they'? Who instructs who? You have to produce? Who is accountable to whom and how can they ensure it? Looking at the work ethic of Europeans in comparison to Africans, who creates that ideology around work ethic? COSATU does not say anything about those people who are unemployed.

Asians are working harder than everyone else. When you make a social pact, you need to create trust that everyone will play ball. The East Asians had a sense of peril, which served as a binding agent and encouraged people to sacrifice. The peril made people work together. Eg Japan, which was destroyed after WW2, needed to pull together as a society or risk losing it all. Your country is going to be destroyed unless you are going to work together unless you sacrifice and work together. That sense of peril was the driver of development. If we do not develop, it was the end of us as a country.

What is the binding element in SA? If we do not get it right as a country, we are going to explode and all we have worked for, it will be gone. We don't have any other choice. Everything that you have, your values, your culture, all will be gone unless you are able to get on par with those people who might destroy us.

Why was it a wasted opportunity in Africa? The legitimacy of being a liberation movement gave these organizations the chance to transform society and experiment. But, if you have not done anything about it in 20 years, well, then ...

Ordinary members of liberation movements are too lenient, they give their leaders too much political space, a blank cheque. What we need to do, is to say that you as a leader have certain kinds of responsibilities to us. Unless we get that kind of accountability, we will not develop.

Back to the work ethic – if you know that when I sacrifice, government will also do it, as will business, as will all members of society. Jacob Zuma is now sending out ANC members to municipalities to calm people down in terms of delivery and the recession. But at the same time, ministers are buying R1.5 million cars. To get the work ethic, you need to have the moral authority. If Zuma would say that all ministers would return their cars and would only buy a car of R160 000 and counselors are moving out of the suburbs and back to the community, everyone would take a pay cut. Can you imagine the difference?

The ANC is going to lose the moral authority and the ability to enforce and contain the current discontent around service delivery protests. Yes, they will be able to send in the police, but only for a relatively short amount of time.

The ANC needs to show that they are also cutting back. Not in superficial ways like PR exercises, but in real ways (like removing the 8 car long hummer blue light motorcades). If this is a recession, why

is government also not cutting back? Government is the example to the rest of society. These are the tough choices that need to be made.

Look at Botswana, when leaders used to stand in the queue for the post office, they went to the same shops, they helped to build a sense of a social pact. There was not revolutionary rhetoric but acts of solidarity between the government and the people (especially during the famine mentioned earlier).

Matamthomba. I think that the issue of democracy seems very problematic because in SA, the issue of western influences, and in SA our economy is controlled by somewhere else. Even our policies are controlled by western influences. These western influences are not interested in democracy, only profit. How do we as a country talk of democracy when we are facing this tsunami called globalization. Making an example of Botswana, when they follow a system used during colonialism. Why don't we have our own way of democracy? Do we think that our leaders are controlled by someone else? Are all African leaders suck ups to the West?

One of the reasons why African countries have failed is that they did not manage to play the ideological battle well. The East Asians managed to play the cold war better than the Africans. South Korea, while some may say that it is a part of the Western Axis, they were smart about how they played the international game. S Korea used the aid money and put it into one department, where they employed the most talented people in the country, whether you were a part of the ruling party did not matter, whether you lived abroad did not matter. They used this aid very effectively. They played this ideological rivalry so well.

Botswana and Mauritius managed to play this game better. If you took all African countries that were aligned to the USSR, then look at how much money did you get from them? Did you get military support or development aid? It does not matter which side you were allied to, it matters how you managed to play the game. During the drought in Botswana, they managed to get aid from across the ideological spectrum, which was a purposeful attempt, rather than just limiting themselves to one side of the Cold War. We know what America wants, what China wants, how do we tackle all of them in the right way to maximize our own interests? This is what the Asians managed to do successfully.

Look at one of the great debates of the 20th century: the role of the state in economic development. How far could the state play a role? The USA was saying that the state should not play any role in economic development in comparison to the USSR which said that the state should create it all. Then whichever side you supported you had to follow that model. Then look at the countries of South East Asia – they used both: the private sector and the state. This kind of pragmatism was the key to their success.

Botswana and Mauritius are now at a stage when they can 'take off' and start to industrialize. Even if they are not perfect, their levels of economic development show that they are primed to be at this point. Which countries are better able to survive the current financial crisis than these two?