

# WAR, PEACE AND CROSSFIRE IN CAPE TOWN



QUINCY SAUL REPORTS FROM THE FIRST  
PANAFRICAN CONFERENCE ON NONVIOLENCE.  
ORGANIZED BY WAR RESISTERS INTERNATIONAL  
CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, JULY 2014

# WAR

## Reflections from the War Resisters International Conference, Cape Town 2014: Part 1 by Quincy Saul

*“At night during the blackout rebels chanting 'we want peace! We have come for peace!' locked up whole families in their houses and set them ablaze...” Andrew Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, pxx<sup>1</sup>*

A decade into the 21st century, the world appears as an immense accumulation of battlefields. Like this snapshot from Sierra Leone, these battlefields are blurry and horrifically confused. The differences between civilian and soldier, between allies and enemies, have become ever more porous and permeable. War and peace themselves have become difficult to clearly define or distinguish. How does one begin to tell the story of war?

The historic gathering in Cape Town, South Africa of War Resisters International this July provides a unique opportunity to answer this question. Delegates and representatives from 56 countries and five continents all came with stories of war; civil wars, resource wars, proxy wars, wars of national liberation, and wars of counter-insurgency, all in uneven and combined development. Together they revealed a catastrophic collage of a world at war, with billions of lives at stake.

Is there a method to the madness? Or are we condemned to a world of permanent war, declared and undeclared, without origin or ending? While millions have marched for peace, it seems to have had little measurable effect on the overall state of the world. Not only does war continue, but we lack clarity about the nature of war. In Cape Town we met individual war resisters of immense personal courage, who have great understanding and vision. But we also met people whose simplistic rhetoric about peace and anti-militarism seemed transplanted unchanged from World War 1. The peace movement in the First World in particular, taken as a whole, seems to have taken literally the old song “we ain't gonna study war no more.” But to understand our world at war, to see cause and effect working amidst murder and mayhem, to know the enemy and rally humanity against it, it is our prerogative precisely to “study war more”!

### What is War?

*“The situation is much more complicated than we have led on.” - Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, Semiotext(e), p61*

In the venerated towers of the academy, studious scholars have devoted themselves to the study of war. Some of their conclusions are surprising and revealing: A well credentialed consortium<sup>2</sup> of scholars and professors currently contend that the world now enjoys a historically unprecedented peacetime. Steven Pinker, who has written an 800 page book on this subject, writes:

*“War appears to be in decline. In the two-thirds of a century since the end of World War II, the great powers, and developed states in general, have rarely faced each other on the battlefield, a historically unprecedented state of affairs. . . . After a 600-year stretch in which Western European countries started two new wars a year, they have not started one since 1945. Nor have the 40 or so richest nations anywhere in the world engaged each other in armed conflict.” (Ibid.)*

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1 “The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade,” by Andrew Feinstein, 2011

2 “The Forum: The Decline of War,” edited by Nils Petter Gleditsch (Centre for the Study of Civil War, Peace Research Institute), by Steven Pinker (Harvard University), Bradley Thayer (Utah State University), Jack Levy (Rutgers University) and William Thompson (Indiana University). *International Studies Review*, 2013

Reading this after attending the conference in Cape Town is almost enough to make one believe in parallel universes. Global military expenditure is currently soaring at \$1.6 trillion per year, an increase of 53% over 14 years ago. (Feinstein, pxxii) The US military operates over 200 military bases worldwide, and is now making military interventions in dozens of countries without approval of its Congress. The last decade alone has witnessed to 10 million deaths in the Congo [<http://www.allthingspass.com/>], and another 10 million dead directly and indirectly as a result of the US War on Terror.<sup>3</sup>

The scholars of the most prestigious academies seem to be just as lost as the rebels of Sierra Leone about war and peace. It has been said the truth is the first casualty of war, and we must ask in such a world as ours, is truth still alive? Or are we condemned to a post-modern nightmare, buried in infinitely accumulating and overlapping battlefields, with no prospect at unraveling cause and effect, lost to navigate without a map, or with infinite maps, between the classrooms of Harvard University and the battlefields of Sierra Leone? It seems we must back up and ask “what is war?” To answer, we must see through and beyond the twin insanities at both poles of a world at war.

### **A Brief History of War**

Modern history is the history of war.<sup>4</sup> There are written records of local warlords battling each other for thousands of years. They fought with neighboring warlords and sometimes launched crusades and conquests against foreign powers. As some gained power, warlords and their bandits styled themselves as monarchs and nobility.<sup>5</sup> With the treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the biggest players divided up the spoils, and the concept of territorial sovereignty was sealed and enshrined. Over the ensuing years of continued war, peoples became nations, and protection rackets became nation-states. War graduated to another level, with increasing numbers of people and resources engaging in ever more frequent wars upon both neighbors and distant continents.

Only a few centuries later, war emerged from adolescence, when as Eqbal Ahmad noted, the West began number their wars. [<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/eqbalahmadcoldwar.html>] The ascendancy of monopoly capital led to imperialist war, with all the industrial nations locked in a brutal contest for market share, dragging in the rest of the world as proxy cannon fodder.

As peoples became nation-states, and as sovereign territories gave way to monopoly capital and imperialism, one of the most important changes in the history of war occurred: The targets of war were no longer the soldiers but the civilians, no longer and the territory, but population.<sup>6</sup> From General Sherman's devastation of the US South in its Civil War, to the Allied powers firebombing of Dresden in Germany during World War 2, to Winning Hearts And Minds (WHAM) in Vietnam, the people themselves – not soldiers, barracks, or state institutions – became the objects and victims of war.

With the conclusion of World War 2, the structural crises of monopoly capitalism (overproduction and stagnation) were temporarily resolved through the assemblage of the Military Industrial Complex (MIC) which solved these crises by providing a bottomless drain for the investment

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3 “The (US-complicit) 9-11 atrocity killed about 3,000 people but the subsequent War on Terror has directly killed about 10 million people, the breakdown being 2.7 million (Iraq, 2003-2011), 5.0 million (Afghanistan, 2001-2011), 1 million (Somalia, 2000-2011) and 1 million (global opiate drug-related deaths due to US Alliance restoration of the Taliban-destroyed Afghan opium industry). In addition, about 7,340 US Alliance military personnel have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. “*The Post-9-11 Decade by Numbers: The American Holocaust*” by Gideon Polya, <http://www.stateofnature.org/?p=5176>

4 For the prehistory of war, see “Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale,” by Maria Mies, 1999

5 “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime” by Charles Tilly, from *Bringing the State Back*, edited by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

6 “Five percent of all casualties in the First World War were civilians; the figure for the Second World War was 50 percent, and that for the Vietnam War was over 80 percent. In current armed conflicts over 90 percent of all casualties are civilians, usually from poor rural families.” Derek Summerfield, quoted in “Tropic of Chaos”, by Christian Parenti, 2012, p25

of surplus capital.<sup>7</sup> And so World War 2 flowed almost seamlessly into the Cold War, with the logic of population as military target reaching its apocalyptic conclusion in the permanent possibility of global nuclear war and human extinction. Meanwhile, Cold War in the US and Russia was hot war in the rest of the world. [ <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/eqbalahmadcoldwar.html>] Every struggle for national liberation became terrain for proxy war, and the horrors of war filled Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The demise of the Soviet Union ushered in the next chapter of this story. The MIC had become far too structurally entrenched over the previous 40 years for de-escalation (let alone disarmament) to be a real possibility in the world of realpolitik. So with only one superpower remaining, the next chapter in the history of war began. This is the remarkable global peace which the imperial scholars see in the mirage above the flames. No longer did standing armies face each other in trenches, planes and battleships. In this period, the violent inertia of our story, combined with the economic imperatives of the MIC, has been outsourced to the proxy battlefields of the global South.

If the First World has experienced unprecedented peace in the aftermath of the demise of the Second World, this peace is built upon long lists of military interventions against the Third World. The list of US military interventions after World War 2 is instructive:

[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_United\\_States\\_military\\_operations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_United_States_military_operations)] These are not your grandparents' wars – the difference between the World Wars and modern military operations is vast. When Jean Baudrillard said that “The Gulf War Did Not Take Place,” he was not crazy; he had his fingers on the pulse.<sup>8</sup>

Unleashed with Desert Storm was a world war, but a very different kind: Armies do not face off, industrialized countries do not fight one another. Commanders fight communities, soldiers fight civilians, and precision missiles fight IEDs. This is the Pax Americana. Over 200 military bases oversee both unprecedented peace and “a war that will not end in our lifetimes,” as former US vice president Dick Cheney promised.

In response to the scholars of the end of war, we have the words of Eyal Weizman: “war was only over because now it was everywhere.”<sup>9</sup> Or as Deleuze and Guattari put it, “Total war itself is surpassed, towards a form of peace more terrifying still.” (p119) This terrifying peace is most evident in the United States. Ask a decorated veteran:

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7 Istvan Meszaros explains: “Only ‘The Nation’ could promise to satisfy the dual requirements of providing an inexhaustible purse on the one hand, in order to make possible capital’s enlarged self-reproduction, and a bottomless pit, on the other, to swallow up the resulting waste. (p593)” The agency willing and able to cut the Gordian knot of how to combine maximum feasible expansion with the minimum rate of utilization presented itself for capital in the shape of the military-industrial complex, following a number of failed attempts to deal with the problems of overproduction in less wasteful ways after the world economic crisis of 1929-1933. (p587) “In other words, it allocates a massive and ever-increasing portion of society’s material and human resources to a parasitic and self-consuming form of production which is so radically divorced from, and indeed opposed to, actual human need and corresponding consumption that it can envisage as its own rationale and ultimate end even the total destruction of mankind.” (p591) (Beyond Capital, by Istvan Meszaros, 2000) See also “Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Social and Economic Order,” by Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, 1966

8 “The Gulf War Did Not Take Place,” by Jean Baudrillard, 1995

9 “Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation,” by Eyal Weizman, 2007. Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, in their book “Unrestricted Warfare” elaborate further: “We have no reason for optimism. This is because the reduction of the functions of warfare in a pure sense does not mean at all that war has ended. Even in the so-called post-modern, post-industrial age, warfare will not be totally dismantled. It has only re-invaded human society in a more complex, more extensive, more concealed, and more subtle manner. It is as Byron said in his poem mourning Shelley, “Nothing has happened, he has only undergone a sea change.” War which has undergone the changes of modern technology and the market system will be launched even more in atypical forms. In other words, while we are seeing a relative reduction in military violence, at the same time we definitely are seeing an increase in political, economic, and technological violence. (p6) [W]hat we have done is nothing more than substitute bloodless warfare for bloody warfare as much as possible. As a result, while constricting the battlespace in the narrow sense, at the same time we have turned the entire world into a battlefield in the broad sense. On this battlefield, people still fight, plunder, and kill each other as before, but the weapons are more advanced and the means more sophisticated, so while it is somewhat less bloody, it is still just as brutal. Given this reality, mankind’s dream of peace is still as elusive as ever. (p221)

*“To define war in America is an impossible task. Because for us, war is a way of life, a cultural milieu. We declare war on everything: Drugs. Crime. Terrorists. Obesity. Wolves. Cancer... We search and destroy purple-mountain majesties by cutting off their peaks, fracking them, and destroying everything that surrounds them, humans, animals, plants, water, air soil. We blast oceans with sonic waves to test our warring capabilities accidentally killing thousands of dolphins, whales, and numerous other species, collateral damage. We wage war on sharks for shark-fin soup that magically gives hard-ons to ultra-rich connoisseurs. We wipe out rivers, lakes, forests, an whole ecosystems and argue it's a betterment or necessity of life. We extinguish species, cultures, civilizations. . . . Perhaps instead of future war(s), we should simply think of perpetual war. . . . They will not be televised. They will not be broadcast on corpora-tocracy TV. They will be battled anonymously in the middle of the night inside the castles and fortresses of our homes against the pit-bulls of governmental police, often ending in staged suicides or accidental sudden deaths.... They may well be our last battles, for if we lose there will be nothing left to fight for, nor any reason to resist.”<sup>10</sup>*

I apologize to the reader for this lengthy introduction. We are upon the threshold of a major and unprecedented convulsion in world history. I have taken the time to back up so far in the telling of this story because it is necessary to back up a great deal, and get a running start, if one wishes to leap forward. This brief history takes us up to the present moment, but what lies ahead? Is there an exit door in the twists and turns of this bloody labyrinth which we might find and break through? We must map the path ahead in order to break from cycles of action and reaction, and chart a prefigurative path towards peace.

### **Tomorrow's War**

*“If you want to discuss war, particularly the war that will break out tomorrow evening or the morning of the day after tomorrow, there is only one way, and that is to determine its nature with bated breath, carefully feeling the pulse of the God of War today.” Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, “Unrestricted Warfare”<sup>11</sup>*

In our age of information, the numbers are easy to come by. The size and scope of tomorrow's war can be measured in the records of the arms trade. “For to say arms or war,” as Don Quixote said, “is the same thing.”<sup>12</sup> The scale, content, and directionality of the arms trades are all relevant, so let's take a look at each.

*Directionality:* It is for the most part those strangely peaceful countries which contribute most to tomorrow's wars, by selling the most weapons. The leading dealers include the US, the UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Holland, and Italy. Israel, Russia and China are also major players. (Feinstein, xxiii) The recipients of these weapons, for the most part, are the formerly colonized nations. 90% of all weapons in the whole continent of Africa, for instance, are imported.<sup>13</sup>

*Content:* While there is much attention to Weapons of Mass Destruction and stealth bombers, tomorrow's war will be defined more by small arms, drones and “non-lethal weapons,” which are manufactured and distributed in much greater quantities than the most expensive and publicized

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<sup>10</sup> “The Future is Now”, by R.G. Cantalupo, who has three Purple Hearts, and a Bronze Star with a Combat V from his 1968-9 tour with the 25th infantry division, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, The Veteran, Spring 2014 Volume 44 Number 1)

<sup>11</sup> “Unrestricted Warfare,” by Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, 1999

<sup>12</sup> “Don Quixote” by Miguel Cervantes, p377

<sup>13</sup> “Loaded,” BBC focus on Africa, by Khadija Sharife. A recent report goes further: “Between 2004-2008 and 2009-2013, arms imports to states in Africa increased by 53 per cent. . . . while imports by states in Europe decreased by 25 per cent.” (“Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2013, by Siemon T. Wezeman and Pieter D. Wezeman, SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2014)

weapons programs. New weapons developed in the global North are tested on the battlegrounds of the global South.

*Scale:* Drastically increasing in all directions! Armed conflicts cost \$7.2 trillion per year. (Feinstein xxiii) But as Feinstein explains in *The Shadow World*, legality and illegality have become ever more blurred in the post-9/11 arms landscape, so it is safe to assume that all arms dealing records are underestimated.

Like Edgar Allan Poe's *Purloined Letter*, the quality of tomorrow's war is hidden in plain sight. First of all, it is written of in no uncertain terms by the people who will lead and fight this war; veterans of past wars and those preparing for tomorrow's. And second of all, it is the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, and the land beneath our feet.

*The impregnation of our air  
With militarism  
Is not a thing to be defined  
Or catalogued;  
It is a miasma  
Wide as the air itself  
Ubiquitous as a million trifling things;  
Our very climate...*  
(Dennis Brutus)

Dennis Brutus' metaphors have become our metastasis, as capitalism like a cancer consumes the planet.<sup>14</sup> The trifling parts-per-million content of carbon in our atmosphere prefigures tomorrow's war, whose terrain is our very climate. While many prevaricate about climate change, the leaders of the world's most powerful army are outspoken about the times ahead. A recent report compiled and signed by 16 retired generals from the US Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps, provides a window into the wars of our grandchildren.

*“The national security risks of projected climate change are as serious as any challenges we have faced. . . . the risks we identified are advancing noticeably faster than we anticipated. . . . We have seen record melting of the Arctic ice and more than a hundredfold increase in operations in that fragile area. . . . Time and tide wait for no one. . . . Simultaneous or widespread extreme weather events and/or wildfires, accompanied by mass evacuations, and degraded critical infrastructure could outstrip local and federal government resources, and require the increased use of military and private sector support.”*<sup>15</sup>

In his book “Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence,” Christian Parenti characterizes the military's plan for climate change as “counterinsurgency forever,” concluding that “the Pentagon is planning for Armageddon.” (p11 and 13)

And yet chaos and Armageddon are not the best metaphors – they may even be optimistic. The emerging battlefield is highly mapped and prospected, and the soldiers are already in training. The war to come is distinguished not by chaos, but by its degree of systematization.<sup>16</sup>

14 “Diary of a Radical Cancer Warrior: Fighting Cancer and Capitalism on the Cellular Level,” by Fred Ho, 201

15 “National Security and the Accelerating Risks of Climate Change”, CNA Advisory Board, May 2014:

<http://www.cna.org/reports/accelerating-risks>

16 For a preview into what systematic warfare looks like in the age of climate chaos, here is a description from retired Chinese generals Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui: “Ecological war refers to a new type of non-military warfare in which modern technology is employed to influence the natural state of rivers, oceans, the crust of the earth, the polar ice sheets, the air circulating in the atmosphere, and the ozone layer. By methods such as causing earthquakes and altering precipitation patterns, the atmospheric temperature, the composition of the atmosphere, sea level height, and sunshine patterns, the earth's physical environment is damaged or an alternate local ecology is

In their book “Unrestricted Warfare,” retired Chinese generals Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, with an epic survey of thousands of years of military history, provide some insight into the future of warfare. Their book should be required reading for those working for peace in the 21st century. Writing after the Gulf War (the war which did not take place) the generals make an inventory and taxonomy of all the different kinds of war:

*“Atomic warfare, Diplomatic warfare, Financial warfare, Conventional warfare, Network warfare, Trade warfare, Bio-chemical warfare, Intelligence warfare, Resources warfare, Ecological warfare, Psychological warfare, Economic aid warfare, Space warfare, Tactical warfare, Regulatory warfare, Electronic warfare, Smuggling warfare, Sanction warfare, Guerrilla warfare, Drug warfare, Media warfare, Terrorist warfare, Virtual warfare (deterrence), Ideological warfare” (p146)*

Together, they add up to “unrestricted warfare”:

*“Warfare which transcends all boundaries and limits. . . . It means that all weapons and technology can be superimposed at will, it means that all the boundaries lying between the two worlds of war and non-war, of military and non-military, will be totally destroyed, and it also means that many of the current principles of combat will be modified, and even that the rules of war may need to be rewritten. (p12) In this sense, there is now no domain which warfare cannot use, and there is almost no domain which does not have warfare's offensive pattern. (p189) Even the last refuge of the human race--the inner world of the heart—cannot avoid the attacks of psychological warfare. There are nets above and snares below, so that a person has no place to flee. All of the prevailing concepts about the breadth, depth and height of the operational space already appear to be old-fashioned and obsolete. In the wake of the expansion of mankind's imaginative powers and his ability to master technology, the battlespace is being stretched to its limits. (p41) This is to say that there is nothing in the world today that cannot become a weapon. (p25) The outcome of all this is that one will be sent to an unexplored battlefield to wage an unfamiliar war against an unknown enemy. (p215-6) If that young lad setting out with his orders should ask today: "Where is the battlefield?" The answer would be: "Everywhere." (p43)*

Whether we call it unrestricted war, total war, full spectrum dominance, climate war, or the Gotabaya doctrine<sup>17</sup>, is not too important. More important is the essence, the pulse. And none have said it more clearly than the Peruvian revolutionary Hugo Blanco: All of these wars form part of a global war of extermination, a war by the 1% against the 99%, a war to annihilate the surplus populations which are unnecessary for the reproduction of capital.<sup>18</sup>

In the face of this unrestricted God of War, which arrives simultaneously with convulsions in earth systems not seen in the last 16 thousand years<sup>19</sup>, what are the prospects for peace? We must be honest about this. Simple optimism is worth nothing to future generations. In the heat of tomorrow's

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*created. Perhaps before very long, a man-made El Nino or La Nina effect will become yet another kind of superweapon in the hands of certain nations and/or non-state organizations. It is more likely that a non-state organization will become the prime initiator of ecological war, because of its terrorist nature, because it feels it has no responsibility to the people or to the society at large, and because non-state organizations have consistently demonstrated that they unwilling to play by the rules of the game. Moreover, since the global ecological environment will frequently be on the borderline of catastrophe as nations strive for the most rapid development possible, there is a real danger that the slightest increase or decrease in any variable would be enough to touch off an ecological holocaust.” (Unrestricted Warfare, p54-5)*

17 Gotabaya Rajapaksa, commander of the Sri Lankan army in its recent victory over the Tamil Tigers, describes his military program: “The eight points are: unwavering political will; disregard international opinion; no negotiations; control information; absence of political intervention; complete operational freedom for the security forces; accent on young commanders; keep international neighbors in the loop.” (“The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers”, by Gordon Weiss, 2012, p302)

18 “Construyamos un Nuevo Mundo” by Hugo Blanco, Ediciones Lucha Indigena, May 2014

19 For more on this, see “In the Shadow of the Sabertooth: Global Warming, the Origins of the First Americans, and the Terrible Beasts of the Pleistocene” by Doug Peacock, 2013

wars platitudes of peace will shrivel up -- millions will starve on them if nothing different is done. Millions and millions march for peace, and to what end? Hundreds gather from around the world for the goal of peace, and with what result? What is peace?

At worst, peace is a palliative, complementary to war, an empty signifier which fits perfectly into a program of global counter-insurgency, like free speech zones in a corporate tyranny.<sup>20</sup> At worst peace is a new name for structural violence, for a one-sided class, race and gender war. Bob Marley warned of how “the dream of lasting peace,” may “remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never attained.” There is a saying from Burundi which we must heed: “the word that remains in the mouth becomes drool.”

The highly decorated US military officer Smedley Butler wrote in a timeless text, almost a century ago, that War is a Racket, and that peace and disarmament conferences could never do a thing to stop it.<sup>21</sup> And yet over a hundred brave and ambitious souls from around the world did not gather this July in Cape Town for nothing. The terrain of war resistance which emerged that week was a perfect platform, at a perfect time, to understand where we are, what we have done, and what we must do.

### ***Senzenina (What Have We Done?)***

South Africa's most popular anti-apartheid song is our guide. We must understand where we have been, and what we have done, to move forward. *Senzenina* is an important rejoinder to Lenin's more famous question, “what is to be done.”<sup>22</sup> It is more introspective, more honest in some ways than Lenin's question; it forces us to reckon with ourselves. This is the message that peace activists and war resisters need today: Less condemnation of others and more reflection and resolution within ourselves.

The indigenous Hawaiian people think about time like this: that we walk backwards into the future, not knowing what is to come. The past is in front of us, and the future is behind us. So let us look forward at what has passed. When we sing *senzenina*, we confront two parallel truths: That we have done a great deal; we have moved mountains, turned tides, and survived against seemingly impossible odds. But also that we have not done enough, that we have even paid the price of today's security with tomorrow's terror, sacrificed solidarity for safety, and betrayed our better selves. We have looked too little within ourselves for solutions. Peace must be practiced, and this requires a level of dedication and devotion for which we must summon the courage and the vision. *Senzenina* is a declaration of innocence, asking of everyone and ourselves: what have we done to deserve tomorrow's war? And it is a statement of agitation, challenging ourselves and everyone: what have we done to prevent tomorrow's war?

South Africa is a place with answers for these questions. In the two reports that follow, we will search first more deeply into South Africa, past, present and future, and draw out lessons for the world. And then, the leap forward – a prefigurative path for peace.

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20 “The word 'peace.' Ah, how voluptuous. Like 'democracy.' It just fills the mouth with its familiar, wellsucked, inoffensive, satisfying taste. As if one were experiencing ones on *goodness*. No indigestion, no burnt lips. It won't cause constipation and won't grow fat on it either. In fact, it carries no nutritional connotation whatsoever. And guaranteed to have no secondary effects: it won't provoke a rash of freedom, let alone the aches of justice. As, 'peace,' 'democracy,' soft drugs of self-absorption – how we love to talk sweet nothings with them tucked in the cheek hard by the tongue, chew them, take them out at international conferences to lick the contours before plopping them back into the mouth...” Ka'afir, West African poet, quoted by Breytlen Breytenbach in “Notes from the Middle World,” 2009, p139

21 “But there is a way to stop it. You can't end it by disarmament conferences. You can't eliminate it by peace parleys at Geneva. Well-meaning but impractical groups can't wipe it out by resolutions. It can be smashed effectively only by taking the profit out of war.” Smedley Butler

22 Although the question was first posed in the title of the novel “What is to Be Done” by Nikolai Chernyshevsky, written in 1905, from which Lenin copied his first book's title.



# CROSSFIRE IN CAPE TOWN

## Reflections from the War Resisters International Conference, Cape Town 2014: Part 2 by Quincy Saul

Crossfire seems like the right metaphor for this city, this place that is both beautiful and horrible, thrilling and stagnant, refreshing and defiled. In a single horizon's glance and a single moment's breath you see and breathe finery and filth, dignity and decrepitude, the sacred and the profane.

And crossfire is not only a metaphor, but a deadly allegory for the structural violence which pervades this wondrous city; its magical light, resplendent scenery and urban landscape redolent of apartheid. If South Africa as a whole is like an island of Europe in Africa, as Steve Biko said<sup>23</sup>, then Cape Town is its symbolic, if not economic, capital.

The Western Cape is a curious place; "where liberation politics were more complex and contorted than anywhere else in South Africa."<sup>24</sup> The dynamics which drive its contradictions are hidden, like so much else, in plain sight. If we can pull our eyes away from safari tours, Tanzanite, and great white shark cage diving for long enough, then we will find ourselves confronting truth, like crossfire, coming from all directions.

Less than 10% of South Africa is white, but you wouldn't know it here. The contradictions are too outrageous to be made up. This is the only part of the country that voted for apartheid in 1994. The same dynamics which created that quandary continue to culminate, unchecked. In the same land where Sol Plaatje "woke up a pariah" in 1913, tens of thousands of people in the shacks spilling across Cape Flats remain pariahs today. And you wouldn't know it downtown, where the atmosphere is hip and cosmopolitan. A few years ago, people in Khayelishta whose sewage had been shut off protested the indignity and humiliation by throwing their own excrement at the local administrator. Up above, I was told, there is a British citizen wanted for paedophilia, who looks down over the flats from his private estate, on a concession within the national reserve park of Table Mountain.

The new South Africa remains, as it was during apartheid, the leading arms dealer on the continent. But the mayor of the city was honest and earnest as she welcomed us on the opening night. Welcome to the crossfire.

Here I offer the reader four windows into the battlefield, each I think with lessons for the world. *De te fabula narratur*. Each section will be introduced by Dennis Brutus, who braved the crossfire before and after apartheid, to offer us a path to truth and peace...

### **Robben Island Redux.**

*If you ever go visiting in Capetown  
and look across that blue and silver bay  
spare a thought for those who ploughed  
the gray miles of water  
salt and bitter as their tears  
who stir in graves as restless as the surge  
and wonder if they gave their lives in vain.  
(Dennis Brutus 1996)*

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<sup>23</sup>"[T]his particular country is almost like an island of Europe in Africa... any visitor who comes here tends to be made to believe almost that he is in Europe." Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* 2009, p164

<sup>24</sup> *After the Party: Corruption, the ANC and South Africa's Uncertain Future*, by Andrew Feinstein, 2009, p2

Bright, flat and bleak in the center of Cape Town's harbor, Robben Island cannot be missed. For many decades it was a brutal prison where thousands suffered, many died, and some were buried. It once held captive the leaders of the anti apartheid struggle, many of whom now rule the country.

It is difficult to explain the symbolic power of Robben Island to people outside of South Africa. (Alcatraz in San Francisco bay's harbor is one corollary, except that its inmates never went on to become heads of state.) In South Africa the stories of political prisoners, personal and political – a touchy subject for any regime – are enshrined in popular consciousness with sovereign seals.

With the end of apartheid, it was decided that Robben Island's history should not be erased, but remembered for all time, as a testament and monument for all who suffered there and as proof of the liberation struggle's victory. “We want Robben Island to reflect the triumph of freedom and human dignity over oppression and humiliation,” said Ahmed Kathrada, whose words are reproduced on a large poster at the ferry terminal...

And so Robben Island today has become a tourist attraction. You can pick up a brochure advertising the details, right next to the other ads for night clubs and the Big Five.

The tour is deeply surreal. To walk the same paths and corridors as heroes, corridors which not so long ago echoed with both depravity and solidarity, flanked by tele-photo-toting tourists, is difficult to describe. Crossfire on Robben Island culminates in the gift shop, where slogans of the freedom struggle have become commodities, for sale alongside t-shirts, processed food and key-chains, available for cash or credit. In the juxtaposition of the slogan “We Will Win” next to the Coca Cola vending machines, I felt the ghosts of “graves are restless as the surge” haunting history, present and future. Ashwin Desai has written in his book on Robben Island:

*“So even Robben Island's history must be ironed out. . . . The debates, the imaginings, the often incredibly different experiences of the island must be siphoned into one person. The island has become a metaphor for the liberation struggle, and so its post-apartheid incarnation becomes symptomatic of the discourse of change.”* (Reading Revolution: Shakespeare on Robben Island, Ashwin Desai, 2012, p118)

But there is something else haunting Robben Island. It is an unfinished revolution, a liberation struggle which ended in a crossfire called ceasefire. If some tourists have been fooled, the hearts and minds that matter most to Robben Island's story are not silent:

**Sonny Venkatrathnam, Robben Island inmate for seven years:** *“I am bitter, I am bitter. I don't deny that. I think I'm bitter that so many years of struggle seem to have gone down the drain; and we only hope that we can start it again. . . . we've got the right to vote, we've got the right to free speech. . . . But we don't have the right to free education; no free medicine; no free housing or anything like that; which is the crux of democracy. If you don't have that, to have the right to vote is meaningless. You can't eat a vote; you can't shelter under a vote. . . . Freedom means the basic conditions of life need to be addressed.”* (quoted by Desai p29)

**Sedick Isaacs, Robben Island inmate for thirteen years:** *“I also cannot understand how [the ANC leadership] were conned into buying such extremely expensive white elephants, in the form of warships and warplanes, in the face of so much poverty, and rising infant mortality in our country reaching a level even higher than Afghanistan.”* (Desai p90)

**Neville Alexander, Robben Island inmate for ten years:** *“I think one has to be brutally honest. First of all, I think that the opportunity given to us in 1993-94 was completely wasted.”* (Desai p108)

And not only the big names are speaking out. At the conclusion of the tour, our guide gave a stirring and chilling short speech. He, like many of the guides who work there, had served time on Robben Island for his role in the liberation struggle. Do you think I enjoy it, he asked us, spending my whole life on Robben Island, first as prisoner and then as guide? But with a soaring unemployment rate of near 50% for blacks, what were his career options? First an apartheid state kept him on the island, and now the invisible hand of free market capitalism was doing the same.

An unsettling conclusion, and yet one which demonstrates that history not all ironed and unsiphoned out. The giftshop has not fully prevailed. We have not won, but we have not lost either. The wind-whipped mist spilling over Table Mountain and the crashing waves give an aura of uncanny patience to this crossfire, pregnant with the future.

### **The Mandela Betrayal**

*“Forgive me, comrades  
If I say something apolitical  
And shamefully emotional  
But in the dark no night  
It is as if my heart is clutched  
By a giant iron hand:  
“Treachery, treachery” I cry out  
thinking of you, comrades  
and how you have betrayed  
the things we suffered for.”  
(Dennis Brutus)*

The title of this section comes from the Cape Town hip hop collective Soundz of the South.<sup>25</sup> These young men and women explain that Mandela was like a father to them, but the famous “spear of the nation” had been turned against them. As Dennis Brutus before them, with the same spirit of the liberation movement, they now struggle against the Mandela betrayal.

Thomas Kuhn in his famous book on scientific revolution, accords an important place in the evolution of human knowledge to the role played by charismatic individuals. A single individual can have both a progressive and regressive role. Often, he describes, in order for a paradigm shift to occur, the champion of the old paradigm has to die. Something like this is playing out now in South Africa. Khadija Sharife wrote that “long before Mandela passed away. . . . the ANC faded out.”<sup>26</sup> But only now that Madiba is gone can we grasp and comprehend what must be done.

Steve Biko saw it coming: “the biggest mistake the black world ever made,” he wrote, “was to assume that whoever opposed apartheid was an ally.” (Biko, p68) The internationally projected image of Mandela as father of the struggle concealed considerable divisions not only within the movement but within the ANC. About his negotiations with apartheid leaders while in prison, Mandela writes in his autobiography that “the Freedom Charter was not a blueprint for socialism but for African-style capitalism. I told them I had not changed my mind since then.”<sup>27</sup> When I visited New Brighton, a township outside Nelson Mandela Bay, on the other hand, I was told that “the Freedom Charter is our Marxism!” Where some read the Freedom Charter as a communist manifesto, Mandela and others in the ANC understood it as a bill of sale.<sup>28</sup>

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25 Listen for yourself: <http://sos1.bandcamp.com/album/freedom-warriors-vol-2>

26 “Mandela, the Good African,” by Khadija Sharife, Le Monde Diplomatique, December 2013, <http://mondediplo.com/blogs/mandela-the-good-african>

27 *Long Walk to Freedom*, by Nelson Mandela, 1995 p538)

28 “The process whereby the ANC came to change its approach to economic policy from the avowedly socialist to the orthodox

So when Mandela broke ANC party protocol while in prison, and began negotiations on his own with the apartheid government, the outcome was predictable. The revolutionary socialist wing within the ANC was out-manuevered in negotiations, along with the untimely assassination of the equally popular Chris Hani, left the door wide open for Mandela to launch “African-style capitalism.” From pauper prisoner to president prince, when Mandela left office in 1999 he had an estimated 89 million dollars in several foundations. (Crawford-Browne, p16) Archbishop Desmond Tutu has been outspoken and scathing about this: “The ANC had stopped the apartheid gravy train just long enough to climb on board,” he said<sup>29</sup> ANC spokesperson Smuts Ngonyama said recently, “I did not struggle to be poor.”

The ultimate sleight of hand was the new South African constitution itself. Scripted by Cyril Ramaphosa (remember that name!), it was hailed at the time as “the most progressive in the world.” The new constitution also conceded and enshrined the 1913 Native Lands Act, the same one which made Sol Plaatje a pariah in the land of his birth. In other words, there was to be no land reform. So today, “60,000 white farmers, who make up only 5% of the white population, own almost 87% of the land,” reports Sam Moyo.<sup>30</sup>

Mandela and the ANC traded the land out from under their feet in exchange for 1 man 1 vote. Never perhaps has the question of the ballot or the bullet been posed so clearly, and answered so subtly.

But Mandela had integrity and statesmanship. He was a brilliant organizer, strategist and orator. It takes a political genius to stop a revolutionary civil war in its tracks,<sup>31</sup> let alone simultaneously placate both a racist national bourgeoisie and international finance capital. After watching him destroy US right-winger Ted Koppel on national TV<sup>32</sup>, who wouldn't fall in love with the man?! Mandela thus makes us yearn for better times, for his successors in the ANC have lacked any of his good qualities. The betrayal and deception has now gone far beyond Mandela. South Africa is now

*“world leader in money-laundering, bribery and corruption, procurement fraud, asset misappropriation and cybercrime,” with internal management responsible for more than three quarters of what was termed “mind-boggling” levels of theft.”<sup>33</sup> (Bond)*

Since we are here in the crossfire of Cape Town to resist and end war, it is fitting to conclude this section with the South African arms trade. On a large red poster displayed near the entrance to the conference in City Hall were the words of Nelson Mandela: “Never again shall South Africa be the fountainhead of conflict in the region and further afield. Never again shall our country be the source of

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monetarist was a key time in the South African transition. . . . Engagement with corporate leaders, academics and policymakers had profound impact [sic] on the economic thinking of some of the leadership. . . . This led to the use of obfuscatory language by the leadership in order to sell the policy framework – for instance ‘the restructuring of state assets’ meant, in effect, privatisation. The movement’s historic language of revolution was utilised to make palatable an ostensibly neo-liberal approach to the economy.” Feinstein, p62

29 Mandela responded to Tutu, calling his criticisms “irresponsible.” Tutu responded in turn: “It is very distressing that the President is behaving like an ordinary politician. Instead of answering my criticisms, he is impugning my integrity. It is beneath his stature. What is more distressing is the impression the President gives that I did not speak personally to him. I raised my concerns with him about salaries and about the arms trade some weeks before I expressed them publicly.” from *Eye on the Diamonds*, by Terry Crawford-Browne, 2012, p6

30 “The Land Question and the Peasantry in Southern Africa,” by Sam Moyo, from the volume *Politics and Social Movements in an Hegemonic World, Lessons from Africa, Asia and Latin America*, edited by Arilio A. Boron and Gladys Lechini, 2005

31 “Just seven months after Chris Hani’s assassination, in December 1993, Nelson Mandela gave the order for Umkhonto we Sizwe to be disbanded. It was an order only two people could have given without being crucified. One was Madiba. The other was Jesus Christ. It shocked and demoralized Black South Africa.” *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid*, by Fran B. Wilderson, III, 2008, p11

32 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryO3En-zG68>

33 “South Africa’s Resource Curses and Growing Social Resistance,” by Patrick Bond, Monthly Review, April 2014. This is not the place to detail the endless escapades of current president Jacob Zuma, but it is worth noting that “In 2009, for instance, almost half of Zuma’s executive cabinet were found to hold active directorship or membership status in 184 companies on CIPRO [Companies and Intellectual Property Registration Office].” (“Why Nationalising the Mines is Not the Answer,” by Khadija Sharife, Le Monde Diplomatique, March 2011)

armaments used to suppress our neighbors.” In the aftermath of revelations of corruption around arms dealing in the ANC, the poster almost seemed a cruel joke. Andrew Feinstein has told the story:

*“With the encouragement of international arms companies and foreign states, the government spent around 6 billion pounds on arms and weapons it didn't require at a time when its President claimed the country could not afford to provide the antiretroviral drugs needed to keep alive the almost 6 million of its citizens living with HIV and Aids. Three hundred million dollars in commissions were paid to middlemen, agents, senior politicians, officials and the African National Congress itself. In the following five years more than 355,000 South Africans died avoidable deaths because they had no access to the life-saving medication, while the weapons remain largely unused.” (The Shadow World, Feinstein, pxxiv-xxv)*

And yet here in the crossfire is hope. Emerging after the death of Mandela is a pronounced ability to see clearly and without clouded sentiment the realities of the New South Africa. Moreover, born and borne among the new generations is a more mature understanding of revolutionary leadership, one which will not make the same mistake twice. The refrain performed by Soundz of the South at the conference resounds in the crossfire: “we don't want to be your celebrities, we just want to see our people free, we need elevated comrades in the streets!” Their hip hop collective is only one of the many groups in South Africa which is building new worlds in the shell of the old:

*“We really are creating liberated zones. It's almost as if people are part of the economy, but they're able not to be part of the economy at the same time, and there are incredible bonds being built between people as they're imagining a new world. These are small things, but they're very big things. People's stories are being told for the first time. Not Mandela's story and so on, but the real lives of ordinary South African people are being taken seriously now. The Pooors of South Africa have not given up. They will make history. Again.” (“The Power of the Cooking Pot,” Ashwin Desai, 2003)*

### **Reconciliation or Revolt?**

*Here only is a sense of reconciled senility  
And traces of uncertain tracks to find  
A humaneness to heal the slaver's whip.  
And from the admissions of a common man  
May yet emerge the clamant fact  
Of unity, asserted with the crisp  
Incisiveness of logic or a spear.  
 (“Cape Town”, Dennis Brutus)*

South Africa has been through both revolution and reform. With all respect to Rosa Luxemburg, the question today in this country can be posed differently – reconciliation or revolt?

South Africa wowed the world with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In the aftermath of apartheid, the new government embarked on an unprecedented process of forgiveness and bearing witness, which would serve as a model for the whole world. The courage, wisdom and hard work of reconciling a country full of trauma can in no way be exaggerated or overplayed. And yet questions remain, haunting the official story of liberation and amnesty like Khayelishta and Manenberg haunt Cape Town, like the ghosts of Robben Island's restless surge haunt the gift shop.

The premise of the TRC was that truth could set the people free. Torturers who confessed their crimes were granted amnesty. By forgoing retributive justice, the people of South Africa could be

granted much more – reconciliation. As long as everything was remembered, the people could rest assured that such atrocities would never happen again.

But as the 21st century deepens, not everyone is sure that either the method or the logic was sound. “South Africa is a country of massive forgetting and selective remembering,” writes Ashwin Desai. (p118) While some have spoken about various blind spots and conflicts of interest within the TRC, the greater danger by far lies in forgetting the ideals for which so many suffered.

Nietzsche wrote that “only by means of forgetfulness can man ever arrive at imagining that he possesses truth.” This throws an epistemological wrench in the gears of the TRC, and it can also help explain how a noble undertaking arrived at a muted conclusion. Only a forgetful truth can reconcile white supremacy and black consciousness, liberators and colonizers, capitalism and communism.

Ask the people in Cape Flats about their truth, about how reconciled they are with the downtown consumer culture. Not so long ago, Steve Biko warned about the rapidly closing window for reconciliation. Is there still time for reconciliation, “before our society is driven to chaos by irresponsible people from Coca Cola and hamburger backgrounds”? (Biko, p101)

The will to make history seems to have all but suffocated in what Dan Berger aptly calls “the lethal synthesis of abandoned optimism and calculated convenience.” (*The Struggle Within*, Dan Berger, 2014 pviii) The synthesis is indeed lethal, because our choice here is between a reconciliation, which to some degree can be peacefully managed, and a revolt, which will obey nothing and overturn almost everything. Reconciliation requires statesmanship, courage and creativity, qualities sorely lacking in South African politicians today. So revolt has arrived.

*“[T]he 'small' rebellions across the country point to the makings of a generalised social implosion because the present arrangements are unsustainable, and the memories of what was promised are still raw. The often brutal suppression of community protest is indicative of a government that has run out of ideas, that tinkers with 'new growth paths' while bemoaning their impotence in the face of global forces.”* (Desai, p120)

South Africa today in 2014, breaking its own previous record from 2013, is home to a daily average of five “violent protests” recorded by police, usually met with extreme force.” (Bond Ibid.) South Africa is tied with China for the highest per-capita rate of organized protest in the world.

The people are struggling for electricity, water, food, and sanitation. Travel anywhere in South Africa and you will see it: the highest degree of inequality in the world, combined with one of the highest degrees of political consciousness, expectations of government and historical experience of struggle. Mandela knew, and was clear about this when he said: “We are sitting on a time bomb. The enemy is now you and me, people who drive a car and have a house.”

The fuse was lit on August 16, 2012, when forty-four mine workers on a non-violent strike were massacred in Marikana. More than miners was massacred in Marikana. The bullets tore into the backs of fleeing miners, and also into the heart of hopes for a new South Africa.<sup>34</sup> The order for the massacre came down from on high – from none other than the author of South Africa's constitution, Cyril Ramaphosa. (Bond, Ibid.) a contender for next ANC president. Will he lead the reconciliation?

As Mandela recognized, it is only a matter of time. Then, as Breyten Breytenbach knew, if unhealed wound continue to fester, if debate remains stagnant and no new ideas emerge, “we will eat maggots.” (*Notes from the Middle World*, by Breyten Breytenbach 2009, p175)

Whether in the smell of raw sewage or in the smell of burning rubber that is the telltale sign of a “service delivery protest,” the inevitability of this revolt is staggering. The “popcorn protests,” (as some have called them) which give South Africa its reputation for the most militant working class in the world, are the seedlings of the bigger revolt to come. It will shatter the reconciled senility of Cape

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34 Miners Shot Down, directed by Rehad Desai, 2014 <http://www.minersshotdown.co.za/>

Town. A new unity will erupt from the betrayal, and the only question is the one Brutus posed – how will it be asserted? Logic or a spear?

### **The Third Transition**

*The new Middle Passage confronts us talk of a new Holocaust  
how many thousands of our men and women must die in this new  
Holocaust how many must be broken in mind and body brutalized  
and broken in the brutalizing business of war limbs amputated body  
disabled brain damaged haunted by images of horror and courage  
haunted by bloody deeds and bloody dyings talk of a new Holocaust  
confront a new Holocaust how many of our men and women must  
confront a new Holocaust say no, say no, say no  
(Dennis Brutus)*

In 2012, the ANC released its program for “The Second Transition,” subtitled, “building a national democratic society.” Coming 18 years after the official inauguration of democracy (the “First Transition”) this document is in some sense an honest admission of previous failures to build such a society. And yet it is far too little and too late. This talk of a second transition will shortly be overshadowed and undermined by forces which will shape not only society, but the coastlines.

The next transition, in the language of Dennis Brutus, may be a new Middle Passage. When Lumumba di-Aping invoked the Holocaust in his speech about catastrophic climate change in Copenhagen in 2009, it was no exaggeration.<sup>35</sup> Over all the crossfire spreads a cloud which will determine everything else. Eventually, Cape Town will go down like the Titanic, Cape Flats first.

The ecological apocalypse that is almost upon us has been a long time coming. It is the cumulative outcome of a predatory relationship humanity has inflicted upon itself and nature. We have been warned. Mandela's first visit home to his home in Qunu after decades on Robben Island is worth recalling:

*“When I was young, the village was tidy, the water pure, and the grass green and unsullied as far as the eye could see. Kraals were swept, topsoil was conserved, fields were neatly divided. But now the village was unswept, the water polluted, and the countryside littered with plastic bags and wrappers. We had not known of plastic when I was a boy, and though it surely improved life in some ways, its presence in Qunu appeared to me to be a kind of blight. Pride in the community seemed to have vanished.” (Mandela, p581)*

And Alan Paton saw the storms to come, in the first page of *Cry, the Beloved Country*:

*“the ground is holy, being as it came from the Creator. Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed. . . . But the rich green hills break down. They fall to the valley below, and falling, change their nature. . . . It is not kept, or guarded, or cared for, it no longer keeps men, guards men, cares for men. The titihoya does not cry here any more. . . . The great red hills stand desolate, and the earth has torn away like flesh. . . . The men are away, the*

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<sup>35</sup> Di-Aping, a diplomat from the Sudan, called the climate deal in Copenhagen “a suicide pact, an incineration pact, in order to maintain the economic dominance of a few countries. . . . It is a solution based on the same values that funneled six million people in Europe into furnaces.” Read more at <http://ecosocialisthorizons.com/2011/12/fourteen-days-burned-world/>

*young men and the girls are away. The soil cannot keep them any more."*

Humanity's estrangement from nature and from itself as part of nature culminates today in the capitalist world-system, in which the global ruling class has precipitated climate catastrophe on the poor, in a new form of imperialism.<sup>36</sup> The new Middle Passage and Holocaust are prefigured in the "resilience" and "adaptation" plans which the world's governments, armies and police forces are preparing for the millions of climate refugees and other unruly populations of the years to come.

The conclusion (if we do not say no, no, no!) is Africa without Africans. Hugo Blanco again: the surplus population must be exterminated.<sup>37</sup> As Gilles Deleuze said about Palestine, "a territory is emptied of its people. Capitalism takes a great leap in a single bound."<sup>38</sup> Nigerian architect, author and poet Nnimmo Bassey has said: what the system wants in this new scramble for Africa is not the people, as before, but now the ground from under their feet.<sup>39</sup> Specifically, "eighty-eight per cent of the world's reserves of platinum, seventy-three per cent of its diamonds, sixty per cent both of its manganese and cobalt, forty per cent of its gold, and thirty per cent of its uranium." (Crawford-Browne, p53)

How can we say no to the new Middle Passage and Holocaust? And to whom do we say no? The time for appealing to politicians ended in 2011 when the United Nations came to Durban. Many climate scientists called it "the last chance" to reach a binding agreement to reduce carbon emissions, but world leaders opted instead for premeditated genocide.<sup>40</sup>

What are the prospects for peace in all this crossfire? Can another holocaust be prevented? Can our moment of great crisis be an opportunity for a great revolution? Instead of a new Middle Passage, can we have a Third Transition, a transvaluation of values, an ecosocialist horizon?

This is a report from Cape Town, a luxury city on the edge of doom. It would be dishonest to leave the reader anywhere else but here in the center of the crossfire. But in the final chapter of these reports, we will turn, as promised, to a prefigurative path for peace. Stay tuned.

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36 See *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World*, by Joel Kovel, 2007

37 "Construyamos un Nuevo Mundo" by Hugo Blanco, Ediciones Lucha Indigena, May 2014

38 *Two Regimes of Madness* by Gilles Deleuze, 1975-1995 Referenced chapters: The Indians of Palestine and The Spoilers of Peace

39 "To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa" by Nnimmo Bassey, 2012. For more on this, listen to the radio show interview with Nnimmo Bassey on the Ecosocialist Horizons hour here: <http://ecosocialisthorizons.com/2014/06/we-thought-it-was-development-but-it-was-ecocide/>

40 "Looking Backward and Thinking Forward: A post-mortem on COP17 in Durban," by Quincy Saul, The Africa Report, January 2012. Also see: <http://ecosocialisthorizons.com/durban/>



# PEACE

## Reflections from the War Resisters International Conference, Cape Town 2014: Part 3 by Quincy Saul

*"The issue of climate change respects no border. Its effects cannot be reined in by an army nor advanced by any ideology. Climate change, with its potential to impact every corner of the world, is an issue that must be addressed by the world."* George W. Bush, 2001

*"I can't understand why there aren't rings of young people blocking bulldozers, and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants."* -Al Gore

The winds of climate change will fill the sails of battleships, pump the bellows for fires where weapons are forged, and turbo-charge tank treads.

Ecological predictions for the 21st century alone are enough to warrant comparisons to another Middle Passage, another Holocaust, with the scale of human lives on the line even greater than those consumed by the transatlantic slave trade and the Nazi extermination camps, combined.<sup>41</sup>

And this is just the beginning. As devastating and catastrophic as climate chaos will be, the human reaction may well be worse. Old wars will be intensified, new wars will emerge. Those dedicated to resisting war have never faced a greater danger or a more immediate mandate, and the horizon for their tireless dedication is *climate justice*. Climate justice is the prerequisite and substance of peace in the 21st century and beyond.

George W Bush understands the scale of the problem. His political opponent Al Gore called for massive illegal actions, and one of the world's leading climate scientists agrees.<sup>42</sup> The majority of humanity, which lives close to the soil and watches the sky, lives the urgency and knows the dangers. Some of the people we met in Cape Town came from the most violent and dangerous places in the world, places where genocides are underway. They understood the grave urgency of climate change, and the need to act now.

And yet it seems that we in the global North have not understood. Collectively, we are doing less than what has been called for by Al Gore. Some seem even less ready for change than Dubya, and are retreating into isolation and survivalism; "the politics of the armed lifeboat."<sup>43</sup> In avoiding illegal collective action and dismissing big picture vision, we are following a recipe for temporary personal safety at the cost of permanent universal danger.

Why is this? Why aren't young people blocking coal plants in massive numbers? To chart a prefigurative path to peace, we must first understand what is holding us back.

### What Would Steve Biko Do?

While writing and working in a different time and context, the frank talk of Steve Biko has a lot of light to shed on the peace and environmental justice movements. Since time is short, let's cut to the

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<sup>41</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu warned in 2008 that if effective action to prevent catastrophic climate change was not taken, the combined effects would cost the lives of 185 million lives in Africa alone by the end of the century (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onSHD4sAuB4>). Since then, the assessments of the scientists he was quoting have become increasingly severe. Not only deep ecologists but NASA has warned that human civilization itself is at stake. ("NASA-funded study: Industrial Civilisation Headed for 'Irreversible Collapse'?", by Nafeez Ahmed, The Guardian, March 2014)

<sup>42</sup> "It seems to me that young people, especially, should be doing whatever is necessary to block construction of dirty coal-fired power plants." Dr. James Hansen

<sup>43</sup> See *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence*, by Christian Parenti, 2012

chase: “Our originality and imagination have been dulled to the point where it takes a supreme effort to act logically even in order to follow one's beliefs and convictions.” (Biko 19) Sound familiar? We know the climate science and recognize the dangers, we know what our principles are, and yet we do not act. When we do, it is rarely on a scale commensurate with our crisis.

Biko warned that the main danger facing his community was “to be so conditioned by the system as to make even our most well-considered resistance to fit within the system both in terms of the means and of the goals. . . . Not only have they kicked the black but they have told him how to react to the kick.” (Biko 40 and 72) And so we respond to climate catastrophe with carbon markets, to new wars with old protests. This conditioning of our resistance has been institutionalized as never before in the 21st century with the ascendance of the non-profit industrial complex, whereby the ruling class literally designs and directs its own loyal opposition.<sup>44</sup> And so more than ever we have to heed the warnings of Biko:

*“In laying out a strategy we often have to take cognisance of the enemy's strength and as far as I can assess all of us who want to fight within the system are completely underestimating the influence the system has on us.”* (Biko 41)

The influence of the system is not only institutional. It is not only that the World Wildlife Fund takes money from the dirty energy industry -- the rot is far deeper. Our originality and imagination have been dulled, so our resistance is dull.<sup>45</sup> We seem to be not only incapable of mounting an effective challenge, but also of understanding our own failures. It is empire is a way of life.<sup>46</sup> We do not shut down the fossil fuel war economy because we cannot imagine life without it.

So we do our best to “tweak armageddon”<sup>47</sup> with all kinds of false solutions: carbon financing, carbon taxes, the usual rigamarole of petitions and electoral politics, and most ominously of all, geoengineering.<sup>48</sup> These false solutions cannot be better described than by Biko: “The whole idea is to made to appear as if for us, while working against our very existence.” (Biko 90) He urged: “we must reject the beggar tactics.” (Biko 100) He warned: “destroy it without giving it any form of respectability.” (Biko 166)<sup>49</sup> Thus must we break the spell, and exorcise the false solutions not only from politics but from our imaginations. Only by destroying them and breaking from the conditioning of the system, can we find a prefigurative path for peace.

## **Climate Justice**

In making a break for it, we must define what we want. The term climate justice has a short but loaded history.<sup>50</sup> It is a deeply comprehensive term, if one respects the depth of its implications. Quite literally it means global justice; not only for humans, however, but all species and all ecosystems. It requires not only stabilization and drawdown of carbon emissions, but an end to all ecosystem destruction. (It is necessary to repeat this lest the phrase become emptied of meaning and commodified, like “sustainability,” etc.) Given what we have learned about war and about climate change, peace activists everywhere can understand climate justice as the most urgent and most comprehensive slogan for their efforts.

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44 *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, edited by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, South End Press 2009. Also see *Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism*, by Joan Roelofs, 2003

45 “*Like A Dull Knife; Reflections on the People's Climate Farce*,” by Quincy Saul, *Truthout*, September 2014

46 *Empire As A Way of Life*, by William Appleman Williams, 1980

47 *The Struggle Within: Prisons, Political Prisoners and Mass Movements in the United States*, Dan Berger PM Press 2014, pviii

48 No joke: See *Earthmasters: The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering*, by Clive Hamilton, 2013

49 “Once you step in it, once you participate in it, whether you are in the governing party or the opposition, you are in fact giving sanctity to it, you are giving respectability to it” (Biko p166)

50 See *Toward Climate Justice: Perspectives on the Climate Crisis and Social Change*, by Brian Tokar, 2014.

So what is needed for climate justice? We must make the supreme effort to follow the logic of climate science and the convictions of climate justice through to their conclusions. While many push for incremental reforms, or for emissions and temperature targets that tolerate mass extinction and genocide, Philip Sutton persuasively argues the contrary: “there is no point in pursuing goals that, if achieved, would still create intolerable conditions. . . . a tougher goal is actually more practical and so more motivating.”<sup>51</sup> The goal, he explains is “100% decoupling of the economy from environmental damage.” Furthermore, it is technically possible to begin immediately. Drawing on the experience of World War 2, when governments seized control of private industry, retooled, and produced not for profit but for use, Sutton argues for a “holistic wartime mobilization.”<sup>52</sup> As many scientists and policy makers have pointed out, there is no technological obstacle to this kind of large scale planned transformation of energy infrastructure.<sup>53</sup>

What is our timeline for this? Unlike the timeless movements for truth, justice and dignity, the climate justice movement has an expiration date. While the principles of climate justice<sup>54</sup> will prove lasting guides no matter what temperature it is or how many species remain alive, the rights of future generations (human and non-human) to a safe and stable climate will be won or lost within the next decade. We are already passing tipping points every day. But there is still time to turn the tide, and that time is now. If you don't believe me, or the scientists, or the politicians, believe sixteen US army generals: “Coordinated, wide-scale and well-executed actions to limit heat-trapping gases and increase resilience to help prevent and protect against the worst projected climate change are required – now.”<sup>55</sup>

In the light of this urgency, we must make a candid assessment of our movements. While good and noble work is being done in the peace and environmental movements, it is not nearly enough. The triumphalism of assembling large numbers of people will turn quite bitter in hindsight, if actions do not quickly begin to have concrete effects on carbon emissions and the preservation of biological diversity. So our movements must get much, much bigger, in both quantity and quality.

Bill McKibben has said correctly that our politics needs to change as fast as the climate science, and even that we must be as strong or stronger than the storms heading our way. “Any movement that hopes to head off the worst future depredations of climate change will have to get much, much larger. . . . it needs to remake the world in record time.”<sup>56</sup> Michael Nagler echoes: “Ten years is not much time to awaken a civilization. But it can be done.”<sup>57</sup>

The prevarication of our movements before this mandate must be understood, and overcome. We must destroy the beggar tactics. We do not need more data, more time for conditions to develop, more analysis of the conjuncture. We have to act now. The military understands this. In their dramatic, scary, but refreshingly frank analysis, the leadership of the US military has this to say:

*“When it comes to thinking about the impacts of climate change, we must guard against a failure of the imagination. . . . As military leaders, we know that we cannot wait for certainty. The failure to include a range of probabilities because it is not precise is unacceptable. . . . Speaking as a soldier, we never have 100% certainty. If you wait until you have 100 percent certainty, something bad is going to*

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51 “Restoring a Safe Climate at Emergency Speed, Strategy for Discussion” presentation by Philip Sutton, RSTI, 2014

52 “An emergency restoration of the climate requires a coordinated rebuilding of the economy. This can only be done as a whole package and in the end this cannot be achieved through dozens or hundreds of independent campaigns.” (Ibid.)

53 For a proposal for the global North, see “US Climate Plan”: <http://www.usclimateplan.org> . For a proposal for the global South, see “An Ecosocialist Horizon for Venezuela: A Solar Communist Horizon for the World,” by David Schwartzman and Quincy Saul, 2014, forthcoming in *Moving Beyond Capitalism*.

54 “The Bali Principles of Climate Justice,” 2002: [www.ejnet.org/ej/bali.pdf](http://www.ejnet.org/ej/bali.pdf)

55 “National Security and the Accelerating Risks of Climate Change” CNA Military Advisory Board, 2014 (By 16 retired generals and admirals from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps.)

56 “Movements Without Leaders: What to Make of Change on an Overheating Planet” by Bill McKibben, 2013

57 “Fixing Planet Earth: A Not So Modest Proposal,” by Michael Nagler, 2010

*happen on the battlefield.*"<sup>58</sup>

So we must act, as Walt Whitman advised, now, or maybe never. But how?

## **Satyagraha**

Against the ritualized protest politics which have gotten us nowhere fast, we must imagine another form and content for politics. A call for climate satyagraha, emerging from the Cape Town conference in South Africa, urges us to consider the spirit of satyagraha as a framework for our movements for peace and climate justice. Pioneered by Gandhi but practiced by millions, stayagraha is an action and a way of life. Various translated as "truth-force," "soul-power," or "love-firmness", it is a method of both personal transformation and mass action.

The concept of satyagraha is by definition all encompassing, with equal emphasis on self purification and system change. To transcend a movement which protests pollution while being funded by polluters, to rise above the degradation of the traditions of civil disobedience and nonviolence (into neatly rehearsed and orchestrated "cuff and stuffs") the spirit of satyagraha calls for a politics that breaks from symbol and ritual, which calls upon deeper humanity and higher principles.

Central to satyagraha is a calling for personal sacrifice. "Things of fundamental importance to the people must be purchased with their suffering," Gandhi insisted. Satyagraha calls on people of relative privilege to break from the spiritually poisonous comforts accorded to them. There is no better antidote to the politics of hypocrisy and complicity in which our movements have become entangled.

Gandhi went on to promise that satyagraha, in appealing "not only to reason, but to the heart also," can help to "free [reason] from inertia. . . . it compels reason to be free." In times like ours, when it takes a supreme effort to follow your own logic, and when reason has been replaced in an ideological sleight-of-hand by market rationality and rugged individualism, satyagraha is a cure for the mind- and heart-numbing matrix of late capitalist society, and its more or less loyal opposition.

Capitalist society has thrived on the eradication of authentic spirituality<sup>59</sup>. Yet the rise of fundamentalism indicates that peoples in these societies are unsatisfied with the prevailing nihilism and schizophrenia of consumerism and empire as a way of life. People earnestly want deeper meaning in their lives, and are willing, even eager, to make sacrifices for a better, different future. We need only a path to walk together, and satyagraha may be that path.

Satyagraha calls upon us to abandon sectarianism, to always always regard adversaries as potential allies. Given that all life on earth is threatened by the continuation of oppression as usual, there has perhaps never been a greater constituency for satyagraha. The 99% has a genuine basis for life-or-death unity in defense of Mother Earth. The call for climate satyagraha circulated and discussed in Cape Town has some interesting strategic suggestions for how this unity should be focused.<sup>60</sup>

Satyagraha is a prefigurative path to peace. It is prefigurative in that it breaks from the commonplace schizophrenia in politics which separates means from ends. It calls for an embodied politics which celebrates, and struggles to amplify, the unity of means and ends. The satyagrahi must embody in all respects the goals of the movement, must be the change they want to see in the world. In a culture where people who call for change are unable and unwilling to change themselves, satyagraha is the escape route. This calls for greater sacrifice and greater commitment, but also greater reward. With the future of the planet at stake, who would choose a precarious security over a noble and heroic sacrifice? Only coward souls will not leap to a calling to defend creation.

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<sup>58</sup> Admiral Frank L. "Skip" Bowman of the US Navy, former director of the naval nuclear propulsion program shares some of his key principles: "Face Facts, Respect even small amounts of risk, Adhere to the concept of total responsibility, Require continual rising standards of performance." (Ibid.) Imagine if all climate justice activists and organizers held themselves to this standard!

<sup>59</sup> *History and Spirit: An Inquiry into the Philosophy of Liberation*, by Joel Kovel, 1991

<sup>60</sup> Coming soon! Stay tuned to [www.wri-irg.org](http://www.wri-irg.org) and [www.ecosocialisthorizons.com](http://www.ecosocialisthorizons.com).

## **Return to the Source**

PanAfrican revolutionary leader Amilcar Cabral called upon the people of the world to return to the source.<sup>61</sup> Not to stagnate in old traditions, but to define and locate themselves in the struggle – cultural, economic, political, military – between the colonial power and their indigenous roots as peoples. Today the entire world, in the shadow of catastrophic climate change, precipitated by a reckless embrace of capitalist modernity, faces Cabral's injunction.

It is not enough to end war, or to stop the extraction of fossil fuels. In fact, these things are impossible to even conceive of in isolation. The world system must be changed and the movement to change it must prefigure the alternative. The new world must be built and the old one dismantled, and these are one and the same process; a climate satyagraha, and a return to the source.

At an international conference in Durban South Africa in 2006, representatives from 14 countries and 107 organizations gathered on the 100th year anniversary of Gandhi's first satyagraha, to discuss and debate the meaning and relevance of satyagraha in the 21st century. A connection was made at that time between satyagraha and Julius Nyerere's concept of ujamaa, or African community socialism.<sup>62</sup> Ujamaa is not only a theory but a practice: an incipient mode of production and a vision of socialism whose nucleus is the cooperative village economy. This connection continued in Cape Town this year, with the July 5 event organized by Ecosocialist Horizons calling for the world to “Act now against climate catastrophe: From Satyagraha to Ujamaa”.<sup>63</sup> Since the times of Nyerere, neither the theory nor the practice of ujamaa have died.<sup>64</sup> In an age of climate chaos, ujamaa is a theory and vision of a return to the source, a path and a destination, to accompany, complement and fulfill the goals of movements to end war and the fossil fuel economy.

## **The War Is Over (If We Want It)**

This year, the world commemorated the anniversary of World War 1. What was called at the time a war to end all wars quickly became a war that began all others.<sup>65</sup> Unsurprisingly, this year's ceremonies tend to glorify the victims of war more than mourn them. Yet there is something in WW1 which is well worth celebrating and reviving, and which can serve as a practical and spiritual guide for our immense challenge.

The Christmas Eve truce, which erupted spontaneously on December 24, 1914, revealed to the world that, as Lennon's Xmas song promised, the war can be over, if we want it. As told by Susan Schnall in a recent issue of *The Veteran*: “the truce broke out spontaneously in many places, with soldiers emerging from their trenches, exchanging cigarettes and gifts, singing Christmas carols, burying their dead, and in some places, participating in impromptu soccer games.”<sup>66</sup>

The whole world is just a hair's breadth from something completely different. Peace and brotherhood have been known to emerge suddenly from war and fratricide. “Philosophical principles tell us that whenever something reaches an ultimate point, it will turn in the opposite direction,” insist

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61 *Return to the Source*, by Amilcar Cabral, edited by Africa Information Service, Monthly Review Press, 1973

62 For an archive from this conference, including both a general declaration and summaries of presentations, see [http://sapf.blogspot.com/2006\\_10\\_01\\_archive.html](http://sapf.blogspot.com/2006_10_01_archive.html)

63 See: <http://ecosocialisthorizons.com/2014/07/from-satyagraha-to-ujamaa-eh-in-cape-town/>

64 For one inspiring modern-day example of ujamaa in action, see the work in Tanzania of the United African Alliance Community Center: <http://www.uaacc.habari.co.tz/>

65 “Between the world wars, all the large arms companies. . . agitated against the prospect of permanent peace. (p8) . . . It is surprising, with the reaction to the First World War in mind, that there was not more public concern about the rush of arms sales in the aftermath of the most destructive war in the history of mankind. (p11) . . . [And] the second World War had been but a prefiguring of the great global conflict to come.” (p19) *The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade*, by Andrew Feinstein, 2011

66 “A Call to Lay Down Arms and Recognize Our Common Humanity,” by Susan Schnall, *The Veteran*, Spring 2014

Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps this ultimate point is upon us. The cynicism and irony which are so compatible with the capitalist disenchantment of the world must be replaced with an abiding faith in humanity as an expression of nature's self-transforming power. There is no force in the world more powerful than the love and truth which has kept us all alive through millennia of lies and war.

Can it be done? Of course. "If you take your time," a Rwandan saying has it, "you can cook an elephant in the pot." The climate crisis demonstrates the absolute interdependence and unity of all life on earth, and thus creates a platform for a degree of unity and coordinated struggle greater than anything the world has ever seen. Climate justice underscores the statement of Martin Luther King Jr. with renewed urgency; "we must learn to live together as brothers or perish as fools. We are tied together in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality."

And Mossi wisdom reminds us that "he who suffers from diarrhea does not fear the night." Yes, laugh, because laughter kills fear. As the decline of the US empire, together with climate tipping points, come home to roost, a global movement will emerge. Decolonized and no longer beholden to the dominant order, we can find a prefigurative path to peace. We can and we must. As Harold Pettus, a Navy hospital corpsman, recently wrote, "only the peace movement, in all its manifestations, stands between our world and those too greedy, and too stupid to allow us to survive."<sup>68</sup>

Biko doubted that everyone would really join at the rendezvous of victory. But for those who know, regardless of where they are coming from, where they are going to, Biko's advice is clear: "we must cling to each other with a tenacity that will shock the perpetrators of evil... the one criterion that must govern all our actions is commitment." (Biko 108, 57)

In Cape Town City Hall this July, rooms filled with stories of horror and pain, suffering and sacrifice. Passions flared over differences of context and circumstance. But emerging from the map of a continent and a world at war, was the reminder and the promise of a common humanity, seeking out new horizons.

Peace is not a destination, it is a destiny. As War Resisters International founder A.J. Muste said, "there is no way to peace, peace is the way." Peace is not in platitudes or in symbolic protest, but in the concrete practice of satyagraha, where politics is reborn as human and as neutral, with the rejoining of sacred hoop of means and ends. We'll see you there, on the ecosocialist horizon.

*DuBois said: The cause of war  
is the preparation for war.  
I say the cause of peace  
must be the preparation of peace  
(Sonia Sanchez)<sup>69</sup>*

*"If it be now, 'tis not to come.  
If it be not to come, it will be now.  
If it be not now, yet it will come—  
the readiness is all."  
(Hamlet, Shake-Spear)*

*"The struggle for victory will take place on a battlefield beyond the battlefield."  
(Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* p179)*

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67 *Unrestricted Warfare*, by Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui p26

68 "Peace," by Harold Pettus, *The Veteran*, Spring 2014

69 "Peace, a poem for Maxine Green," by Sonia Sanchez, excerpted from *We Have Not Been Moved*, edited by Matt Meyer, 2012, p529)