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### 'The Road to Freedom is via the Cross' 'Just Means' in Chief Albert Luthuli's Life

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# ‘The Road to Freedom is via the Cross’: ‘Just Means’ in Chief Albert Luthuli’s Life

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## Abstract

This article deals with the ambiguities relating to the use of violence on the part of Chief Albert Luthuli, president of the African National Congress (ANC) until his death in 1967, the first African to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The article examines what Luthuli said and did and what are argued to be multiple meanings attached to these. The article does not set out a definitive reading but uses statements of Luthuli and others to probe ambiguity and symbolism, which point to the possibility that much of his work may have opened up debate on the apparent fruitlessness of non-violence against an intransigent regime. Whether adoption of violence was Luthuli’s desire is not argued, but he appears to have come to terms with it. The counter-arguments that stress absolute opposition to violence are not rebutted on a point-by-point basis to argue Luthuli’s preference for violence, rather than possible pragmatism.

**Key words:** Albert Luthuli; Christianity and violence; Gandhi; civil disobedience; revolution; symbols.

Chief Albert John Luthuli<sup>1</sup> was announced as Africa’s first Nobel Peace Prize winner 50 years ago, in 1960. Revisiting his life is necessary, not purely because of neglect, much as one uncovers an archaeological relic of the South African past. We are, instead, examining the legacy of a figure who may well provide inspiration and guidance on the issues that confront South Africa now and in the future.

Many find it difficult to articulate questions pertaining to morality and ethics. There is a sense that a person who speaks about these matters is being precious or claiming special subjective qualities for him or herself, and that this belongs to the clergy who are not in any case always taken seriously. Words connoting the moral or ethical content of our actions have lost currency. This seems to have been particularly so in the political world, possibly going back to the post-1990 or 1994 period, or even earlier.

One of the reasons why Luthuli’s life is important to revisit is that it fuses ethics, especially personal commitment to the values of his religion and to his political beliefs and actions. There is a sense in dealing with Luthuli that we are not merely addressing cold political issues where

1. Luthuli preferred the spelling Lutuli, but I follow that of his descendants, who use Luthuli.

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our judgement is required, although he has clear direction. But that direction is also informed by his religious beliefs which converge with the way he acts out his political life. How he represents these presupposes that he has made a choice, the undertaking of which requires political and religious examination.

There is no one in current South African politics as far as I know, who bears these values in this way and yet it is more necessary now than ever before. We are in a time when we need to turn, without blindness to the faults they may have or have had, to the lessons of exemplary leaders and reconsider what it is that we can learn and transmit to others. We need to build on this in order to inform our politics in a different way from that which currently prevails. There is of course a danger in notions like 'exemplary leadership' and one must be conscious of the need to avoid idealisation and this is not always easy to observe when one becomes absorbed in such work.

Unfortunately, the legacy of Chief Luthuli has been relatively neglected compared with others. As Dr Albertinah Luthuli (his eldest daughter, 'Ntombazana') remarked, I (the author) want to bring him up from '6 feet under'<sup>2</sup> into public view. Most of the major leaders have had substantial biographies written about them, which is not the case with Luthuli. There has only been a short biography by Mary Benson and that is not a substantial or careful scrutiny of his life.<sup>3</sup> This paper is intended to take Chief Luthuli seriously not merely as an event (as often happens in memorial lectures) where we talk about something else but link it to Luthuli. This legacy is revisited in its own right, attempting to achieve the rigour that it requires. This entails probing the legacy and his choices in order to understand them properly, but also in certain cases to examine concepts he uses and ideas he expresses and ask whether he has treated them in a manner that is the only meaning that can be given. It is asked whether these words can bear another and possibly more dynamic and changing content, one that is more emancipatory. While that may not have been his interpretation 60 years ago, the re-reading is quite compatible with Luthuli's life view and constantly enquiring spirit.

We will only discharge our duty properly if we do not turn such exercises into romanticism and assume that everything that the Chief said or did was correct for all time. He was a child of his time, and many of the beliefs that he held or interpretations offered by him may well have been revisited<sup>4</sup> had he not died in so tragic and unresolved a manner, struck by a goods train.<sup>5</sup> Elements of Luthuli's life are discussed not merely in appreciation of his qualities, but also to engage with them critically and argue that some of his views were mistaken or are now known to be inapplicable or wrong. This disagreement is a sign of the importance attached to Luthuli, that he still 'lives' and is not merely a figure to which we accord periodic heroic or other noble allusions. It is not merely by repeating what he said that we honour him. It is by engaging in a robust manner with his legacy that we examine his contemporary relevance.

It will also be argued that Luthuli's life was full of ambiguities, as was his thinking. This is an indication of complexity and nuance and that he was a man who was willing to learn

2. Interview conducted by the author, Ballito, 21 July 2009.

3. M. Benson, *Chief Albert Lutuli of South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

4. Where his views are likely to have changed include his notions of civilisation and 'copying from others' certain other cultural and identity-related questions. See for example, G. Pillay, ed., *Voices of Liberation, Volume 1: Albert Lutuli* (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 1993), 43.

5. That an apartheid-era inquest found no foul play does not close the matter, as with most other inquests of that time. I need to go no further than to record that it is open to question, but I cannot pursue that topic here.

when confronting situations that changed. Mahatma Gandhi, when confronted by much greater inconsistency in his thinking, did not contest this assessment, but said ‘judge me by my actions’.<sup>6</sup> With Luthuli I am arguing not that there was a weakness in ambiguity, but that while he wanted to address a particular issue, he sometimes opened up debate going well beyond that and allowing for conclusions that may well not have been originally intended. I do not see Luthuli as seeking any final answers, but asking questions repeatedly and openly with a willingness to learn.

Luthuli found violence repugnant. Most of the generation from the 1960s onwards when confronted by the demand that they renounce violence, were in fact called upon to renounce the armed struggle of the African National Congress (ANC).<sup>7</sup> This became a condition for release from prison or detention in the 1980s, rejected by most and accepted, for a range of reasons, by some.<sup>8</sup> As with most people in their normal life, Luthuli abhorred the harm wreaked by violence, the power of one imposed on an unwilling other. Like Gandhi, he was not a pacifist and all his statements on violence have an element of conditionality attached, related to the practicality of implementing *the principle* at a specific moment. Violence at an abstract level could do no good. At a concrete level, the violence of the oppressors could force the oppressed to depart from the principle of non-violence and to have recourse to methods, like armed struggle, more appropriate to the situation. Violence was never a principle with the national liberation movement, while peace is. The final part of the Freedom Charter reads: ‘There Shall be Peace and Friendship’.<sup>9</sup> Armed struggle may have been heroic at specific times, but it was never a principle of the ANC.

Consequently, when dealing with his attitude towards violence, it is not argued that Luthuli wanted violence, but that there is room to see his stance as opening a debate and even an element of *conditional* support<sup>10</sup> (as with Gandhi), that is, allowing it to be ethically correct under certain circumstances (which support could also have been withdrawn with a change in such conditions). In other words, the departure from the principle of non-violence was an aberration, while non-violence was the norm. Gandhi expresses an example of the reasons behind conditional departure from non-violence in 1947:

6. Quoted in N. Sen, ed., *Wit and Wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: New Book Society, 1995), 44.
7. The ANC is the oldest existing liberation movement, formed in 1912 (as the South African Native National Congress and is now in government), on the African continent. Initially it was open to African men only. This raises the complicated issue of terminology, which has considerable ideological significance as a result of apartheid naming and dividing. In this paper the South African population is described as comprising whites (at one stage called ‘Europeans’) and blacks (at one stage called non-Europeans, and still called non-whites by some). The word black supplanted non-white with the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement in the late 1960s, amongst many of those who supported the anti-apartheid struggle, in order to stress the unity of all black (previously non-white) people. The black people however comprise groupings subjected to different levels of oppression under apartheid: Africans, coloureds (of mixed race) and Indians. It is true that all South Africans are ‘Africans’ in a sense of belonging and other existential or geographical reasons, but the term used here specifically refers to that section which had been subjected to the most intensive oppression under apartheid.
8. It is not my intention to condemn those who signed such declarations. There is a range of factors that impact on these decisions, including lengthy terms served in relative isolation or simple and honest acknowledgement that no more of that life could be endured.
9. See R. Suttner and J. Cronin, *50 Years of the Freedom Charter* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2006), 266 and commentary, 189ff.
10. Since first writing this very qualified sentence, I have interviewed all his daughters, a son-in-law and other informants who are very clear that he supported the armed struggle. Interviews: Dr Albertinah Luthuli and Thembekile Luthuli Ngobese, Kwa Mashu, 29 August 2009; Thandeka Luthuli-Gcabashe, Umhlanga Rocks, 28 August 2009; and Thulani Gcabashe, Edendale, 29 September 2009.

... The violence we see today is the violence of cowards. There is also such a thing as the violence of the brave. If four or five men enter into a fight and die by the sword, there is a violence in it but it is the violence of the brave. But when ten thousand armed men attack a village of unarmed people and slaughter them along with their wives and children it is the violence of cowards. America unleashed its atom bomb over Japan. That was the violence of the cowards. The non-violence of the brave is a thing worth seeing. I want to see that non-violence before I die.<sup>11</sup>

Chief Luthuli was not one to suppress debate no matter how strongly he felt about a subject. But in opening up questions early in his presidency of the ANC in 1952, he risked that the resultant discussion would lead to conclusions quite different from those which he initially advocated. This, as indicated, was not to say that his initial premise of commitment to non-violence would not again become hegemonic, given a change of conditions, as has happened in post-1994 South Africa. In other words, violence may be an exception which is conditionally accepted, but once the conditions no longer exist, the respect for non-violence as a general approach returns. As a principle of social coexistence it is always necessary, even if temporarily in abeyance. Alternatively, having acquired the skills or special tools for practising violent acts it is within the realms of possibility that these may again be retrieved and threaten democracy. That is part of the climate of present-day South Africa, where violence is often treated as a virtue, rather than, as Luthuli did, seen as a necessity under special conditions.<sup>12</sup>

### Just Means and Just Ends

Chief Luthuli's conception of justice in the sense of what he strove for may not be a subject of great contestation in the sense that it derives from broadly agreed ideas such as those found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Freedom Charter,<sup>13</sup> supported and informed by his own Christian outlook, drawn from the Old and New Testament. This is not extensively developed in his writings, but may be generally uncontentious. But the question of what means may be employed to realise just ends under a very unjust order is an issue of debate and disagreement. This is part of a wider discussion over whether any means are justifiable if one's goal is worthy. Chief Luthuli, like many others, believed the means that the ANC employed should be worthy of its just cause, that it should not act in a manner that devalued that cause; and though he often adds the notion of practicality, he associates a just means with non-violent activity. In this respect he was in line with the thinking of Gandhi, though both were not pacifists.<sup>14</sup> The implication that his line of principle was conditional, being dependent on actions of the oppressor, can be found in his ANC presidential address of 1953, where he says, '[w]e can assure the world that it is our

11. G. Gandhi, ed., *The Oxford India Gandhi: Essential Writings* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 649.

12. See R. Suttner, 'The Zuma Era – its Historical Context and the Future', *African Historical Review*, 41, 3 (2009), 28–59; and 'Violence: Necessity or Virtue', *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg), 14–20 May 2010, 33.

13. Although not directly mentioned, these principles infuse the address delivered on receiving the Nobel Prize in 1961. See Pillay, *Voices*, 130–145.

14. Pillay, *Voices*, 157, citing Treason Trial (1956–61) testimony; N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Randburg: Macdonald Purnell, 1994), 260; I. Meer, *A Fortunate Man* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2002), 224; Benson, *Chief Lutuli*, 65. See also Mahatma Gandhi, above.

intention to keep on the non-violent plane. We would earnestly request the powers that be *to make it possible for us to keep our people in this mood*.<sup>15</sup>

What is explored are the implications of this stance in Luthuli's life and the complexity in attempting to achieve this aspiration. It will be argued that to decide what is an appropriate or just means in every situation, whether as a Christian, a Communist, and/or an international human rights activist, is not simple. It will be contended that Chief Luthuli's own beliefs on the matter are open to more than one interpretation; or he opened a debate on a potential for more than one interpretation.<sup>16</sup> In fact, recent interviews and discussions with his three surviving daughters, a son and one son-in-law, take the question into another realm. They indicate a broader degree of support for armed resistance as 'intransigence' intensified. But this was provided the masses were properly trained and not used as cannon fodder.<sup>17</sup>

At the time when Chief Luthuli became national president of the ANC there was already much talk about 'taking up the gun' and 'fighting back'. Walter Sisulu in concert with Nelson Mandela, without any organisational mandate, had in fact enquired of the Chinese – without success – whether they would provide support in the event of an armed struggle.<sup>18</sup> These leaders who were moving towards taking up arms were in fact acting in line with the sentiments of many of the rank and file.<sup>19</sup> Many later 'jumped the gun' and started burning sugar cane fields in Natal province in the late 1950s, before the question of armed action had been formally placed on the ANC's agenda.<sup>20</sup>

While there were these currents tending towards a military option, others counselled caution. Chief Luthuli is reputed to have been slow to approve of any violent action – on principle. Mandela argues that the Chief, while inclined towards non-violence did not stand in the way of armed struggle.<sup>21</sup> This will not go unchallenged and is likely to remain controversial amongst historians (despite what I have quoted from his children).<sup>22</sup> Moses Kotane, the South African Communist Party (SACP) general secretary, who had become a close confidant of the Chief during the Treason Trial of 1956–61, while not opposed to violence on principle, initially considered resort to arms as being reckless on the revolutionary basis that one should not risk lives until all other options have been fully exhausted.<sup>23</sup> In this respect, there is a degree of convergence with the non-ethical reference of Luthuli to practical reasons for non-violence, and

15. E. Reddy, compiler, *Luthuli: Speeches of Chief Albert John Luthuli* (Durban and Bellville: Madiba Publishers and UWC Historical and Cultural Centre, 1991), 57. Italics inserted.
16. But see S. Couper, 'My People Let Go: A Historical Examination of Chief Albert Luthuli and his Position on the Use of Violence as a Means to Achieve South Africa's Liberation from Apartheid', *International Congregational Journal*, 5, 1 (2005), 102, 106 and discussion below. Couper says this but comes to quite different conclusions from mine. Rev. Couper was the priest serving the Groutville Congregational community until recently. See also for distinct interpretations: B. Bunting, *Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary* (Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1998), 229ff; Pillay, 'Introduction', *Voices*, 3–33.
17. Interview, Albertinah Luthuli; discussion with Thembekile Ngobese; and interview, Thandeka Luthuli-Gcabashe.
18. While this was not the first or last time Mandela acted outside of the collective (for example his apparent call for violent resistance in the Sophiatown removals of the 1950s, and later his unilateral initiation of negotiations), it is unusual for Sisulu's political life.
19. South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004), 53–146.
20. *Ibid.*, 62ff.
21. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 260; Meer, *A Fortunate Man*, 224.
22. SADET, *Road to Democracy*, 89–90; and for opposing views, see Couper, 'My People Let Go'.
23. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, chapter 41; Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 73–74.



the oral evidence of the qualifications he placed on support for armed action. For both there was a conditionality that made non-violence viable, longer than it did for Mandela.

Kotane had great influence on the ANC leadership. It required an all-night discussion with Mandela chiding him with the example of the Cuban Communist Party having fallen behind the popular organisations by its tardiness to take up arms in the Cuban revolution, to contain Kotane's negative sentiments. Kotane agreed not to oppose Mandela and be silent in the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC), that is, not necessarily signifying that he approved, without qualification.<sup>24</sup> It should be noted, however, that the formation of MK (mKhonto we Sizwe, the Spear of the Nation, as the ANC's military wing) was on an ambiguous basis. In order to protect ordinary ANC members and leaders who were not engaged in MK, it was established as a separate body. Consequently, although Mandela repeatedly reported to the Chief on MK and was in fact arrested on return from one of these visits,<sup>25</sup> formally it was not an ANC organisation at the time of its establishment. This created various problems of accountability and in the recruitment process.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps we have tended to draw too sharp a line between the peaceful and armed struggle, and this can be illustrated in the actions and words of Chief Luthuli, around which there remain controversy.

The announcement of the Nobel Prize award to Chief Luthuli was made in 1960. He received the prize in 1961. It is said that the formation of MK and its initiation of sabotage was postponed to avoid embarrassing Luthuli while receiving this award and also casting doubts on the longstanding peaceful campaigns of the organisation that he led. The proximity in time was nevertheless acknowledged by Mandela to have been unfortunate.<sup>27</sup>

But any embarrassment must be qualified and the potential of using violence could have been foreseen. Even in his earlier non-violent statements, Luthuli gives indications of the ultimate fruitlessness of these efforts. Indeed, in one of his most famous speeches 'The Road to Freedom is via the Cross', after the government deposed him as a chief, he reflected in 1952:

Who can deny that 30 years of my life have been spent knocking in vain, patiently, moderately and modestly, at a closed and barred door? What have been the fruits of my many years of moderation? Has there been any reciprocal tolerance or moderation from the government? No! On the contrary, the past 30 years have seen the greatest number of laws restricting our rights and progress, until today we have reached a stage where we have almost no rights at all.<sup>28</sup>

What conclusion is the listener or reader to draw from this statement? It is a statement of failure of non-violent peaceful activities. Not one to run away from unpleasant facts, he put on record that non-violence had not succeeded. For the person who followed Luthuli, could this not have been seen as an invitation or encouragement to debate the matter further? Luthuli believed

24. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 258–260.

25. On the separation of ANC and MK, see Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 260–261. On repeated consultation between Mandela and Luthuli, see interviews with Thembekile Ngobese, Albertinah Luthuli and Thandeka Luthuli-Gcabashe above.

26. J. Matthews, interview, SADET, *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling their Stories, Volume 1, 1955–1970* (Houghton: Mutloatse Publishers, 2008), 19–20; R. Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa* (Jacana: Johannesburg, 2008), 34–35.

27. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 273.

28. Pillay, *Voices*, 47. The speech was delivered in November 1952 (see Reddy, *Luthuli*, 41), not after the Treason Trial, as stated by Cooper, 'My People Let Go', 104. This trial only began in 1956.

strongly in non-violence, but in many of his statements, as indicated, he suggests that it was not only a good in itself but the most *practical* course to follow. But in this declaration he concedes that the approach had not brought results. As an open-minded person, was he not inviting others to question that course or debate its validity, or consider pursuing it with greater vigour and imagination? The reference to knocking on the door for 30 years without results quickly became part of the repertoire of struggle songs, demanding an opening:

Open Malan, we are knocking: (four times)  
 Wake up Luthuli, Luthuli of Africa (twice)  
 You will never refuse when you are sent (twice)  
 Let God be praised (four times)  
 What has the black person done?  
 Let Africa return! (four times)<sup>29</sup>

The refrain is ambiguous, because it is not calling for something beyond ‘knocking’, even though Luthuli had concluded that this had not succeeded. But again, knocking may itself be more or less aggressive and does not necessarily connote polite petitioning, given that the ANC was already engaged in acts of defiance. On the connotation of knocking, many activists will testify to the anxiety and fear induced by the loud knocking of the police. There is, however, no denying that one of the interpretations to which Luthuli’s own words are open, is that the results of non-violence were very limited. The time for armed struggle may have arrived, or have been near; at the very least, it needed to be considered. It does not worry me greatly whether or not Luthuli fervently supported or gave qualified support or was simply silent on the armed struggle and the formation of MK. All that is indicated is that within his non-violent stance, he himself voiced frustration at the results it had yielded and provided the foundation on which an armed struggle could be debated or justified.

This differs from Couper, who while referring to Luthuli’s ‘complex and ambiguous’ stance, insists on his steadfast adherence to non-violence.<sup>30</sup> That cannot be without qualification, nor can it be said that he supported armed struggle without caveats. My refuge is in the notion of ambiguity, the sign of an unresolved question, which seems to best capture the state of mind of the Chief. This is to be read together with the abovementioned reference to conditionality. Equally, if Couper, as indicated above, sees much of Luthuli’s statements being suffused with ambiguity, why should he state that this passage was ‘certainly not intended by him to be used to justify the armed struggle’?<sup>31</sup> Surely the Chief could not have discounted such an interpretation, which was part of the basis for many people’s resort to arms in later times?<sup>32</sup>

In his statement after the Rivonia trial verdict, Luthuli said:

The African National Congress ... held consistently to a policy of using militant, non-violent means of struggle ... But finally all avenues of resistance were closed. The African National Congress and other organisations were made illegal; their leaders jailed, exiled or forced underground.<sup>33</sup>

29. Translation from the Zulu version, in L. Kuper, *Passive Resistance in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 14–15.

30. Couper, ‘My People Let Go’, 106, 107.

31. *Ibid.*, 113.

32. See Mandela’s statement from the dock, in N. Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life* (London: IDAF, 1990), 163.

33. T. Karis and G. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882–1964, Volume 3: Challenge and Violence, 1953–1964* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), 798–799.



Like Mandela in his court statement in the Rivonia trial,<sup>34</sup> he referred to the need to contain spontaneous acts of violent resistance in the face of intensified apartheid repression. '[S]poradic acts of uncontrolled violence were increasing throughout the country. At first in one place, then in another, there were spontaneous eruptions against intolerable conditions; many of these acts increasingly assumed a racial character.' Luthuli continues:

The African National Congress *never abandoned its method of a militant, non-violent struggle*, and of creating in the process a spirit of militancy in the people. However, *in the face of the uncompromising white refusal to abandon a policy which denies the African and other oppressed South Africans their rightful heritage – freedom – no one can blame brave just men for seeking justice by the use of violent methods*; nor could they be blamed if they tried to create an organized force in order to ultimately establish peace and racial harmony.<sup>35</sup>

This is a statement that should not be hurriedly unpacked. It is first and foremost an affirmation of opposition to violence as an undesirable means for dealing with disputes. It signals that non-violence has not yielded results and is in itself another qualification on his allegedly absolutist position on violence. Logically, what Luthuli recounts as the result of his moderate knocking on closed and barred doors is that it had seen a worsening of the situation. Is it not implicit, or a very legitimate conclusion, that more aggressive steps could follow and that he, Luthuli, could not condemn those who had taken this route? None of this detracted from the commitment to non-violence where circumstances allowed. That is obviously not the only inference that can be drawn, especially given the time, for some have said that non-violent resistance was not pursued with sufficient vigour. It was not non-violence that had failed but as J.N. Singh put it, 'we have failed non-violence'.<sup>36</sup> Indeed Luthuli may then have thought that the ANC had not done so with sufficient imagination, though he did not voice this. But then 'finally', as he puts it, 'all avenues of resistance were closed'. To avert random violence, an organised force was created. Without volunteering to join or saying he actively supported it, he makes it clear that those who chose to take up arms were 'just men ... seeking justice by the use of violent methods ...'<sup>37</sup>

I am reading into what Luthuli said, elaborating more than he ever did in his public statements,<sup>38</sup> because while condemning violence – in principle – we should not fetishise or essentialise the difference between violence and non-violence in ANC history. ANC history manifests continuities which repeatedly contain ruptures and likewise ruptures bear within them elements of continuity. That is why even in the words of one of the main proponents of non-violence one can read an argument for changing tack, towards armed struggle, amongst other possibilities.<sup>39</sup>

Couper, while noting the complex and ambiguous nature of Luthuli's positions,<sup>40</sup> and that there can be many understandings,<sup>41</sup> (though the position advanced here is not any of the 10 listed), but relying on Luthuli's Nobel Prize speech, comes down for a more or less unqualified

34. Mandela, *The Struggle*, 165ff; Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 260.

35. Karis and Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, 798–799. Emphasis inserted.

36. Quoted in Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 261; and in Meer, *A Fortunate Man*, 224.

37. Karis and Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, 789–799.

38. As indicated above, the oral evidence accessed thus far does point to his having accepted armed struggle.

39. Lyn Graybill notes caveats to this effect in his Nobel Prize speech. See L.Graybill, *Religion and Resistance Politics in South Africa* (Westport: Praeger, 1995), 38.

40. Couper, 'My People Let Go', 106.

41. *Ibid.*, 108.

support for non-violence.<sup>42</sup> But after citing a rather garbled rendition of ANC history by Pillay,<sup>43</sup> and his own textual analysis of words in Luthuli's Rivonia statement, an analysis that seems to 'protest too much', he again reiterates a *preference* for non-violence.<sup>44</sup>

That preference was there. It is not intended to suggest that violence was in the Chief's mind from early on, certainly not for him, but only that it is a legitimate and possible inference, which experience had forced upon his thinking. It is important that we understand that in practice no approach was irreversible nor displacing all others.

### **Indian Political and Cultural Influence: Oaths and Dress as Signifiers of Embryonic Violence<sup>45</sup>**

In the early 1950s, we have noted on the part of some of the leading cadres as well as regional leaders, anticipation of conflict and the day when the African people would again be soldiers. We have thus far only the testimony of males, and it may be that there was similar talk amongst the women, but we do not know, insofar as available evidence is concerned. This is also a period where the most dedicated, the 'voluntiyas' (volunteers), wore a specific uniform, distinguishing themselves as cadres of the liberation movement, willing to make unlimited sacrifices. The uniform marked them off as a special group of highly disciplined and not merely casual members or followers of the ANC. There does not appear to be any evidence to suggest an African or other black people having influenced the form of this uniform, apart from the use of the 'Gandhi cap'. Luli Callinicos<sup>46</sup> has suggested that the jacket derives from the shirts Nehru used to wear. There is an undoubted similarity, but the Nehru shirt was multi-coloured and of soft fabric, while the voluntiyas only wore tough khaki jackets, usually with nothing underneath, in the photographs I have seen. (Nehru often wore a shirt or vest under the shirt.) It seems most likely that it was an adaptation of the uniforms worn during the World Wars, although nothing I have read or anyone with whom I have spoken has been able to point to the precise origins.

The volunteers also swore an oath to undertake to operate within the discipline of the organisation.<sup>47</sup> Significantly, Gandhi also placed great weight on oaths and vows, using these in the early recruitment of Indian volunteer protesters in South Africa, notably in a great 'bonfire' of registration certificates in 1908. They could foster unity not only within the self but also be of use in the structures of the organisation. The oath is also related to *psychological preparedness for sacrifice*, on which more is said below.<sup>48</sup> Gandhi had specifically chosen the cap or had it adapted from the Kashmiri hat as an emblem of the Indian struggle and nation to be.<sup>49</sup> In a sense, this sets up a tension between the uniform carrying potential military connotations and the cap, bearing the imagery of Gandhism and non-violence. On the other hand, while armed struggle was adopted, the ANC never renounced peaceful, legal struggle where it was feasible. This can

42. *Ibid.*, 119.

43. Pillay, *Voices*, 30.

44. Couper, 'My People Let Go', 122.

45. This argument is developed more substantially in R. Suttner, 'Dress, Gestures and Other Cultural Representations and Manifestations and Indian Influence on the Formation of ANC Masculinities', *Historia*, 54, 1 (2009), 51–91.

46. Personal communication, 4 July 2009.

47. M. Benson, *South Africa: The Struggle for a Birthright* (London: IDAF, 1985), 143–146.

48. M. Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Diagnostic Approach Rethought: Exploring a Perspective on his Life and Work* (New Delhi: Promilla, 2007), chapter 4.

49. E. Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 70.

be seen in the eagerness with which openings of the late 1970s and 1980s were encouraged for mass activities.

Interestingly, amongst the contemporary interpretations running counter to some of the implications I have raised, was Helen Joseph being very impressed and seeing the uniforms as signifying 'peace volunteers' at her first attendance of an ANC conference in 1954.<sup>50</sup>

In accepting the Nobel Prize, Luthuli again raises military connotations through his attire, wearing the headdress, necklace and other elements of the apparel of his chieftaincy. Luthuli was acting in line with what the ANC would do throughout its existence, joining the struggles of the day to its heritage, by some wearing the insignia of chieftaincy or other signifiers identifying them with their clan or chiefdom. The ambiguities that this may have evoked were part of the ambiguities that the ANC always carried.

What Luthuli wears around his neck appears to be *iminqwamba*, which is associated with medicinal powers<sup>51</sup> and it is made of hawks' claws.<sup>52</sup> The history of association of medicinal powers with both curing individuals and preparation for war,<sup>53</sup> and the hawk representing aggression, increase the ambiguity around Luthuli's identity and the potential associations which can be drawn.

### 'Ramshackle Home', Nobel Prize Money and Swazi Farms

Chief Luthuli was a remarkable man, but in his home there were tendencies and issues of disagreement that one finds in many others. The children were not immune to the aspirations of young people for the good things of life. According to Albertinah Luthuli (Ntombazana), some of the daughters felt somewhat ashamed of their home, compared with others. When they approached the Chief, they told him that he was a man who was visited by important people from all over the world and he should host them in a better house. He should find a way of earning more money to do this. The Chief was not convinced that there was anything wrong with the house. He was quite happy with it.

When the news of the Nobel Prize reached the family, the elder sisters started to imagine the home they would buy, one that would make them the envy of the rest of Groutville. Their imaginations came to a halt when almost all the money was spent on buying farms in Swaziland, because, the Chief explained, people might have to leave the country and the ANC could make use of them. Nokukhanya, MaBhengu, Luthuli's wife would tend these farms from time to time, in order to ensure that they were not seen by the Swazis as unoccupied. According to Thulani Gcabashe, her son-in-law, during the 1960s there were MK cadres or recruits being tended for by MaBhengu and he also worked on the farms. In the 1960s they were also able to take a lot of produce back to Groutville, although the farms collapsed in the 1970s.<sup>54</sup>

50. E-mail communication with 1950s veteran, Norman Levy, 15 July 2009.

51. E-mail communication with John Wright, 4 August 2008.

52. Personal communication, Luthuli's grandson, Nkululeko Luthuli, 4 June 2008.

53. See J. Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Pietermaritzburg: UK-ZN Press, 2005). See similar evidence prior to the Wankie campaign of 1967, in Suttner, *ANC Underground*, chapter 4. The detachment was named after Luthuli. This is the ANC's representation, but in the interview, Albertinah Luthuli referred to this specifically as indicating the Chief's identification with armed struggle.

54. Interviews Thulani Gcabashe and Albertinah Luthuli. Earlier telephonic conversation with Thembekile Ngobese, 14 April 2009, where the use of the farms as ANC transit camps was confirmed. See also P. Rule, with M. Aitken and J. van Dyk, *Nokukhanya: Mother of Light* (Johannesburg: Grail Press, 1993), 131ff.

The only part of the money that was used by the family was for the purchase of a flat to be shared by sisters Albertinah and Thandeka in the event of their finding themselves without a home.<sup>55</sup> The family lifestyle in their house in Grootville remained unaltered until the death of the Chief.

In many of the interviews conducted with individuals who left the country, these relate that they were met in Swaziland by ANC veterans like John Nkademeng and stayed at some unknown place.<sup>56</sup> The weight of evidence leads one to conclude that there is little doubt that the Chief, whatever his initial reservations may have been, decided to contribute practically to the success of MK through such logistical support.

Couper seems to support the likelihood that these were ANC transit camps though their objective was not clear. My starting point is that armed activity is not merely carrying a gun but also includes a range of logistical support assisting exit and entry into the country. Without this, a particular underground or armed action would not have been possible. Clearly, accommodation and meals was part of such ancillary support.<sup>57</sup> Couper indicates that this may have been what happened:

One would need to determine what kind of 'refugees' these farms were intended to serve. It is true that the lines between a 'combatant' refugee and a 'political refugee' were very blurred during the struggle. Perhaps the distinction was not even attempted as regards the use of the farms. Second, were the farms utilised as 'safehouses', or as launching pads for military operations across the border? Either case is very doubtful. The answer to these questions would point to whether the farms in exile suggest Luthuli's support of the ANC's change of strategy.<sup>58</sup>

This quotation shows that it is not clear from the written record what the precise terms of Luthuli's engagement with the ANC armed struggle became. As Couper suggests, there is a version that may provide the answer. Luthuli is reported, apart from the oral evidence above, to have told Moses Kotane: 'When my son decides to sleep with a girl, he does not ask for my permission, but just does it. It is only afterwards when the girl is pregnant and the parents make a case that he brings his troubles home'.<sup>59</sup> One thing is clear and that is that transit houses, whether for political, combatants, safehouses or military operations, are all actions in support of MK or other underground work.<sup>60</sup>

One possible additional document which supports the notion that Luthuli probably did come to terms with armed struggle during this period, is the view expressed by Professor Z.K. Matthews, who was very like-minded with Luthuli in many of these matters. He is reported to have had a similar stance to Luthuli at the NEC meeting deciding on the formation of MK.<sup>61</sup> In a World Council of Churches speech in 1964, he said, *inter alia*:

It is clear that Mandela and his colleagues *were still inspired by the spirit of non-violence. They reluctantly recognised that violence was inevitable*, but they were convinced that if it did come, it

55. Interview Albertinah Luthuli.

56. Suttner, *The ANC Underground*, for example, chapter 4. See also H. Bernstein, *The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), for many such accounts scattered within her interview material.

57. See Suttner, *ANC Underground*, chapter 6, regarding women performing logistical tasks.

58. Couper, 'My People Let Go', 116.

59. Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 274.

60. See Suttner, *ANC Underground*, chapter 6, on the erroneous notion of logistical support treated as non-combatant work.

61. Joe Matthews interview in SADET, *South Africans Telling their Stories*, 19–20.

was their duty as responsible leaders of the people, to take certain steps about it, namely, to ensure (1) that such a movement should be *under the guidance of responsible leaders like themselves imbued with the spirit of non-violence*; (2) that it should be carried out without any loss of life, but should be directed against installations which did not involve danger to life.<sup>62</sup>

This is a significant confirmation of the continuity within the rupture that MK comprised, that Matthews sees it as an action taken by those who were committed to non-violent struggle. Then he concludes by asking:

When the flower of African youth ... are being sentenced to long terms of imprisonment during peace time, for fighting for their legitimate rights in what they believe to be the only ways open to them, can we say that the Christian thing to do is to advise them to acquiesce in their present situation and wait, Micawber-like, for something to turn up?<sup>63</sup>

In a small way, the oral record in the interviews and reports on discussions held have provided the likelihood of an answer that narrows the ambiguities.

### **In Choosing the Road to Freedom, be Prepared to Do What you Advocate and Suffer**

Gandhi was very clear that he himself should be prepared to do whatever he advocated.<sup>64</sup> Mandela in facing the death penalty indicates that when one says one is prepared to die, one must have prepared oneself for that and be sure that this is in fact the case.<sup>65</sup> Luthuli stressed that anyone who took an action should be certain that s/he was ready for the consequences. The Natal region of the ANC had not been properly informed of the impending Defiance Campaign by the previous president, A.W.G. Champion, and consequently delayed their entry. At the moment of decision, Chief Luthuli, the new Natal president said: 'Look, we will be calling upon people to make very important demonstrations and unless we are sure of the road and prepared to travel along it ourselves we have no right to call other people along it.' M.B. Yengwa, who had just become secretary of Natal, described what happened after that: 'We all said we were prepared and he said he too was prepared and he asked us to pray. We gave our pledge and we prayed'.<sup>66</sup> Yengwa is reported as saying that this was the turning point in Luthuli's life. He had decided, not irresponsibly, to damn the consequences, as long as he was advancing the cause of the movement.<sup>67</sup>

One of the reasons I find myself drawn to a leader, the details of whose life are sketchy compared to those of others whose biographies have been written, is the character of his statements. They are words from which it is hard to retreat; they put his body on the line. They do not speak purely of the current situation and strategies but what he, Albert Luthuli, chose to do. He speaks of the sacrifices and potential dangers to which he committed himself to face. The

62. Z.K. Matthews, 'The Road from Non-violence to Violence', Speech at a conference in Kitwe, sponsored by the World Council of Churches, May 1964; see T. Karis and G. Gerhart, eds, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1990, Volume 5: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964–1979* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1997), 354. Italics inserted. The reference to avoiding 'loss of life' refers to the earliest days of MK, later superseded, although civilians were not supposed to be targets.

63. *Ibid.*, 356.

64. Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Diagnostic Approach*, chapter 4.

65. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 360.

66. Benson, *The Struggle for a Birthright*, 144–145.

67. *Ibid.*, 145.

statements unequivocally and publicly say he is prepared to open himself to great injury in order to realise what is required. The road to freedom is via the cross and that is a road that is full of pain. The cross itself may be ambiguous, a cross of thorns, rather than the noble result desired. This is captured in Matthew's Gospel, where the governor's soldiers 'twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on His head'. They then mocked Him before crucifixion<sup>68</sup> (see below).

In the same speech ('The Road to Freedom'), Luthuli, in choosing to remain in the liberation struggle even if deposed as a chief, stares directly into the dangerous future that lay before him and gives us a glimpse of his process of thinking:

As for myself, with a full sense of responsibility and a clear conviction, I decided to remain in the struggle for extending democratic rights and responsibilities of all sections of the South African community. I have embraced the non-violent passive resistance technique in fighting for freedom because I am convinced it is the only non-revolutionary, legitimate and humane way that could be used by people denied, as we are, effective constitutional means to further our aspirations.

The wisdom or foolishness of this decision I place in the hands of the Almighty.

What the future has in store for me I do not know. It might be ridicule, imprisonment, a concentration camp, flogging, banishment and even death. I only pray to the Almighty to strengthen my resolve so that none of these grim possibilities may deter me from striving, for the sake of the good name of our beloved country ... to make it a true democracy and a true union in form and spirit of all the communities in the land.

My only painful concern at times is for the welfare of my family but I try even in this regard, in a spirit of trust and surrender to God's will as I see it to say: 'God will provide.'

It is inevitable that in working for freedom some individuals and some families have to take the lead and suffer: The road to freedom is via the cross.<sup>69</sup>

Before interpreting the main part of the speech, the conditionality attached to the methods employed is again evident when Luthuli says 'denied, as we are, effective constitutional means to further our aspirations'. This obviously indicates the crossing of a threshold of legality and invites the question whether the struggle should adopt non-constitutional means and how far this interpretation can be taken.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, it remains an affirmation of non-violence and legality so long as conditions permit.

My general interpretation of this part of his speech, 'The Road to Freedom', is Luthuli unpacking what he understands his life's choice to mean. He interrogates what his commitment to freedom implies for a human being who has chosen that path. In so doing I read out of what is there and I read into it, perhaps, what is implicit or symbolic.

Should we read anything into his saying that the wisdom or foolishness of this decision is placed in the hands of the Almighty? Luthuli has made his decision. He may have prayed for guidance. But this invocation of the Almighty is to 'strengthen my resolve', in the decision he has himself made, so that he is not deterred by some of the grim consequences. In other words, he is not speaking of a situation where he surrenders to the Almighty. His own agency initiates some events, which the Almighty may, however, consider wise or foolish.

68. Matthew, 27: 27–31.

69. Pillay, *Voices*, 50; Reddy, *Luthuli*, 43–44.

70. See Couper, 'My People Let Go', for a different interpretation to mine.



The cross is a guide but also requires a specific choice, a purpose in one's life that needs dedication to that goal. The way to freedom is via the cross may mean that that is the way you must act but it also means that the cross is the goal, an unfolding goal as freedom is a dynamic concept that is not finalised once and for all.<sup>71</sup>

What follows appears to envisage what the costs may be and in this he has a cross to bear. He asks the Almighty to empower him to carry out what he has decided to do, even if he bears these costs, in carrying the cross on his shoulder. *He does not ask the Almighty to avert any such mishap from occurring. He is ready to face the potential dangers and damage. That is his choice as a free human being, connected to the Almighty insofar as he draws strength in his resolve. He asks for no mercy. He is ready to endure the consequences of his choice, which he feels is taken as a Christian, but being fallible, the Almighty might well show him one day that he has been wrong.*

When he relies on God to provide for his family in the sense of there being a way for those who tread a righteous path, not that they will be 'rewarded' but that he believes the Almighty will guide him in finding the means to survive.

The final passage of the Luthuli quotation seems to carry three meanings:

- The way to freedom is that of the cross – it is the route to follow and it coincides with the freedom struggle.
- It is a painful path in that bearing the cross is a burden in a physical or other non-spiritual sense or also entailing a constant spiritual test.
- The third meaning is potentially not surviving, martyrdom.

In a speech at the 44th Congress of the ANC in 1955, he exhorts the members to be willing to serve and sacrifice:

But for all this we cannot claim to have prosecuted our campaigns with any semblance of military efficiency and technique. We cannot say that the Africans are accepting fast enough the gospel of service and sacrifice for the general and large good without expecting personal and at that immediate reward. They have not accepted fully the basic truth enshrined in the saying no cross, no crown.<sup>72</sup>

I see this as joining a call for sacrifice as necessary for freedom and that no suffering, means no freedom. Now the use of the word 'cross' again means nothing as simple as accepting Christian beliefs or following the way of the Lord, it is suggested, but an understanding that one has taken a course that can entail hardship. This can mean jail, flogging, death, but also willingness to act without thought of reward. In a sense that initial stress is to speak to the other side of our current problem in South Africa, the need for greed to be satisfied instead of serving the needs of others through our efforts.<sup>73</sup>

Here Luthuli is adding to the earlier statement the need to make sacrifices and eschew

71. J. Hoffman, *Gender and Sovereignty: Feminism, the State and International Relations* (Aldershot: Palgrave, 2001), 6ff, 23ff; A. Arblaster, *Democracy* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2002), 3, 6–9 and 15–16. As indicated below, it can also suffer reversals, as history has shown repeatedly.

72. Pillay, *Voices*, 89–90. Note the use of the words 'military efficiency and technique'. This is a significant change in discourse, though it does not in itself suggest support for or acceptance of military activity.

73. On E News International (a South African television station) on 22 March 2009, ANC Youth League leader, Julius Malema (in contrast) said that those who left the ANC to join the then new opposition party, Congress of the People (COPE), were 'now poor: you can only prosper in the ANC'.

selfishness, and this may be ‘rewarded’ perhaps with flogging and other forms of punishment, but even though that is not certain, those who are dedicated must prepare themselves for such possibilities.

This was a choice and we must not assume that it came to Luthuli, or anyone else, easily. It is said that Jesus hesitated. At the Mount of Olives, according to Luke, and at Gethsemane, according to Matthew, faced with death on the cross, He became sorrowful and troubled, even to death. Because of this He prayed that this cup pass,<sup>74</sup> or be removed from Him.<sup>75</sup> But, Jesus said, not my will but Your will be done. No one, no human being really wants to go the way of the cross, is how I read this, not even Jesus, who counselled others to do so.

Greg Cuthbertson argues, in addition, that this interpretation being offered is represented in Luthuli’s mind as an extension of Christ’s redemptive act on a cross. The powerful imagery of the cross is present in Luthuli’s religious and political experiences; there is a symmetry that sets up a continuum between the material and the metaphysical. He does not separate religion and struggle.<sup>76</sup>

The reference to the crown as related to the cross, has a pathos because ‘cross’ signifies reward, but could in Christian terms also refer to the ‘crown of thorns’. There is therefore an ambiguity which points to victory and crown on the one hand, and the cross of suffering and a crown of humiliation, on the other. Luthuli speaks of ‘ridicule, concentration camps, banishment and death’, so he is clearly aware of this ambiguity. The ‘road to freedom is via the cross’ which spells terrible suffering and even the ‘crown’ could be more humiliation. But the hope of the Christian, in his optimism, is that ‘victory and the crown is also a possibility’.

His vivid portrayal of ‘being in the hands of the Almighty’ is a reference to Christ’s suffering even to death. He speaks of ‘surrender to God’s will’ as the price to pay for freedom which he equates with salvation, which was to find an echo in the liberation theology of the 1960s.<sup>77</sup>

Luthuli was likely to have drawn on a range of texts in the New Testament, such as St Matthew’s Gospel,<sup>78</sup> which says that ‘no one is worthy of me who does not take up his cross and follow me’. This is Jesus’s injunction: ‘Anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine must renounce self; he must take up his cross and follow me. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it’.<sup>79</sup>

Walter Sisulu in stressing the revolutionary implications of the ANC’s Defiance Campaign referred to a new breed of militants being developed who were prepared to suffer to the limit, being known as ‘defiers of death’.<sup>80</sup>

74. Matthew, 22: 36–46.

75. Luke, 22: 39–46.

76. Personal communication with Greg Cuthbertson, 4 March 2009. See also A. Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), especially chapter 8.

77. Personal communication, Greg Cuthbertson.

78. Matthew, 10: 38.

79. Matthew, 16: 24–25.

80. W. Sisulu, *I Will Go Singing: Walter Sisulu Speaks of his Life and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*, in conversation with G.M. Houser and H. Shore (Cape Town and New York: Robben Island Museum and the Africa Fund, nd., c. 2001), 79.

### Strengthened in One's Choice by Solidarity with Others in Struggle

Albert Nolan addresses the question of how one might draw strength in carrying out one's commitment. He associates the notion of 'liberation struggle' with the ideas of hope of a solution.<sup>81</sup> He notes the importance of singing and dancing, and remarks that they are also a celebration of solidarity or unity in struggle:

The struggle rescues people from alienation, isolation and individualism. It restores *ubuntu* (humanness) and the experience of being a living member of a living body. Hence the slogan 'an injury to one is an injury to all'.<sup>82</sup> I can only presume that this is derived from the statement of Paul in I Corinthians: 'God has arranged the body ... so that each part may be equally concerned for all the others. *If one part is hurt, all parts are hurt with it.* If one part is given honour, all parts enjoy it'.<sup>83</sup> I am also reminded of Jesus saying, 'Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me'.<sup>84</sup> ...

... To participate fully in the struggle you need something more than commitment, you need heroic *courage* .... [I]t is the struggle that helps them to overcome their natural fears. *The experience of solidarity and support together with the examples of others gradually enables a person to overcome fear and to act with confidence and courage.*<sup>85</sup>

Nolan sees the struggle as embodying a religious aura, celebrating hope, the experience of community, the self-sacrifice, the total commitment, the courage, the discipline and the willingness to live and die. These, he argues, are normally associated with religion.<sup>86</sup>

When Jesus discovered great faith outside of the system ... he exclaimed: 'Nowhere in Israel have I found faith like this'.<sup>87</sup> Would it be an exaggeration to say of the struggle in South Africa today: 'Nowhere in the Church have I found faith like this?' Perhaps we need to dig still deeper to find out whether this is true or not.<sup>88</sup>

The above statement amplifies some of what has been analysed earlier. What we have generally seen is the individual choices that the Chief made. What Nolan argues, speaking for the 1980s, is that individual choice is strengthened; the resolve is buttressed by solidarity with others and not purely the support of the Almighty. That common commitment and association strengthens the ability to withstand the suffering that may be incurred in carrying out the original choice.

Not all concepts have a single meaning, like a stone. In the social sphere there are many concepts that may have a range of meanings, connoting development from one phase, progress or perhaps retrogression and perversion of an idea from what it was at an earlier time. Thus Anthony Arblaster writes that there cannot be one meaning attached to the word 'democracy', because it is contextually defined and mediated by a range of factors that have altered the dominant meaning – which may not be exclusive, at various times.<sup>89</sup> John Hoffman writes of a momentum

81. Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 158.

82. This is a well-known unionist slogan in South Africa.

83. Nolan quotes here from I Corinthians, 12: 24–26.

84. Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 159. His source here is Matthew, 25: 40. Emphasis in original.

85. Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 160. Initial emphasis in original. Emphasis in last sentence inserted.

86. *Ibid.*, 160–161.

87. Nolan's source is Matthew, 8: 10.

88. Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 161.

89. Arblaster, *Democracy*, 161.

concept. This connotes a mode of understanding some concepts as always in development and that in fact is never ending in its boundaries; its development may continue to become more or less emancipatory over time.<sup>90</sup>

The struggle is surely also a dynamic concept that may develop in a range of ways that reflect the enhancement of the values that Nolan notes as prevalent 22 years ago. Alternatively, what he, Arblaster and Hoffman speak of, may be reversed or diverted. It is necessary to analyse the contemporary meanings of the struggle and accept what is attributed to that word by Nolan may or may not be valid today.

If we see some sort of reversal or retrogression, it adds relevance to the revisiting of Luthuli's life as apparently an exemplar of struggle through common and individual sacrifice. His life and message is an example required for us to restore what may have been lost.

### Conceptual Usage Conditioning Luthuli's Stance on Violence

#### *Subversion and revolution*

Luthuli uses concepts in line with their currency in his time and the meanings with which many people still associate them today. It is important that concepts like freedom, revolution, justice, and struggle be understood as not having a limited meaning but a plurality of meanings related to conditions prevailing at any particular moment, and the ideology and subjective perspective of a range of actors, whose location differs. As we have noted above, Luthuli himself indicates that non-violence had a certain conditionality attached to its success, and this had political and a range of other implications. Reference has also been made to evolution and retrogression in the meaning of concepts. Luthuli in 1952 clearly regards some concepts as dynamic, but in the case of certain others he does not allow for their being mediated by a range of factors and their meanings being in flux. He thus tends towards a static conceptualisation of some concepts that may potentially be understood as dynamic. This is first examined in the context of the words revolution and subversion.

In 'The Road to Freedom ...'<sup>91</sup> and other writings, Luthuli is at pains to dissociate the ANC policies, strategy and tactics from revolution and subversion. That interpretation is open to question, allowing as indicated, that Luthuli's thinking was not complete and this is an early speech in a life that was cut short.

Despite variations within various schools, there is a body of thinking that associates revolution with violence and much of the classic Marxist-Leninist and national liberation movement literature has been tied to insurrectionism with one decisive moment where power is seized or control of the state is decisive.<sup>92</sup> This is opposed to evolutionary change which is seen as non-revolutionary, more cautious and less likely to better people's lives. One of the weaknesses of many of the models of revolution is that they rest on this one decisive moment – violent or otherwise – where

90. Hoffman, *Gender and Sovereignty*, 6ff, 23ff.

91. See Pillay, *Voices*, 46–50.

92. V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969) favouring seizure; and A. Hunt, 'Introduction', in A. Hunt, *Marxism and Democracy* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980) and B. Kagarlitsky, *The Dialectic of Change* (London and New York: Verso, 1990), placing more weight on cumulative reforms. The position with emphasis on the single decisive act is also found in ANC literature. See ANC, *Strategy and Tactics of the ANC*, 1969, at [anc.org.za/history/stratact.html](http://anc.org.za/history/stratact.html), accessed 28 November 2008.

everything changes. Nothing before that instance can have similar significance. Nor can weight be placed on a series of substantial or 'structural reforms'.<sup>93</sup>

It essentialises revolution in counterposition to evolution. In fact, a series of evolutionary changes over time may transform a society in a revolutionary way, by which I mean that its basic conditions of existence are changed. For classical Marxists, the bourgeoisie should be replaced by a new ruling class, the working class and the dictatorship of the proletariat is instituted.<sup>94</sup> That would mean that the inauguration of democracy in South Africa was not revolutionary. But arguably it was a revolutionary change in that revolution may be a process, whereby there are decisive moments, not just one decisive change. Many or all of these were brought about primarily by non-violent means. None of this means that 'revolutionary moments or phases' great or small will continue. They may be stalled or reversed. What has been described as the 'democratic breakthrough' of 1994 may have suffered a 'democratic setback', through current violence and acts against constitutional rights.<sup>95</sup>

### *The significance of defiance*

Even though the Natal region of the ANC was caught ill-prepared for the Defiance Campaign, Luthuli became a fervent supporter and very many powerful images of him are where he wears the Congress volunteer uniform. In an example of the apparent contradictory or ambiguous element in his statements indicated earlier, Luthuli said at the time: 'I have joined my people in the new spirit that moves them today; *the spirit that revolts openly* and boldly against injustice and expresses itself in a determined and non-violent manner'.<sup>96</sup>

They broke the law, they broke the laws that stated what could and could not be done by a parliament that claimed to be sovereign in South Africa. They challenged the question of allegiance to an authority which was not elected by the majority of South Africans. They asserted the rights of those excluded from lawmaking and voting by saying 'this we will not obey'. It was profoundly radical and by some definitions, such as the statement of Sisulu, an embryonic revolutionism.<sup>97</sup> There are phases or a series of significant moments which may cumulatively comprise a revolution and the notion of violence may or may not be one of these. What is sought to achieve in revolution may well be done without violence.

Like the Defiance Campaign, the burning of passes after Sharpeville made a powerful impact on many people.<sup>98</sup> The image of Luthuli burning his pass is still discussed amongst many of those who later joined MK.

Defiance is not simply passive resistance (the term often used by Luthuli and also Gandhi, despite both criticising it), as Gandhi himself stressed that non-violent disobedience was active resistance or the 'moral equivalent of war'.<sup>99</sup> In some ways by wishing to operate within an environment of civil/citizen's rights, admission to the rights of citizenship within the existing polity, Luthuli was obliged to use a specific language that apparently adhered to the authority of that polity. It was only later (and glimpses of this can be found in early statements by Luthuli) that

93. See Kagarlitsky, *The Dialectic*, chapter 1.

94. Lenin, *State and Revolution*. But see Hunt, 'Introduction' and Kagarlitsky, *The Dialectic*.

95. See Suttner, 'The Zuma Era'.

96. 'The Road to Freedom', in Pillay, *Voices*, 48. Emphasis inserted.

97. See above.

98. Interview with Nkadimeng, 7 March 2003, Johannesburg.

99. Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Diagnostic Approach*, chapter 6.

the ANC advanced a notion of rejection of that goal for their own constitutional order presented in various documents. The Defiance Campaign was an early phase of rejection of the status of that order, a denial of political obligation/allegiance to the authorities of the time.

### *'Subversive'*

Luthuli is at great pains to stress that the Congress was not subversive. He is rebutting the attribution of subversion to those who struggle for human rights. It is also possibly part of a reaction to the wholesale use of the word 'communism' to paint the ANC and other anti-apartheid opponents as 'subversive'. In reality where a state is founded on the denial of human rights, the advocacy of such rights *is* subversive, just as that order subverts the dignity of human beings. Subversion must relate to something and in this case saying: 'I believe in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Freedom Charter' was to advocate subversion in an order founded on denial of rights to the majority of South Africans.

It is argued, therefore, that the notion of subversion is contextual. What is subversive in one place is not that in another. In the context of apartheid South Africa, advocating much of what constituted the Christian and humanistic ethics of the Chief was subversive.

### *A just cause must be struggled for through organisation*

Related to the remarks of Nolan, Luthuli did not rely purely on personal dedication and willingness to sacrifice and determination to reject the unjust order. He knew that individuals had to be organised into structures where their actions could be made effective. Despite being a major and highly impressive figure, later drawing a large following from both black and white,<sup>100</sup> he knew that the Congress had to be organised. In 1949, he addressed this:

It may at times be necessary that we make known the complaints and needs of the African people either by proclaiming them or by boycotting the ways of the whites ... [T]hese should be the views or deeds of the majority of the nation. That is why it is desirable that all Africans, male and female, should be members of the African National Congress. *The current slogan says: 'Speak from strength.'* For the present we members of the Executive regard as a priority the task of increasing the number of branches of the African National Congress in Natal.<sup>101</sup>

The difference between organisation and mobilisation is one which is being addressed and tends to be neglected today. Mobilising people for a rally or even an election, does not ensure that they will regard the organisation as an enduring home. The branch and other structures were meant to ensure that whoever spoke for the organisation had this strength backing their words. When the ANC faced hard times an organisation had to be built that could withstand the despondency that arose; the ANC's survival had to be ensured. When Nelson Mandela was freed and later negotiated he had *organisational strength* behind him, not purely personal magnetism.

### *Non-sectarian/multi- and non-racial struggle*

One leader, no matter how great, cannot be credited with achievements of an organisation or set of organisations. But it is significant that Luthuli was very non-sectarian, condemning the

100. Benson, *The Struggle for a Birthright*, chapter 15.

101. Pillay, *Voices*, 41. My emphasis.



elevation of differences based on 'isms'.<sup>102</sup> As early as 1938, in attending a church conference in India and later passing through Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) he became aware of willingness to suffer on the part of Communists, which he describes.<sup>103</sup> This non-sectarianism and his experiences are part of his openness to what became a very close relationship with Communist leader, Moses Kotane,<sup>104</sup> and also the Congress Alliance, many of whose members in the Congress of Democrats especially were underground Communists.

Although white and black and, amongst black people, Africans, Indians and coloureds were organised separately, they did act together on many occasions and this contributed to the development of non-racialism. Ntombazana (Dr Albertinah Luthuli), while conceding that she did not usually contest what her father said, one day expressed her reservations about non-racialism. Provocatively, she referred to his statement that they should not have boyfriends in secret, but rather bring them home. She asked what his reaction would be if she brought home a white boyfriend. The Chief's response was that he would embrace him. That ended the debate, according to Ntombazana.<sup>105</sup>

What is interesting to reflect upon is that already in the late 1950s and for a short while in 1960 when he was unbanned, Luthuli started to develop a large following amongst white people.<sup>106</sup> This is one of the reasons why he was feared and it is also a reason why mischief may not be excluded in his death, whatever any inquest record may say.

The role of the Indian community in relation to Luthuli, as well as in the struggle in general, needs to be more fully retrieved than has been the case. In the situation of Luthuli, being isolated in Groutville and often banned, sections of the Indian community provided office space and arranged logistics for secret meetings with Kotane and others.<sup>107</sup>

### *Gender and struggle*

The means envisaged by Luthuli included and needed equal participation of men and women in Congress activities. Even in his early days as a chief, Luthuli began to address the question of gender equality (without using those words) in his insistence on women being part of community deliberations, thus entering places women had never been in before.<sup>108</sup> His relationship with Nokukhanya, MaBhengu, is clearly one of equality. There was no such thing as boys' work and girls' work under MaBhengu.<sup>109</sup> Far from Luthuli being the male heroic figure that set out alone to do his mighty deeds, his speeches had to pass through the careful scrutiny of MaBhengu, herself a former teacher, as was the Chief. Ntombazana notes:

Ubaba's respect for UMama was such that there was nothing he did without consulting her. Every speech he wrote was first presented to her, for her criticism and approval before he presented it to the audience for which he had prepared it. And mother, for her part, would interrupt her work,

102. For example, Pillay, *Voices*, 90.

103. A. Luthuli, *Let My People Go* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1962), 72–73.

104. Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, chapter 14; SADET, *Road to Democracy*, 65.

105. Interview with Albertinah Luthuli.

106. Benson, *The Struggle for a Birthright*, chapter 10.

107. Interviews Albertinah Luthuli, Thembekile Ngobese, amongst other evidence.

108. Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, 56–57.

109. P. Rule, with M. Aitken and J. van Dyk, *Nokukhanya: Mother of Light* (Johannesburg: The Grail Press, 1993), 66–84 and generally.

no matter how urgent, and sit and listen to him, making an input when necessary, and generally strengthening his confidence.<sup>110</sup>

It is also noteworthy that, as male head of the family, he did not act out conventional patriarchal rights with his children. Ntombazana notes: 'Ubaba never imposed his status as family head upon us. Everybody had an equal opportunity to talk and no one was considered too young to have his views respected'.<sup>111</sup>

The relationship between Luthuli and MaBhengu was complex. She was the breadwinner, working the fields from 4 am. But she went to bed early and every evening Luthuli would sit with the children and discuss their problems. When they had finished they would say prayers and sing hymns, then he would write. But if they had to go out to 'release' themselves, he would be the one to take them outside. If some child's blanket fell off, it was the Chief who would gently cover him or her again. In a sense Luthuli played a nurturing role. Thembekile says that when he was at home he was really at home for them. When she thinks back, she does not think of him as not having been there.<sup>112</sup>

Obviously, we cannot read a developed gender consciousness or feminism into Luthuli. But the signs of gender awareness were there from an early stage. In other words, in taking the road of the cross, the road of the oppressed and downtrodden, his call was made to men as well as women.

He placed great weight and sought out the women in the struggle, the views of women who became leaders like Dorothy Nyembe, who worked on the white farms and had special knowledge, important to the ANC. He placed great stress on empowering women leadership figures, like Lilian Ngoyi, who despite limited formal education was rising as a leadership figure in the 1950s.<sup>113</sup>

## Conclusion

This contribution makes no pretence of finalising any debate on Luthuli and the use of violence as a means of struggle. Certainly Luthuli is part of the process leading to the taking up of arms through the ideas he evoked in his speech 'The Road to Freedom ...' amongst other contributions. As a man he may be seen as one of the first examples of 'heroic masculinity'<sup>114</sup> in the evolution and intensification of the South African struggle. But his heroism did not connote patriarchal neglect of the home, of which he was very much a part.

Arguing a case for Luthuli's approval of armed struggle has tended to lose sight of the use of violence not merely producing some heroic result, but in fact being a 'tragic necessity' for the ANC.<sup>115</sup>

It is futile to argue as if his stance on the use of violence was a point of law, a series of facts having to be presented and then coming to a decision on a balance of probabilities or beyond reasonable doubt. The meanings of the life of Luthuli just do not allow that. At the same time,

110. 'Ubaba: Recollections by Ntombazana', in Reddy, *Lutuli*, 13 at 15.

111. *Ibid.*, 17.

112. Interview with Thembekile Ngobese.

113. *Ibid.*

114. E. Unterhalter, 'The Work of the Nation: Heroic Masculinity in South African Autobiographical Writing of the Anti-Apartheid Struggle', *The European Journal of Developmental Research*, 12, 2 (2000), 157-178; Suttner, *ANC Underground*, chapter 6.

115. Suttner, 'Violence: Necessity or Virtue'.

his daughters assert with no reason to gain or vested interest, that he accepted armed struggle, subject to adequate preparation. This indicates that the notion derived from the written records alone (which would appear to be a minority view) excludes access to vital material. In this case, it appears to change the meaning of Luthuli's stance.<sup>116</sup>

The reason why it may be argued that Luthuli's heritage has a more general importance, initially through speeches like those considered here, is that these raise a subjective moral component in struggle that has tended to be lost in the times we live. In unpacking that component, which is something quite different from being learned and understanding strategy and tactics and various ideologies, one sees the willingness to sacrifice and the preparedness to make that sacrifice no matter how high it may be. This, we have seen, is also present in the ideas of Mandela and Gandhi, amongst others. It is outside the debate of what one is going to do, but a vital component, in that unless one is emotionally and psychologically prepared, one could possibly retreat at a decisive moment, as many have done.

In addition, that choice and the range of sacrifices are strengthened by an array of factors, in the case of Luthuli, drawing on the Almighty and, according to Albert Nolan, faith in Christianity, being in turn strengthened in the solidarity of struggle. Yet we need to periodically revisit the attribution of these subjective qualities to mass activists and objective qualities attached to the struggle, as Nolan does for the 1980s. If these values are no longer found in a substantial way, how are they rebuilt insofar as they are required to infuse our future democratic life with unselfish concern for others and not merely personal enrichment and gratification through various means?

This paper is an attempt to do some justice on one crucial area of his concern to the relatively neglected legacy of a giant figure, whose life embodied important moral values which need to be reinserted into the debates of the day. This work must be taken further, on all fronts of learning – especially and urgently with the old people who may not live much longer. Some of those who may have been valuable sources of information have already left us.

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116. As in S. Couper, 'An Embarrassment to the Congresses?: The Silencing of Chief Albert Luthuli and the Production of ANC History', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35, 2 (2009), 331–348.

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