

Remembrance

African Activist Archive Project

A PART-TIME ANTI-APARTHEID ACTIVIST

By John Gay

Conviction, compromise or catalyst?

I lived and worked in Africa from 1958 until I retired in 2001. I persuaded myself throughout my time in Africa that I was working to promote the well-being of ordinary people. However, I also believed in lying low, not unduly disturbing the waters in which I swam, protecting my life so that I could continue to be a useful teacher, researcher and community member. In the long run I found that a useful and important strategy, since it helped me avoid the so-very-American tendency to know the right answers and impose them on others. I spoke out when I felt it was useful, perhaps too often; was quiet and tried to listen others into speech, perhaps too rarely; and compromised when I felt it necessary to survive. Now near the end of my life I am trying to assess my career in Africa, and for the purpose of this paper my relation to South Africa.

Did I have the courage to say and do what was really needed to benefit the people of Liberia, Lesotho, South Africa and the other countries where I worked? Did I try to assist Africans to speak and act, giving them tools with which to do their own work in their own way? Or did I move from compromise to compromise, and in the long run just float along the surface of a wave that flowed and broke regardless of what I did and said? Did I go to Africa to do good, and in the end did I just do very well at a personal level?

I lived a wonderful, satisfying, exciting life in Africa, and would not trade that life for what would have been a duller, safer, more boring life in America. But the question remains: did I help change Africa, or did I just watch the excitement as others changed it? Was I being lukewarm, and thus worthy only to be spat out of God's mouth? Was I simply following one half of Yeats' dichotomy when he said "the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity"? Or, more hopefully, was I in a quiet way a catalyst helping Africans shape their own future?

This essay addresses my life and work in the specific context of South Africa's long struggle for freedom and justice. Since my work in Africa rarely directly involved South Africa, I look in these pages mostly at my indirect participation in the struggle. I was a moderate, a liberal, a compromiser who bent when the waves became too strong.

And yet I want to believe that victory may depend on quiet heads-down people like me who were willing to survive for another day when the brave and forthright are cut down in defeat. I think that we were more interested in seeing our friends create a new society in ways we ourselves could never think of than we were in being heroes.

Liberia and the winds of change

My wife Judy and I went to Liberia in 1958 to teach at Cuttington College, an American-style liberal arts college run by the Episcopal Church in the interior of the country. We at Cuttington did our best to give a high quality post-high school education that would prepare our students to be leaders in society, teachers, priests, farmers, government officials, nurses and business people. We also wanted to make sure that they were properly prepared for graduate work in the United States. It was only after we taught there for a couple of years that we realized just how imperialistic and colonial an enterprise that was. We at first thought we knew the answers, as bright eager Americans, bringing the wisdom and skills of the west.

The students by and large did not mind, since most wanted to go abroad, ideally to America. We discovered eventually that three-quarters of our graduates remained in North America, due to their desire to live abroad, to the quality of our teaching, and of course to the horrors of the civil war that devastated Liberia after 1989.

Our life and career focus was initially on Liberia and on tropical Africa, particularly the succession of newly independent African countries. I remember the mixed excitement and frustration in 1960 of celebrating the independence of Senegal, Ivory Coast or Congo or whatever country was freed that day from the colonial yoke, instead of giving my prepared lecture. The winds of change which were blowing across Africa blew aside many days of teaching.

That was a heady, powerful and exciting year, filled with the enthusiasm of Africa reborn. Most of our students at Cuttington were Liberians, but there were also some from Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Swaziland and South Africa. A few had even attended the Pan African conference in Ghana in 1957. All of us, students and faculty alike, were certain that we were present at the creation of a new, powerful, free Africa. And we did so on the unstated assumption that the western, liberal, Christian, American, democratic, capitalist way of life was the model for the future. It took us an unfortunately long time before we discovered the inadequacy of parts of that model. I still personally accept most of these criteria for a good life, but my 40 years in Africa have shown that Africans must reconstruct that model in the light of very different circumstances from those which I know as an American.

Liberia and South Africa

Our first real gut-level awareness of South Africa came when we heard how the South African Police gunned down protesters at Sharpeville in 1960. Our South African

students had told us about the apartheid system, and so we were primed for the news, but it took the shedding of blood to bring it home to us. Almost the entire college community made a campus-wide protest against a government that still resisted the forces working so strongly in most of the rest of Africa.

Was ours a serious protest? Were our students and faculty ready to leave their books and join the battle? We waved placards and made speeches, but to little real effect. We just assumed that the winds of change would continue blowing, and that somehow someday South Africa would join the nations whose independence celebrations allowed us days away from the classroom. That statement sounds too stark, too cynical, because most of us really thought we were genuinely working for a better world, a better Africa. Sadly we would learn over the years that it took more than democratic liberal rhetoric to create what Liberian president William R. Tolbert Jr would call “a wholesome functioning society.” The speeches and the placards were important, but more important under the surface was helping our students think through the issues and providing them with techniques for solving problems.

Nonetheless action by us outsiders was important, if only to demonstrate to our African friends that we too could put our words into deeds. At this point I was not yet active, but some of my friends were. One practical step toward liberation was taken in 1960, the year of liberation, by two of my colleagues. They drove from Liberia across West Africa, into Central Africa, and south into Rhodesia and finally entered South Africa to see the situation for themselves. They carried messages to theological colleges across the continent, helping them unite into what was to become the All African Conference of Churches. They carried assurances of support, and I believe also money, to Christian activists in South Africa. I admired their courage and their witness, but I have to admit that while I was in Liberia I rarely spoke out in a specifically Christian way for change in Africa. I knew what I believed, and I practiced my faith, but Christian proclamation was not normally part of my rhetoric. I am not sure in retrospect why I did not take a stronger, more articulately Christian stance. Perhaps that too was a way to bend to the wind, or perhaps it was to let African Christians take strong stands in their own way.

I taught an African history course which included South Africa in the syllabus. Some of our students had trouble placing the country on the map, but they understood the meaning of white oppression. My wife offered a course in African literature in 1960, a brave step forward because such courses, even in Africa, rarely strayed from the tried, but not true to Africa, diet of Shakespeare and Milton. Her students responded warmly to Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, and James Ngugi (eventually to rename himself Ngugi wa Thiongo), but found that Alex La Guma and Peter Abrahams were talking about a world that was alien to them.

The world of apartheid was strange to Liberians, but a bit more familiar to our Kenyan students who were busy preparing for a multi-racial society in the aftermath of the Mau-Mau war. However, students who came to us from South Africa simply did not find their place at Cuttington, could not thrive in our rural Liberian setting. Liberia was

still too American, too conservative, as well as too deeply rooted in traditional tropical African culture. They did not like the heat and humidity, and were upset by the lack of amenities taken for granted in Johannesburg or Cape Town. I also believe that we did not respond to them at a deep level, did not share whole-heartedly their fight for change.

La luta continua

Three of our students from Tanganyika, still a British colony, learned in 1961 about the newly created Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow through Russians working in neighboring Guinea. I was visiting the dean of the Anglican Cathedral in Accra Ghana in January 1961, when the news came of Lumumba's death. I was moved and impressed by a parade on the main street of Accra, led by women with lanterns and candles on their heads. The Russians made a bold move in creating a University for African students in memory of Lumumba. We Americans, I fear, did nothing about the event after the fact. Why should we? We were responsible for his death.

The Tanzanian students slipped back and forth across the very porous Guinea-Liberia border, eventually arranging for themselves and our South African students to study in the Soviet Union. Once Tanzania became independent, those three men returned to Dar es-Salaam and became leading civil servants and party supporters. We never did learn what happened to the South African students who went to the Soviet Union, but can only guess that they might have joined the freedom struggle in camps in Angola or Tanzania. Certainly they did not find what they wanted at Cuttington.

One of the Tanzanians, a Muslim, was baptized as a Christian at Cuttington, but his faith did not survive. I met him later in Senegal, where he articulated his disillusionment with Christianity and the west. Perhaps if I had been more courageous, more willing to put my faith into practical action, he might have continued on a Christian path. I am sure that my laid-back approach to teaching, whereby I pose problems but rarely give answers, is a very poor method for evangelism.

The defection of our East African and South African students alerted us to contradictions in our version of the struggle for freedom in Africa. Liberia was no friend to radical socialists and radical freedom fighters. President Tubman, and later President Tolbert, were very conservative, calling themselves "moderates", but considered turncoats by such activists as Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Touré. Those two, leaders of newly independent Ghana and Guinea, visited Liberia in 1960 and made a strong stand for radical socialist change in Africa.

President Tubman and later President Tolbert did not want the struggle to spread back across the border into Liberia, itself a colonial state of a black-on-black variety. They were supported by, and wedded to, American capitalism, enjoying a comfortable life built on the acquiescent labor of unschooled indigenous "tribal" people. Too much freedom would - and eventually did - undercut their privileged position. On the other hand, we soon learned that Nkrumah and Touré violated the trust that had been placed in

them by those who looked for a socialist paradise in Africa. Both became corrupt and dictatorial.

It required subtlety to teach creatively in that setting. I remember lecturing on 18th century France, and reminding the students that President Tubman's private apartment in the Executive Mansion boasted Louis Quinze furniture. I then mentioned in a later lecture what happened to the *Ancien Régime*, once the masses became sufficiently angry. I left it to the students to draw their own conclusions. A fellow teacher who was more explicit than I in drawing similar threads together was expelled from Liberia. My conscience still afflicts me for being too devious. As so often has happened in my life, I ducked to avoid being knocked over. My comfort is that I'm fairly certain the students got my message on that occasion, and could draw their own conclusions, not forced by me to accept a liberal democratic American explanation of the problems of their country.

Politics and culture

We were involved with South Africa only peripherally during the remainder of our time in Liberia. I shifted my attention from political issues to local culture and society, taking up questions of traditional thought patterns. My research focused on how local people thought about mathematics, education, agriculture and religion. Perhaps that was my way of escaping from the big political issues, since I really did not want to get into trouble with the Liberian government. I wanted to continue my work. I try to defend my position by reminding myself that understanding traditional thought in Liberia is a way of counteracting the internal colonialism of that country. On the other hand, I never found it easy to articulate in public the injustices so blatantly being done to the indigenous population. Rather I tried to help my rural friends and associates find ways to get ahead in mainstream Liberian society. But that, of course, raises the question whether what we were doing was simply to take subjects and make them into citizens, joining the ranks of the elite to lord it over those who remained outside. I did hope and pray that my students would see the underlying contradiction, and work toward a more equitable social and political system.

We were outside Liberia twice before we finally left Liberia in 1974. I was a visiting fellow in 1965-1966 at the Institute of Mathematical Studies in the Social Sciences at Stanford University. I had been given that opportunity because of my previous graduate study in mathematics and my work on traditional mathematics among the Kpelle people of Liberia. While at Stanford the one opportunity I was given to speak out for justice in southern Africa concerned the Rhodesian government's Unilateral Declaration of Independence. I learned that major American companies were supporting Ian Smith and his illegal government. I wrote letters threatening to expose them for their actions, and got back a very strong response threatening to sue me for taking such a stand. I am afraid that the threat stopped me. Coward? Perhaps.

Then in 1968 I picked up a tropical nasty, a viral infection of the heart muscle. This was shortly after our third son was born. I became quite weak and was evacuated to New York City. Judy packed up our worldly goods, shipped them to the states and joined

me there. I taught for one year at the University of California at Irvine, and a second year at Earlham College in Indiana.

I tried very hard during those two years to maintain my ties with Africa, mostly with Liberia. I did little then to help South Africa, except to persuade Americans to boycott the products of apartheid. At that time I had my first real brush with the Afro-American version of the struggle for freedom and justice. The civil rights activists we met helped me to understand that, despite seeming progress and some structural change, oppression had not ceased, especially not in supposedly independent Africa. What these black activists said and did helped me understand the internal colonialism in Liberia. I have to admit, however, that they frightened me, and convinced me that I could never become a true radical. Keep to the middle, and keep my head down, was my way of life. Be a catalyst, not a provocateur.

We were fortunately able to return to Liberia in 1970. I returned to my teaching at Cuttington and continued my research. In my courses on Africa, I did my best to awaken the students to the larger issues of justice across the continent. In the process, I had one unfortunate experience with African anger, when the Kenyan who was teaching African history with me accused me of being a sellout for the West. He may have been right, for I must admit it did take me a long time to move to a more Afro-centric position as a teacher and researcher.

Lesotho meets Liberia

More students from southern Africa came to Cuttington College in the 1970s. Shortly after we returned to Liberia, two young women from Lesotho - of which we then knew almost nothing, but would later know a great deal - called to say they had arrived at Robertsfield International Airport. I quickly drove the 120 miles to welcome them. But when I arrived at the airport, I found that they were about to be refused admission to Liberia, since they did not have proper documentation. They had only local, but not international travel documents. Moreover, what documents they had were covered with South African stamps of approval. The Liberian immigration official at the airport, in self-righteous indignation, wanted to send the girls straight back home.

I was forced to improvise, and I think I did so cleverly. I asked to see the chief official at the airport, to persuade him that we did in fact expect these students. He was adamant, until I had an inspiration. I like to think that the Spirit spoke to me, and for once I spoke up strongly. I pointed to the seal of the Republic of Liberia on the wall behind his desk, and read the text aloud: "The love of liberty brought us here." I then deepened my voice and intoned about the horrors of apartheid and the opportunity that Liberia would give these girls to escape the indignities to which southern Africans were exposed. I must have been persuasive, because he gave them permission to stay, provided we come back to his office very soon with official Liberian government approval.

These young women were different from the radical Moscow-oriented South Africans we had tried to teach ten years earlier. They were from Lesotho, a country with its own traditional way of life, a country that could understand Liberia's lack of facilities and lack of sophistication. They stayed at Cuttington until they graduated, and then chose to remain in Liberia, one as a medical doctor and the other as a school teacher who then married a Liberian. The love of liberty in fact did bring them to Liberia and encouraged them to stay. Sadly the story did not end there. When civil war hit Liberia, both went back to Lesotho, the medical doctor to work in a hospital, and, after her husband was killed, the school teacher to start a primary school in Maseru, Lesotho's capital city.

My other contact with South Africa while I was in Liberia in the early 1970s was a visit from the Director of the British-based African Theological Education Program. My missionary colleagues who had made the trip across Africa in 1960 joined that Program and took leadership positions on its staff. The Program later made the obvious move, and persuaded Fr. Desmond Tutu, then studying and working as a parish priest in England, to become director. He visited Cuttington to inspect our theological education program, and while with us made a pastoral call on the two women from Lesotho. Since Desmond speaks Sesotho, that meant a very welcome contact with home for them, and a temporary relief from homesickness. Meeting Desmond would also be important for me later in my African career.

Farming and rural development

My research in Liberia from 1970 to 1974 shifted from cognitive issues to practical issues concerning development. In particular, when I finished the 1973 academic year, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations asked me to live in a remote rural community, four hours walk from the nearest motor road. My aim was to understand how people did traditional agriculture. We hoped that outside developers would build on what was already known instead of replacing tried and true traditional methods with unproven alien foreign ideas.

During the seven months we lived in the village with our six-year-old son David, Judy studied the folklore of women in preparation for her doctoral research, while I worked closely with a team of research assistants documenting how rural Liberians used knowledge of their soils, trees, swamps and cultural traditions to stay alive. They had, of course, done so for centuries, and had done well. My task was to find out what they knew about their environment and how they use it to create a viable and integrated way of life.

After leaving Liberia, I took up a fellowship at Clare Hall in Cambridge University for the 1974-1975 academic year, while Judy began her doctoral research in social anthropology at Cambridge. We were modestly active in the local anti-apartheid movement. I believed that my work on traditional agriculture and the psychology of development would help build social and economic justice in Africa. I taught a course on the psychology of development, in which I tried to persuade Cambridge students that

development did not mean riding roughshod over seemingly foolish traditions. I tried to explain that the accumulated wisdom in the African way of life could help developers, in cooperation with ordinary people, build a better way of life. I hope they learned that listening is better than lecturing, discovering better than dictating. My subsequent experience working with international aid agencies unfortunately shows that few experts have learned that lesson.

Into the belly of the beast

We lived in Clare Hall while at Cambridge. There were visiting scholars from all over the world, and we had a wonderful time getting to know them in the dining hall and through personal interaction. Judy and I and our three sons had fascinating neighbors, one of the most interesting being Alan Paton, the South African novelist. He guided me to understand a bit more deeply the inner meaning of South African apartheid. At the time I felt he was too much an old-line liberal, while I was trying to move in more in the direction of black liberation. Nonetheless I admired him greatly and benefitted from knowing him. One conversation I remember with pleasure was when we introduced him to the novel *The Radiance of the King* by Camara Laye of Guinea, a Kafka-esque account of a white foreigner trying to make his way in a mythical black African kingdom. That story had always resonated with me, as we groped through the mysteries of a Liberian culture that accepted us but never showed us its true self.

We had originally thought we would return to Liberia to continue our teaching and research. That did not work out because, while we were absent at Cambridge, our posts were filled by Liberians. That is exactly what any good missionary is supposed to do, namely, work herself or himself out of a job. So we had to hunt around for another opportunity to work in Africa, since we were not prepared to go back to the United States to work and live. I was fortunate to receive an offer from the FAO, which had paid for my Liberian research, to take a job in Lesotho as the sociologist on an agricultural development project. I was pleased with the opportunity, since I would be able to put my theoretical ideas to work in a practical way.

We were members of the Great St. Mary's Church in Cambridge, a magnificent medieval church on the town square. Through the church we met many interesting people from around the world. One was Colin Winter, the former Anglican bishop in the diocese of Damaraland in Southwest Africa. The South Africans expelled him because of his outspoken stand against apartheid in what would one day become Namibia. He had strongly supported the Southwest Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) and would not compromise with the white authorities in Windhoek. His firm stand against compromise was never my style, for good or for ill, and we would soon clash over that very issue. I suppose one explanation is that he was an evangelist and a leader, whereas at my best I am a catalyst, observer and teacher.

I met Bishop Winter at a social gathering organized by Stanley Booth-Clibborn, the rector of Great St. Mary's Church. In chatting with the bishop I casually told him that Judy and I would soon be doing agricultural development in Lesotho. He bristled and

reacted very strongly. He said we were the very sort of people who would have worked in Nazi Germany, thus implicitly accepting the authority and even the ideology of Nazism. Lesotho in his view was a chattel of South Africa, and was ruled by a tyrant who had suspended the constitution and expelled or imprisoned any opposition. He clearly wrote us off as traitors to the faith, not worth talking to. I was, of course, shocked by the attack, since at that point I knew little about Lesotho except that it was an independent country, the home of the two young women we had welcomed to Liberia a few years earlier.

I then did my homework on Lesotho, went to London to meet people who had worked and taught there, and learned that much of what Bishop Winter told me was quite true. However, I felt that it was better to go there to work and keep my eyes and heart open, rather than to stay pure and only distantly involved on the outside. I think I made the right choice, but I am also glad for the rude shock of Bishop Winter's attack. I might have gone in complete naiveté, and been less ready to participate in the struggle of the region for a just society. But I realize that my choice also reflected my unwillingness to stand up for the truth, whatever the consequences. I might have refused to go to Lesotho, might have insisted on taking a principled stand. Had I done so, of course, we would most likely never have been able to become as close to the liberation struggle as we eventually had the opportunity to be. As in the case of Liberia, I felt it was better to go there and be an instrument and catalyst for changes that would be implemented, not by us but by the local African people.

Judy welcomed the decision to go to Lesotho, despite Bishop Winter's condemnation. She arranged to do her anthropological field work for her Cambridge degree there, concentrating on the women who stayed at home while their husbands worked in the South African mines.

Working behind enemy lines

After leaving Cambridge, I spent a few days in Rome at the FAO headquarters. It was clear from my conversations in Rome that for FAO experts the apartheid politics of the region was unimportant, even irrelevant. In their minds our job was to help the country feed itself, using the science and wisdom of western agricultural experts. The political economy of food and farming was not discussed. All that mattered was technical assistance, given by foreign experts and supported with large amounts of foreign money. Already I sensed the inherent contradiction that Colin Winter was hinting at, in the assumption that something called development could happen alongside and independent of the politics of the region.

I thus began my second great African journey. Judy and I would remain in Lesotho from 1975 to the end of 2000, and in the end would do far more than agricultural development and social anthropology. Lesotho would provide us an excellent place to enter the struggle in a low-key and laid-back way, and in retrospect I am glad that we started as we did. We would later learn so much more about the Southern African region and about ourselves, but for the moment we had made a start.

I was forced to stop in Johannesburg for three days before I could catch the twice-a-week flight to the tiny airport in the capital city Maseru. I spent my time looking around the city, to see what I could learn.

I had two South African contacts and made the most of both of them. One was Alan Paton's son Jonathan, then teaching at the University of Witwatersrand. I had supper with him and his family, and learned of the work being done by Ravan Press and SPROCAS (Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society). He encouraged me to stay in touch and also to keep the South African situation firmly in mind as I worked in Lesotho. He insisted I not allow the international development structures to swallow me up, while I naively focused on technical agricultural matters.

The other contact was Desmond Tutu, who by that time had left the Theological Education Program to become the Dean of the Anglican Cathedral in Johannesburg. He received me graciously at St. Mary's Cathedral, and sent me out with Fr. Norman Montjane to see Soweto and neighboring black areas. We visited an elderly mixed-race man in the Coloured Township, and began to see what it meant to be neither black nor white. Shortly after I met Desmond he was called to be bishop of our diocese of Lesotho. He really did not want the job, but felt a sense of responsibility to serve Southern Africans in another part of the region. He remained in Lesotho for a year and a half before being called back to South Africa to serve as head of the South African Council of Churches.

On my visit to Johannesburg, my mind and heart were seared by one contact. I was walking in Johannesburg just to see what I might see. I fell in behind a well-dressed white businessman, and a slightly less well-dressed black man, seemingly the white man's servant or assistant. I overheard the white man say "I don't know why it is, but God just made us more intelligent." I now could grasp in one incident what I had read and heard about. Apartheid was real.

What is the use of experts?

I flew to Lesotho, where I began a year and a half assignment for FAO. My job was to sell the western-designed development scheme to the people in the project area. It took me only about a month to find that my real job was exactly the opposite, namely, to sell local knowledge and practice to the project technicians. The project, like so many I worked with in Lesotho over the years, was failing badly, with local people refusing to adopt the new technologies. The foreign experts were sure they were right, were sure that local people were just being stupid by not adopting the way shown them by the project experts into the modern era. I listened to ordinary village people who were equally sure that the foreign experts were leading them down a dead-end path. I wrote a report which led to a parting of the ways. FAO did not want to listen, the project was failing, and that was the end of that. I like to think that my report was the epitaph for the project. For once I was strong and tried to speak the truth as I saw it. I was speaking to

outsiders who thought they knew how to change Lesotho, and so I did not feel I had to be diffident.

I was criticized from both sides for my report. FAO did not like it because it spoke on behalf of the people at the bottom. But, a well-known Marxist analyst of social change (I think it was Lionel Cliffe, but I may be wrong) in east and southern Africa said that my analysis was not thorough enough. I did not perceive the underlying class and race conflict, which I later came to realize is a serious reason for the failure of such development projects.

My quarrel with the FAO project was not simply that I wanted to listen to local people and respond to their needs. My international colleagues on the project saw South Africa, the apartheid South Africa of the 1970s, as their natural ally. I must admit that white South African farmers knew how to produce enough food to feed the entirety of the region, while people such as the Basotho produced very little on their small poorly managed and badly eroded fields. The agricultural experts on the project in effect wanted to take the land away from the local farmers, and manage it in South African ways. They would use the local people as hired laborer on their own fields, something which the local people were simply not prepared to do. They knew from years of experience that South African farms were simultaneously very productive and very exploitative. Many had actually worked on South African farms, and had hated it. They would have been glad to increase production, but not at the cost of exploitation.

The FAO experts felt naturally comfortable and at home in South Africa, because they simply did not think in terms of the politics of liberation. For them liberation from hunger was enough. The result was a level of social integration into white apartheid South Africa that I could not tolerate. An agronomist chose to live with his family across the border, so that he could find a good school for his children, not thinking the International School in Maseru good enough for a white European. The wife of the engineer on the project looked on nearby apartheid-riven Bloemfontein as her favorite city. The senior sociologist for FAO played golf regularly in white South African Ladybrand.

Almost all the foreign experts belonged either to the Maseru Club or the Mohale's Hoek Club, where there were clear informal barriers against Basotho membership. I remember my one visit to the club, and being told by a white member that "the Basutes have just lost their tails." It was a cozy club almost entirely composed of white Europeans and Americans whose natural affinity with apartheid South Africa was far more than I could take. The only exception among my colleagues was an Ethiopian economist, with whom I shared my anger and my anguish.

Apartheid and the politics of compromise

Nevertheless I was part of the system, and had to behave like a good soldier. I drove a UN pickup truck that was assigned to me, and I was expected to have it serviced across the border. I went to the nearby South African town Zastron to have the work

done, taking the truck to the service station which the UN patronized. The mechanic who helped me was cheery and polite, clearly too cheery and too polite. Because it was a long job, he could not finish the work during the morning hours. I had to leave the truck over the lunch hour, and so I looked around the town for a restaurant where I could get something to eat. Every shop was marked either “blankes” or nie-blankes”, meaning whites or non-whites. I refused on principle to enter a shop for whites only, and I was not allowed by law to enter a shop for non-whites.

So I sat on the curb and ate an apple I bought from a street vendor. The same cheery mechanic sat down next to me, eating his lunch, and asked why I was not going somewhere to eat. I told him my concern. The cheery politeness suddenly faded from his face, and he launched into a tirade, saying with clenched teeth and a steely expression, “One day we will get those fucking Boers”. As in my walk behind the two men in Johannesburg, I now understood where I was. I also understood why Bishop Colin Winter had spoken so strongly. He was sure I would fall into the comfortable space occupied by my FAO colleagues. It was good I left the FAO system when I did.

I worked two more years for Lesotho’s Ministry of Agriculture, and found that to be a more congenial home, since my colleagues were largely either Basotho or Americans working on USAID programs. However, many of the same follies were still being practiced in the Ministry, since the prevailing assumption was that development projects should listen solely to western experts, including me. But at least I was no longer hooked into a system which was thoroughly racist as well as disconnected from ordinary farmers.

The other half of Colin Winter’s warning still applied, however. The Lesotho government was an illegitimate, corrupt, military regime under the leader Leabua Jonathan whom South Africa supported as long as he was a good boy. He had taken power in a coup in 1970, overthrowing the more populist, socially progressive party of opposition leader Ntsu Mokhehle, who had led his party to victory in a reasonably free and fair election.

Jonathan held power, with South African support, until finally he tried to move in a socialist direction in 1986. He was almost immediately overthrown by a military coup engineered by the same apartheid regime that had formerly sustained Jonathan. He bit the hand that fed him, and was thrown out. That was the government I was working for, meaning that my brave stand against directly working with white apartheid South Africa was in part nullified by my indirect cooperation with apartheid through Leabua Jonathan. It was a dilemma, but I swallowed my pride and my courage, and stayed to work within a slightly less offensive part of the system. In retrospect I think I did the right thing, at least in part because my own education was not complete.

Flying under the radar

Judy and I became good friends with our Basotho research assistants John Mahooana and Nkoebe Theko. They were indeed important contributors to our

education, and we are grateful for their patience with us. When we told these assistants of mine in the middle of 1976 that we planned a family trip to Botswana to see the Okavango and the Moremi Game Reserve, they shyly asked us if they might accompany us. They had never been out of Lesotho, except for the occasional trip to see relatives across the border. We realized very quickly that all Basotho have family across a border which exists only because committed Basotho patriots in the 19th century refused to succumb to the Boer and British colonists who were busy stealing land that really belonged to black Africans.

We learned much more about apartheid on that trip. When we crossed the bridge over the Caledon River at Maseru, the white police welcomed our family, but when John and Nkoebe showed their passports, they received the full treatment. In slow, painfully laborious and evidently hostile English, the border guard asked them. "Where...are...you...going?" I am sure that the fact they would travel with us for two weeks became the first black mark in our record at the Ministry of Home Affairs, a record which fortunately became fuller and fuller as time went on.

We had a great trip together, marred only by having to fly under the radar of the law while we were on South African territory. We visited the Kimberley Big Hole, and camped in a public park for the night. After we set up our tents, however, we were told by the park guards in no uncertain terms that we had to be out before daylight the next morning.

Botswana, of course, was a different matter. We had a great time together, camping in open country along the road, and spotting game. We were impressed by the underlying unity of the black population which had lived together in the southern African region long before the whites came. Our friends were able to speak Sesotho easily and freely with the ordinary Batswana that we met, even in the far north of Botswana.

Once it came time to leave, we had to negotiate another transit across the land of apartheid. We reentered South Africa into what was then called the Transvaal Province. We were wiser than when we crossed the Orange Free State at the beginning of the trip. Instead of finding a campground, we put up our tents in a farm late in the evening, and left early in the morning. We joked that we had to beware of "Farmer Peppercorn". We then entered Swaziland, where we camped freely the next night. We drove to the ocean, where we all enjoyed splashing in the waves, under the doleful eyes of white South Africans who fortunately did not force us to leave. We then drove back to Lesotho, glad to return home to a free country.

The next year, 1977, we made a similar trip, this time with Judy's research assistant, Mahlapane. We drove to St. Lucia Park on the north coast. When we stopped at a petrol station on the way, the two women had to use the restrooms. There were three toilets: white, black and coloured. Judy and Mahlapane looked at their hands and decided that Judy was not white, but pink; that Mahlapane was not black, but brown. So they chose the coloured restroom, as closest to the realities of their skin colors. We brought our tents and decided to camp on the beach. As we entered the area, a black guard at the

gate stopped us and told us that servants are not allowed to enter the area. We told him that Mahlapane is not our servant, she is our friend. He could not think of any appropriate response, and so admitted us to the beach. We had a lovely time, although our friend, beautiful in her bikini, did raise some eyebrows.

In 1978 we made a family trip to Mauritius. The Anglican sisters in the Community of the Holy Name introduced us to a Chinese businessman named Philippe Cheung, who entertained us and helped us see and travel around the island. It was wonderful to be in a society that was so totally and thoroughly nonracist, as well as being economically successful.

On the way to Mauritius we stopped in Durban where we met the Indian sociologist Fatimah Meer, at that time under house arrest because of her anti-apartheid activities. We were not supposed to visit her house, because she was not allowed to have more than one visitor at a time, but we ignored that and had a good visit with her. She too helped expand our education as to the insidious nature of apartheid.

Taking a break from activism

After two years working with the Ministry of Agriculture I took a job at the National University of Lesotho. I taught African history and African development, which of course gave me many opportunities to confront and be confronted by apartheid. A number of our students were from South Africa, and they raised a particularly interesting challenge. We never knew which ones of them were there to report on subversive activities at the University. We knew that the South African government had planted spies almost everywhere in Lesotho to keep check on the country and on any possible activists who might cause trouble for them. One young man in my class admitted openly that he had been recruited by the South African security service. He chose not to accept the job, which meant that he could not freely go back home to South Africa. He would be stopped at the border and possibly imprisoned. He had the courage of his convictions, and we all admired him greatly for it. I am sure there are others who simply took their monthly stipend from Pretoria and gave full reports on what we were doing.

One clear piece of evidence for my belief that I was watched came when my wife Judy took our son David to Bloemfontein for orthodontic work. On the way back she fell asleep and swerved off the road into a farmer's field. She was very fortunate in that there were no injuries and all that she lost was one tire. Several people did stop to help her, including a white South African who offered to share his phone number with her just in case there were problems with the insurance. Judy told him her name and address, and his response was very interesting. He said, "I know your name. Your husband teaches sociology at the University, doesn't he? I am a kind of sociologist myself. I work for the Bureau of State Security and live in Ladybrand." Judy thanked him kindly and drove on to Lesotho once the tire was repaired. Clearly he had done his homework, or perhaps the informant students had done it for him.

We became more closely involved with the African National Congress while we were teaching at the University. Our chaplain at the Anglican Church on campus was the Reverend Michael Lapsley. Michael is a member of the Anglican monastic order the Society of the Sacred Mission. He had been sent to Durban in South Africa as a newly professed young monk with the assignment to be a pastor and chaplain to young Anglican students. Very quickly Michael became radicalized and began a lifetime of support of the ANC. This led to his expulsion from South Africa, whereupon he asked to be reassigned to Lesotho. He preached social activism from a radical Christian perspective, which led some of the more conservative members of our parish to leave the church. They thought that Christians should stay out of politics. Michael was certainly heavily into politics, and in fact on the side was an informal chaplain to the ANC. Michael introduced us to many refugees, students and otherwise. One of his friends at that time was Tito Mboweni, who became head of the South African Central Bank. I remember finding Michael and Tito in deep conversation about the shape of the future South African economy.

I suppose those conservative white foreigners who boycotted Michael's sermons were in fact the kinds of persons that Bishop Winter believed I would become. The process of my radicalization was moving me step by step away from such people. What Fr. Michael said to us, both in his sermons and in his life, was to help me understand that living and working inside South Africa was an opportunity to witness for Christian social justice. Our Anglican community at Roma was small, and even smaller when the disaffected right-wingers left, but was outspoken and courageous.

Friends in the liberation struggle

Many of our friends in Lesotho were part of the liberation struggle, most of them in exile from South Africa. Michael Lapsley was one of the first of these but there were many others. Phyllis Naidoo has remained a close friend and an important ANC exile. She was a lawyer who fled South Africa under the threat of imprisonment. One of her sons was an ANC activist who eventually died in exile in Cuba. In Lesotho Phyllis continued her law practice, especially helping refugees who had fled across the border into Lesotho. She was in an important way their mother. Even before we moved to Roma, she would bring black refugees from South Africa to meet us in our Maseru home, saying that otherwise they would never know that whites could be human.

In 1979 the South Africans sent what appeared to be a package of ANC Sechaba newsletters to our Anglican colleague Fr. John Osmer. Just like Michael Lapsley, John was from New Zealand and was an Anglican priest. He was a known ANC supporter and a political activist. I suppose he must have been aware that he was on South Africa's to-do list. John brought the parcel of papers to Phyllis' apartment, and opened them in her presence. The package contained not newsletters but a cleverly disguised parcel bomb. It blew off one of John's hands and also damaged Phyllis' hearing.

My son David and I went to the apartment to help clean up the walls. It was a good introduction for our 11-year-old son to the liberation struggle. I was sadly shocked

when some of my American friends refused to go to the hospital to visit John, because they were afraid of being identified with the ANC.

John Osmer served as a priest in Masite, a rural parish in Lesotho and at that time was the pastor to a particularly wonderful group of Anglican sisters, who belonged to the Society of the Precious Blood. That convent, near the western border with South Africa, was a place of refuge for many South African exiles. We were very close to the sisters, particularly sister Josephine who was the head of the order at that time. When Steve Biko was killed in 1977 his friend and biographer Fr. Aelred Stubbs came to the convent to sort through Biko's papers and eventually publish many of them under the title *I Write What I Like*.

Other South African exiles we got to know in the 1980s included several wonderful couples. Two were interracial and thoroughly committed to the ANC. Winston was coloured and his wife Sandy a white radical South African. She was an agriculturalist and he was a carpenter. They were working to set up alternative agricultural ventures in Lesotho, whereby exiles could go back to the land and feed themselves while in exile. Another couple was Joe and Jackie, also deeply committed to the land. I still remember the pleasure of Jackie helping us get a pickup truck full of horse manure to put into our garden.

Winston and Sandy introduced us to Thenjiwe Mthimso, another important ANC activist. She often visited us before she was able to return to South Africa.

Still another couple was Don and Marianne Edkins, who were working with a radical back to the land community in the south of Lesotho called Plenty, affiliated with an American alternative community called The Farm. All these people were deeply committed to a new South Africa, an alternative South Africa, a nation where everybody had enough to live on and nobody suffered because of race or class. Bishop Winter, please take note that it is possible to work for change even within the belly of the beast.

Before we left Roma and the National University of Lesotho we made one last vacation trip to South Africa. We drove down the garden route to Cape Town, enjoying a 1980 New Year's Day dinner in what appeared to be the hippie alternative community of Scarborough. Unfortunately the restaurant was very expensive and the customers were all white. We had camped the previous night at a specifically marked Coloured campsite east of Cape Town, and had received negative reactions from coloured folks who were already camping there. I often wonder if they might have sent back a report on us to Home Affairs in South Africa. Clearly we were breaking the color bar.

Activists again

Judy finished her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology for Cambridge University in 1980, and was ready to take up practical work in development. She might have gone on to be a successful academic, and I'm sure had she wished to do so she could have found a post-doctoral position somewhere to continue her research on women and development.

That was not to be. Instead she chose to take a series of positions with development projects in Lesotho, with special reference to the lives of women. After doing a big paper on the role of women in development in Lesotho for USAID, she then went to work with a renewable energy project, a village water supply project, and a road project.

I followed her lead at this point and also began to find work with development projects. Before I left Roma I had already studied the Tanzanian Ujamaa village consolidation program. While in Tanzania I met people who had worked in the South African mines and had been radicalized by their experience. In Lesotho I knew many men who had been on the mines and had suffered, but now I met ex-mine workers from another country and saw that the exploitative migrant labor was a universal problem and catalyst for change across southern Africa. I interviewed the village secretary in a Tanzanian village, who had learned how to be a social activist and politician while working on the mines. He brought back these skills and energy to help create the most successful village I saw in Tanzania.

When I returned to Lesotho from Tanzania I had to fly from Dar-es-Salaam via a relatively neutral transit hub in Nairobi, through which planes came from Europe to South Africa. I arrived in Johannesburg and showed my “clean” passport, which at that time still allowed me to enter South Africa. As an American who worked in various African countries, I was allowed to own two passports, one for use in Lesotho only, and the other for the rest of the world. My “clean” passport had only South African and Lesotho stamps. The border official was clever enough to ask for my other passport, but I was clever enough to refuse. I did not want to lose access to the rest of Africa.

I had to sleep the night on the floor of the airport. Because the only money I had was either dollars or Tanzanian shillings, they refused to allow me to sleep in the transit hotel. They insisted that I pay for the night with South African rands, which I had not brought on that trip because, if discovered, they would have made it difficult for me to enter Tanzania. Sleeping on the floor didn’t kill me, but it did make me a bit more aware of the indignities black Africans had to face in South Africa.

The next year I was asked by FAO to do a job in Ethiopia. I helped a team analyze data on redevelopment of a forested area which had become badly degraded. When in Addis Ababa I was impressed by the huge stained glass mural at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa. It showed a large figure of St. George superimposed on the map of Africa. St. George is a patron saint for Ethiopia, and this picture showed him killing the South African dragon at the bottom end of the continent.

In 1982, because of Judy’s work with USAID-sponsored projects, we moved to a house in Maseru, which was just 200 yards from the river that separated Lesotho from South Africa. This gave us many more chances to meet refugees and other South Africans who were part of the liberation struggle. Hence we were able to offer hospitality to people in special need. Phyllis Naidoo was often the contact person, and she would come to us at night asking if we could put someone up, no questions asked.

We agreed, and were surprised to find eventually just how important were some of these visitors. Among them were Jacob Zuma and Chris Hani, who slipped in and out of Lesotho to help the militants in Lesotho lay their plans. We set up our garage as a combination bedroom and office, and stayed out of the way as serious meetings took place in that room. When they went out of the house to meet people, they would go over the fence and into the field below our house rather than venturing out the gate.

I left the National University of Lesotho, following my Ethiopia assignment, and chose to find independent consulting jobs wherever I could find them. My next assignment was in Botswana. I did two jobs. One of them was an analysis of informal sector small businesses. What impressed me in this case was the extreme difficulty that small businesses experienced when trying to compete with large well funded South African businesses. At times I believe that barriers to trade may be a good thing, although only under limited circumstances. On the other hand I basically think that international free trade helps everybody in the long run, even though entrepreneurs and creators of startup businesses often suffer. Certainly my research showed that very few small businesses could make it against the severe competition from south of the border.

My other assignment in Botswana was a study of renewable energy technology. Botswana like Lesotho has a serious shortage of local fuel. The country does have substantial coal reserves, but they were not being put to work efficiently. Most energy in Botswana is either used by ordinary poor people in the form of scarce fire wood, plant residues and animal dung, or at the other end by wealthy people who buy imported fuel or mains electricity from South Africa. The level of dependency on South Africa was clear. My education continued, showing me the profound impact of high tech capitalist white racist institutions on poor black developing countries.

South Africa attacks Lesotho

While I was in Botswana news came that shattered many of our dreams for an alternative interracial and environmentally sound communal way of life in Lesotho. People had begun to let their guard down, three years having passed since the parcel bomb was sent to Phyllis and John. On December 7, 1982, a task force from the South African army, well disguised in black face, entered Lesotho in the middle of the night and scattered into carefully selected apartment buildings to kill 42 people. Most of the victims were ANC activists, but they also included ordinary Basotho as well as visitors from South Africa.

Fortunately then none of our close friends were hurt, although Phyllis Naidoo was probably a target by the South Africans because of her very visible activism. We stayed in close touch with Phyllis over the years. She had a lovely dog named Sasha who was her constant companion and who would stay in our house on later occasions when Phyllis was afraid of being attacked again. Eventually Phyllis was forced to leave her law practice in Lesotho because of threats from South Africa, and because the Lesotho government found her presence too compromising. So she moved to Zimbabwe, where

she taught law at the University and provided a home away from home for refugees, just as she had done in Lesotho.

I flew home from Botswana for Christmas in 1982, and attended a funeral for all the victims. Oliver Tambo took the risk to come directly into Lesotho, flying over South African territory in a plane presumably chartered by the ANC. Normally any plane that flies over South African territory must clear its flight plan with the South African government. Perhaps they did so in this case. Perhaps not. Perhaps the plane simply slipped across the border and then slipped back. My intuition is that in fact the South Africans knew perfectly well about the plane and knew who was on board, but chose not to force it down. Perhaps they did not want to risk a major diplomatic incident.

Shortly after the raid the authorities at the National University of Lesotho, in collaboration with the Anglican Diocese of Lesotho, decided that the time had come to get Michael Lapsley out of the way. One of our Anglican priest friends lost his nerve and joined the government in urging that Michael be exiled from Lesotho. We did not see Michael again until we visited him in Harare, shortly before he would be one of the last victims of a parcel bomb, in August 1990, a full half year after the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC.

The December 1982 raid was not the last attack on Lesotho and on our friends in the ANC. A Christmas Eve party was held in 1985 among many of our refugee friends, when we were on leave in the USA. Winston and Sandy, to whom we had loaned our car when we left for six months, and Joe and Jackie, whom I mentioned above, were at the party. Joe and Jackie went home after the party, only to meet South African thugs who entered their house and killed them and three others, leaving only their new baby who had the prophetic name of Phoenix alive and crying on the floor. Phoenix was then taken by Jackie's parents and raised as their own daughter in South Africa. When we returned from America, we heard about the tragedy, and also discovered that Winston and Sandy had used our car to transport weapons across the border. We had to persuade the Lesotho police to return it to us.

Music may soothe the savage breast

I have always been an enthusiastic amateur musician. I had conducted a small singing group in the town of Maseru's Hoek in the south of Lesotho, and then joined another group when I moved to Maseru Lesotho's capital city. We called ourselves the Maseru Singers, and were ambitious in wanting to sing major pieces of music. We planned big, but then we realized that singing with only a piano is like taking a black-and-white photograph of a brilliantly colored painting. We learned about a group of musicians in Soweto who had formed a small orchestra, and were looking for opportunities to make music. It seemed a natural fit. They could not perform in white South Africa, and we did not have an orchestra.

So we invited them to join us, and by the end of the decade we had performed in Maseru Handel's Messiah, Haydn's Creation, Mozart's Requiem, Haydn's Seasons, and, most ambitious of all, Bach's St. Matthew Passion.

We often had some small difficulty in getting the orchestra members into Lesotho. On one occasion, South African officials kept them at the border for a long time, thus delaying a rehearsal. Another time one of their players was refused a passport by South Africa. Still another problem arose one day when Lesotho would not admit the orchestra because of some technicality. In the end all these problems melted in the heat of music joyously (although usually inadequately) performed. I conducted all the concerts, and was forced to improve my conducting skills. When I was on a six-month fellowship at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge Massachusetts, I took conducting lessons from a woman at Tufts University and voice lessons from Alastair Cassells-Brown, the chapel musician at the divinity school.

Far more dramatic was the story of one of the Soweto musicians, Michael Masote, who put on a janitor's uniform and watched rehearsals of the South African Broadcasting Symphony in order to learn the trade. It was not possible in apartheid South Africa for a black African to acquire such skills, and so he had to demean himself and pretend to be a cleaning person in order to study. I learned much later that his son went on to become a professional cellist.

A high point in our relations with the Soweto group was a performance of Handel's Messiah. A second violinist in the Soweto Symphony was Sibongile Mngoma, the sister of the cellist and leader of the Soweto group Lindumuzi Mngoma. She told us in the rehearsal for the Messiah that she could sing the solo alto part. We were delighted to let her do so, and were even more delighted when we heard her sing. She was magnificent. That performance helped persuade her to become a professional singer, and she has since then gone on to be a top-notch South African diva, who performed at the inauguration of Nelson Mandela.

I was invited to visit the group in Soweto after the performance of Messiah, as I was on my way to my first job in Botswana. We had a lovely dinner together, but not actually in Soweto. My sense then was that something prevented them from inviting me over to their homes.

During my time at Roma my dossier with the "sociologist" in Ladybrand must have become so full that they no longer allowed me to enter South Africa. I applied for a visa to travel into South Africa, as I always had done after my first Botswana trip and after my visit with the Soweto orchestra, but this time the South African authorities said no. I was to continue trying to get a visa until finally in 1991, well after the release of Nelson Mandela, it was granted.

The second high point in my time with the Maseru Singers was our performance of Bach's St. Matthew Passion in 1989. It was a major ecumenical, inter-racial and international event. The three choirs called for in the score were our Maseru Singers, the

Lesotho Evangelical Church choir, and the children's choir from the Maseru Preparatory School. The two orchestras were the Soweto Symphony and a group of white musicians from Bloemfontein. After the orchestra had tuned up and before I raised my baton to conduct the first chorus, I dedicated the performance to the memory of all who had died in the struggle for peace, freedom and justice. The white musicians from Bloemfontein were not happy with that comment, but they continued to play. In the end that concert was an important event, not only for me and the Lesotho singers but also for the Maseru community and I think for the musicians of Soweto and Bloemfontein.

When South Africa finally became free the Soweto Symphony Orchestra no longer needed us, but instead went on to play an increasingly important role in making classical music a living part of the new non-racial South Africa. One offshoot group is the Soweto String Quartet, which continues to make music both in concerts and in public events in South Africa. Another spin-off was the career of Sibongile Mngoma, the alto who jumped from the second violin to sing the Messiah solo, and who along with her niece Sibongile Khumalo, went on to higher heights in the South African musical world.

An unexpected but very happy benefit from our relation with the Soweto Symphony was that Bandile the teenage son of their leader Lindumuzi Mngoma came to live with us in Maseru for four years. His father did not want him growing up in racially divided South Africa. He grew with us from being a shy young boy to a mature teenager. We have gradually lost touch with him over the years after he left to go back to South Africa. He, his father, his wife and his very new baby joined us at the airport the day we finally left Lesotho and South Africa to retire in January 2001.

Catholic heroes of the struggle

Another South African couple with whom we became good friends and whom we admired greatly was Jimmy and Joan Stewart. He had been a follower of Trotsky in his early academic life in South Africa. He had qualified as a lawyer, but I don't know how long he actually practiced. My guess is that he did not practice law for long because of his radical politics. He then went to Cambridge University where he studied English literature. Somewhere along the line he gave up his belief in Trotsky and turned instead to Jesus. He became a committed radical Catholic. He married another strong Catholic activist named Joan Hope, whose sister Anne, along with Sally Timmel, made a major contribution to southern Africa community development with a three volume set called *Training for Transformation*.

After teaching at Notre Dame College in the US, Jimmy Stewart returned to Africa, and took teaching posts in Kenya and then in Malawi. The Malawi government under president Hastings Banda expelled him from the country for being more radical than Banda was willing to tolerate. Stewart was supposed to be deported from Malawi to his home country South Africa, but South Africa did not want him. Had he remained in South Africa he would probably have been jailed like so many radicals in that country. So in 1979 he moved to Lesotho, where he and his wife Joan founded an organization called the Transformation Resource Center. They contributed their entire library as well

as all their money to the center, leaving their five actively Catholic children without any visible means of support. All the children have subsequently gone on to become strong social activists, one of them unfortunately being killed while doing community development in KwaZulu Natal.

Judy and I were among the Friends of Transformation during its first years. We supported the organization financially and helped plan a newsletter called *Work for Justice*, a title taken from a famous papal encyclical at the turn of the 20th century. Tragically in 1984 Joan and Jimmy were killed in an auto accident on their way to visit Roma to teach a class. They were killed in a head-on collision with a Tanzanian economist, unfortunately well known to be a heavy drinker and certainly drunk at the time of the accident.

We join Transformation

At that time Judy and I were still working with development projects, she on the Southern Perimeter Road Project for Lesotho and I on an assessment of possible housing in the southern suburbs of Maseru. We met with the remaining team members at Transformation, who included a white South African Catholic priest who gave up his priesthood in order to marry a black woman, a South African coloured woman from Durban, and a Canadian volunteer working with the Mennonite Central Committee. It was an exciting group of people, but the Stewarts' death suddenly left them without their leader and guide and spiritual director.

Judy and I felt called to help continue the work begun by Joan and Jimmy at the center. We knew we were not of the same caliber as those good folk, but we felt that might be able to share in the work of bringing peace and justice and integrity to the region. I don't remember the specific details, but Desmond Tutu who by that time had been elected bishop of Johannesburg had something to do with encouraging us to take the post at Transformation. We had not worked directly with the American church since our time in Liberia, although we remained active participants in local churches. We wrote to the Episcopal Church Center in New York City in 1985 to explore the idea of joining the Transformation Resource Center once more as appointed missionaries. Desmond supported us, and may even have helped facilitate our approach to the Episcopal Church, which led to our re-appointment as Episcopal missionaries to serve in Lesotho.

But first we felt the need time to reflect on what we had done up to that point and to prepare ourselves for the new work in Lesotho. An old friend from Liberia Jim Hopewell, who taught at Emory University in Georgia and who was dying of cancer at the very time he helped us, recommended me for a Procter Fellowship at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts in the second half of 1985. That gave us five months away from Africa to reflect and to prepare ourselves, and also to be with our children all of whom were studying in America at that point.

We returned to Lesotho just at the time that the country was moving from illegitimate unconstitutional rule to an overtly illegal military government. Leabua

Jonathan had been in power since 1970, and as is the case with anyone who has been in power more than 10 years, he lost his way and became erratic and irrational. The South African government might not have minded him being erratic and irrational had he remained a docile tin pot dictator under their thumbs. However he was at that same time moving in a more socialist direction, and was threatening to establish close relationships with Cuba and the Soviet Union. That was too much for South Africa to bear. So they supported General Metsing Lekhanya in his military take over of Lesotho.

There was a five day gap between the fall of the Jonathan regime and the coming to power of the Lekhanya military government, at which time the country came to a standstill without food or medicine or access of any kind to South Africa. The experience shows just how totally dependent on friendly relations with South Africa Lesotho has always been and still is. All South Africa had to do in January 1986 was turn the switch for Lesotho to collapse.

We arrived in early February 1986 and began immediately to work at the Transformation Resource Center, which we simply called TRC. We faced the challenge of continuing the work of Jimmy and Joan, inspired and guided by the community development methodology of the Training for Transformation books written by Joan Stewart's sister Anne Hope and Sally Timmel. Much of our work was specific to Lesotho, but we were also part of the ongoing struggle in South Africa.

Our staff included three South Africans in exile. We were blessed to have one each from the three main liberation organizations: the ANC, the PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement. They worked well together, which we saw as a foretaste of cooperation to come in the new South Africa waiting to be born.

Migrant labor and justice

We organized a series of workshops to which we brought South Africans, both those in exile and those still living at home but able to travel to Lesotho. The first of these meetings was a joint exercise with the Agency for Industrial Mission and TRC, held at the National University of Lesotho in June 1986. Many South African scholars and activists attended the meeting, including Alan Whiteside, Chris Tapscott, Clive Poultney, Pundy Pelly, Phil Bonner, Dale White, Carl Keyter, Harriet Sibidi and many others. The intention of the meeting was to assess the current state of migrant labor, and to suggest ways in which the lives of migrants could be improved.

A year following that meeting TRC helped empower miners and their families in Lesotho in support of a strike by the National Union of Mineworkers. We issued pamphlets and flyers to encourage people in Lesotho to maintain the strike, and to discourage unemployed Basotho miners from becoming scabs as replacement miners. Unfortunately many did so, and many courageous men lost their jobs.

An example of how insidious can be the effort of the South African government to undermine our work was a social gathering to which we were invited by embassy

officials from Sweden and the United States. They tried to use the occasion to gain access through us to the mineworkers' plans.

TRC was clearly watched by the South African security force. An American friend sent me a letter which had clearly been opened in South Africa and then resealed. In the letter was a hand-written note: "This man is a friend of Phyllis Naidoo". I believe that the note was left in the envelope, not through incompetence, but to frighten me. I was not frightened, but only rather amused by their seeming blunder.

The Lesotho military government at that time was infiltrated and supported by South Africa. One morning during the miners' strike our office was invaded by Lesotho police who searched everything we had, taking away many photos and documents. Fortunately we were able to inform the world. On an earlier occasion I had called the BBC and persuaded Timothy Eckott to interview TRC, in order to tell the world what had happened to a young man killed by the Lesotho police. When the police entered our office on the occasion of the miners' strike, the senior police officer asked me, "Are you going to call the BBC this time?" I told him I certainly would do so, and in fact I followed through. That made me less than popular with the Lesotho government!

Fortunately our Anglican bishop Philip Mokuku supported me and supported our organization. He walked up and down in front of our office berating the policemen who were searching us. We came close to being shut down, and for a few nights we kept our records in a secret location at the Anglican Cathedral in Maseru.

We worked closely with refugees, using a grant from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to give a small stipend and some toiletries and clothes to young men and women in transit. They would sneak across the border at night, and take refuge in a compound set aside for them in Maseru. We would visit them, counsel them, and provide them with some basic comforts before they were flown out of the country by the UNHCR, mostly to Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana.

Our quarterly newsletter *Work for Justice* gave us a forum to publicize the Lesotho perspective on regional change and development. We spoke out often on South African issues, and our readership extended to many countries around the world. I subsequently edited an anthology (available from TRC) of the best articles from *Work for Justice* between 1983 and 2004.

Escaping isolation by crossing borders

Another significant workshop was a meeting held in Lesotho in April 1988. The gathering was originally to have been in South Africa, but the guest speakers, Walter Wink and Richard Deats from the United States, were refused visas to enter South Africa. Wink had written a book on nonviolence in South Africa, and Deats was an active member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The conference included major anti-apartheid South African activists, such as Sheena Duncan, Emma Mashinini, McGlory

Speckman, Joe Seremane, Sid Luckett and Rob Robertson. I wrote a report on the workshop which is available from TRC.

The workshop ended on an ironic and amusing note. Walter and Richard consulted with Rob Robertson, a South African who by virtue of long years subverting the apartheid regime knew how to fool the system. He told them that they should enter South Africa through Transkei, one of the so-called Bantustans. Transkei was recognized as an independent nation only by South Africa (and the other pseudo-countries of Ciskei, Venda, Bophuthatswana and Qwaqwa). There was a minimal border post between Lesotho and Transkei, staffed by sleepy and bored bureaucrats who could not be bothered to find whether Walter and Richard were personae non gratae. They entered Transkei and then crossed a non-existent border into the Orange Free State. They drove to Johannesburg and Pretoria, met many people in the resistance community, and then visited the Ministry of Home Affairs to ask for an exit visa. The officials were furious, and told our friends that they would be immediately expelled from South Africa as illegal immigrants. Walter and Richard thanked them, saying that is exactly what they wanted, bade the bureaucrats fare well and went to the airport to take the next plane to the US.

Judy and I used the same procedure to go on holiday to the Indian Ocean coast. After our earlier holidays, in the early 1980s we were denied visas to enter South Africa. Nonetheless we still wanted to enjoy some of the beauties of the South African seashore. We showed our local passports at Tele Bridge (incidentally the same border post in Transkei where Donald Woods fled the police after the death of Steve Biko). We drove through Umtata, the putative capital of Transkei, and proceeded to the Hluleka Nature Reserve. We and our children enjoyed several delightful days on the Wild Coast, and then went back to Lesotho by the same illegal route.

Only for medical reasons was I legally permitted to enter South Africa during this period. The heart disease that took me out of Liberia in 1968 finally caught up with me. It seems that my pericardial heart muscle had been so weakened that finally it did not conduct enough electricity to keep me going. I was sitting in my chair reading in 1985 when I unaccountably fell asleep. I woke up to discover that my heart rate had dropped to about 35 beats per minute. My doctor Pascal Ngakane, a black South African exile, advised me to go immediately to Bloemfontein, since I had suffered what he called a syncopal episode. With his letter I was able to get a 12-hour visa from the South African Embassy in Maseru to go for observation by a cardiologist. I cherish that document in my passport, since it may be one of the shortest legal entry periods allowed in history.

When I reached the Universitas Hospital in Bloemfontein Dr. Danie Marx, an Afrikaner cardiologist who was head of cardiology at the teaching hospital, sent me straight into surgery. I warned him that my visa would expire, but he simply ignored the fact. A pacemaker was put in the next day, and thereafter I remained his patient, and was allowed into South Africa for the occasional checkup.

Dr. Marx and Dr. Ngakane were both quite remarkable people. Dr. Marx was accustomed to breaking the law, by admitting patients of all races into his whites-only

hospital. When I made my regular visits to him for a checkup, he would spend most of the time asking me about Lesotho politics and discussing the future of South Africa. Dr. Ngakane had been trained in South Africa, and made a career of bucking the system. He had been working in an office job in Durban, but had refused to bend to the rules of apartheid. By the grace of God and good luck, he got the opportunity to go to medical school rather than to jail. After he qualified as a doctor, he left South Africa with his wife Pontso to set up a practice in Maseru, where I met him. After South African liberation he went to the township of Alexandra to serve the people as medical officer in a clinic.

One of the articles in our newsletter *Work for Justice* was entitled “South Africa Needs Lesotho”. The most obvious way in which South Africa depended on Lesotho was to recruit men to work on the mines, who would often go home as broken men to die. I remember hitching a ride to the mountains in 1976 when I had a problem with my project truck. Senior officials from The Employment Bureau of Africa were taking a permanently disabled ex-miner back to his village in the remote southeast of Lesotho, and offered me a ride in their Landrover. They clearly thought they were doing the crippled ex-miner a favor by giving him a free ride, not even thinking about how he had given the South African economy a free ride for all the years of his manual labor. He had been seriously injured, and was being taken home - with nothing but a lifetime of hard labor for his wife and children awaiting him. South Africa needed Lesotho, but did little to return the favor.

South Africa needs Lesotho’s water

The next major way in which South Africa needed Lesotho was as a market for its consumer goods. By the 1970s Lesotho was no longer able to feed itself, forcing Basotho to buy their staple food maize, as well as all other consumer goods, from South African owned and operated shops. Lesotho was a good captive market.

It was in the mid-1980s that Lesotho proved itself once more to be essential for South Africa. Lesotho has only four commodities it can sell: people, rocks, beautiful scenery, and water. Population and industry were growing steadily in the industrial heartland of South Africa, from the mines of the Orange Free State to the industries of Johannesburg to the political capital in Pretoria. Soon it became evident that there was simply not enough water in the Vaal and Ash Rivers, and not enough underground aquifers, to supply growing needs. So the very first agreement signed by the military government with the apartheid regime in 1986 was to sell Lesotho’s water, which would be transferred north by tunnel.

The Lesotho Highland Water Project was initiated, with the intention eventually to build five major dams on the Senqu River, a river which starts in the high mountains of Lesotho. The river flows in a steep canyon through a thinly populated region of Lesotho. When it enters South Africa it becomes the Orange River, and then winds through the equally thinly populated South African highveld westward into the Atlantic Ocean. The Verwoerd Dam (later called the Garieb Dam) was built on the Orange River somewhat

downstream from the Lesotho border, for flood control and irrigation, but the overall benefit to the South African economy was small.

TRC watched the negotiations for creation of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and then the preparations for building the first dam with great interest. It took us some time before we began to realize the implications of the project. We realized that the water could never really be used to irrigate farmers' fields on Lesotho's side of the border. The FAO-sponsored rural development project that I had been associated with in the 1970s built a small irrigation scheme along the river near the South African border, but it never paid for itself. The terrain was difficult and the flow of water too uncertain for there to be a sustainable benefit.

Our main concern for the new water transfer project was for the people who lived in the area soon to be inundated by the dam. As an outgrowth of an ecumenical workshop sponsored by TRC and the Lesotho Heads of Churches in the central mountains of Lesotho, we organized the Highlands Church Action Group, whose members were from the local communities. Few construction jobs were offered to these communities by the international construction companies, and villagers were angered when laborers were brought in from South Africa. TRC participated in an epidemiological study of the area shortly after the first dam had been built, in cooperation with Dr. Brian Sharp of the South African Medical Research Council. We found a high percentage of HIV-positive people on the main road and no cases in the villages off the road. It was clear to us that the infection was penetrating the area through outside contractor laborers. As a result, we did our best to reduce what we saw would be inevitable sexual liaisons between project workers and local people, mostly through prostitution. That was a fight we were unfortunately bound to lose.

We had a somewhat better chance to succeed in providing proper compensation for local residents who lost their fields, their houses and their livelihoods. We were fortunate in that the World Bank Panel of Experts cooperated closely with us and helped us get the best possible deal for local people. South Africa desperately wanted the water, the Lesotho government, secure in its Maseru headquarters, wanted income from the sale of water, and without some advocates from the private sector the local people were bound to lose.

I'm sure that Bishop Colin Winter would have wanted us to do everything we could to stop the project totally. The International Rivers Network in the US opposed the scheme from the start. Instead I continued my effort to work from within, and in retrospect I believe that the Water Project has been a good thing both for Lesotho and for South Africa. My worries about the environmental impact of the dams have somewhat lessened because of efforts to control runoff on the slopes above the dams. The project has also tried to control down the stream flow so that the lower reaches of the river will maintain their vegetation and animal life. I think we at TRC, in cooperation with several international voluntary organizations, played an important role in helping the poor people of the mountains of Lesotho avoid a catastrophic change in their lives. Change did happen but it was ameliorated.

Land reform and hunger

My wife and I regained our visas and thus permission in 1991 to enter South Africa shortly after the release of Nelson Mandela. Thereafter we played our roles as residents of the wider region, trying to work for justice and respect for the poor and the disadvantaged. That story is not part of my present account, but I do want to add one small narrative about my one effort to help the new South Africa in that critical year 1991. The narrative underscores my long-term ambivalence toward the radical stance of Bishop Winter. I worked from within, I tried to go slow and listen, and so I only occasionally found it necessary to speak in a strongly principled way.

I had worked with agricultural development projects in Lesotho over the years. Dale White at the Wilgespruit Fellowship Center in Johannesburg hosted a discussion about land redistribution in South Africa. He asked me to bring any suggestions I might have from my experience with small-scale farming in Lesotho. I had witnessed the inability of the majority of poor village people to wrest a living out of low productivity fields, all very small and at a considerable distance from their houses. I knew firsthand the mistakes of white development experts, and so I might well be the person they needed to provide independent approval of far-reaching land redistribution schemes.

In the discussion of land redistribution in South Africa, however, I did not play the role expected of me. I warned against assuming that dispossessed black South Africans could return to the land and become successful farmers overnight. I pointed out that only about 5% of rural Basotho in fact made a good living out of their fields. The remainder farmed in a desultory fashion, scratching out enough production to help them prevent starvation when income from the mines failed. I reminded my friends in Johannesburg of this experience, and warned them not to think that recovery of stolen lands by black people would solve South Africa's food problem.

My warning was not at all well received. What I was saying was not politically correct, did not appeal to populists who wanted to change the system overnight. Most of the people present at that meeting were from the Black Consciousness Movement, and approached rural development with a communitarian idealism that denied the reality of lives of ordinary poor rural people. I pointed out what we had seen in Transkei, namely a very low level of self-help agriculture along the road from Lesotho to the coast. Even with all our troubles in Lesotho, Basotho were doing better than black South Africans who were nominally in charge of their own land in the Bantustans. I told the meeting that populist land redistribution would lead only to hunger. Perhaps Bishop Winter would have said "I told you so. You never really became a radical, but in the end were co-opted by the system."

I'm afraid that my sober realism was heard as cynicism and white-based arrogance. I still believe what I said, but I think my saying so cut me off from helping build a new rural South Africa. The disasters in Zimbabwe resulting from wholesale redistribution of white-owned farms simply confirm what I believed. I think today that

I'm glad that land redistribution in today's South Africa is proceeding very slowly. That delay may be unjust and it may be anti-populist, may be a confirmation of Bishop Winter's warning. Nonetheless, hunger remains such a serious problem across Africa that I think tampering with South Africa's functioning and productive farming system, even though white owned, would be a mistake.

I have a close coloured friend who works in the Free State town of Kroonstad. I visited him in 2003 and received on-site confirmation of what I had feared. My friend was in charge of restoring farm production to land which had been turned over to the government for use by black farmers. As he himself admitted, the only people who worked on the fields he supervised were old folks who knew little about farming and had little interest in learning more. Young people were in the cities hustling for jobs and money, not waiting impatiently to farm the lands their grandparents had owned.

Subsistence agriculture across Africa is an important and stubborn problem. I fear that other people, hopefully southern Africans themselves, must think deeply about the issue. I was not asked to provide advice on the issue by South Africans after my abortive encounter with black activists at the Wilgespruit Fellowship Center. I am sure that by speaking bluntly at that meeting in Johannesburg in 1991 I cut myself off from working with agricultural change in South Africa.

My wife and I lived in Lesotho for another ten years, and since 2001 we have continued to visit both South Africa and Lesotho. I taught African church history at the Anglican College of the Transfiguration in Grahamstown in 1997, and my wife and I led a study tour of South Africa in 2003. Our youngest son is lecturing in mathematics at the University of Cape Town. Since 1991 I have done research in Lesotho, both in residence and from my retirement home in the USA, on the social and economic setting for development projects in such areas as education, energy, health, agriculture and roads. In the southern African region I have helped IDASA, the Institute for Democracy in Southern Africa, study regional migration and democratic change. However, since the activities mentioned in this paragraph occurred after the liberation of South Africa, I will not discuss them further here.

John Gay, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 4 March 2009

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