

Violence: keep morality alive

History has placed all SA in the box -

VIOLENCE is usually seen primarily in physical terms. The advantage is that one capitalises on the image of destruction but the disadvantage is that one ignores the more subtle manifestations, for example, psychological and structural violence. In both cases we can speak of a metaphorical use of the term violence.

In the case of psychological violence there need not be any physical violence at all but the experience of injury done to the person is crucial. It is an assault on the integrity of a person. Examples of psychological violence are brainwashing, indoctrination and authoritarian attitudes in family relationships and educational contexts.

The term "structural violence" is another example of the metaphorical use of the word violence. Violence is structural when the extreme force is not exerted wilfully by a person but by a structure, a set of relationships, created and perpetuated by custom or law. A structure is created which curbs the freedom of subjects unfairly or which discriminates unjustly against certain sections of the community preventing them from gaining full citizenship. Structural violence is the worst kind of political injustice when rulers enforce oppressive and discriminatory laws without the

Professor Johan Degenaar of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch testified in mitigation of sentence at the Bethal treason trial which ended in the Supreme Court in Pretoria in January.

During cross-examination by counsel for the state, Prof Degenaar said that, in criticising both the state and revolutionaries, he did not



Prof Johan Degenaar of the Dept of Philosophy (University of Stellenbosch).

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the State is unjustified. This is the claim made by revolutionary movements. It is said that the State cannot justify its use of violence because the laws of the State violate moral rights.

The revolutionary movement claims that it can justify its own violence because this violence is primarily counter-violence: It opposes the structural violence of an unjust system; it works towards a just system. In this sense the end justifies the means. Its own use of violence is seen by the revolutionary as constructive rather than destructive, progressive rather than entrenched in unjust laws. It is only constructive violence which can liberate man from structural violence which perpetuates itself.

With the term "structural violence" I have drawn attention to the fact that revolutionary violence is not the only kind of violence and that violence always needs justification. This does not entail that the justification used is necessarily convincing. For example, the traditional way of justifying violence in terms of the principle that the end justifies the means is unacceptable. The end is absorbed by the means ascribing an unintended priority to the violent means.

This applies equally to those who use violence, structurally and physically, in order to maintain law and order, and to revolutionaries who allow for violent means in order to reach the liberated and purified future. *Far from the end justifying the means, the means justifies the end.* This calls for a moral dimension which has to qualify all actions as means to a projected goal. According to Hanna Arendt: "The

to the existence of structural violence in our society which is responsible for excluding blacks from sharing political power. Therefore, although I do not justify the use of violence I can understand their decision in favour of the armed struggle. Any group of people, including the Afrikaners, would come to a similar decision if they were the victims of structural violence and if their non-violence political strategy pursued for decades was ignored.

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I am of the opinion that we should not think about the future in fatalistic and pessimistic terms. One way of liberating ourselves from despair is to think about our political situation as a process. This entails that we should also evaluate political violence, whether State violence or revolutionary violence, in terms of a process. I have analysed the concept of violence in terms of its physical, psychological and structural manifestations. Unfortunately the

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