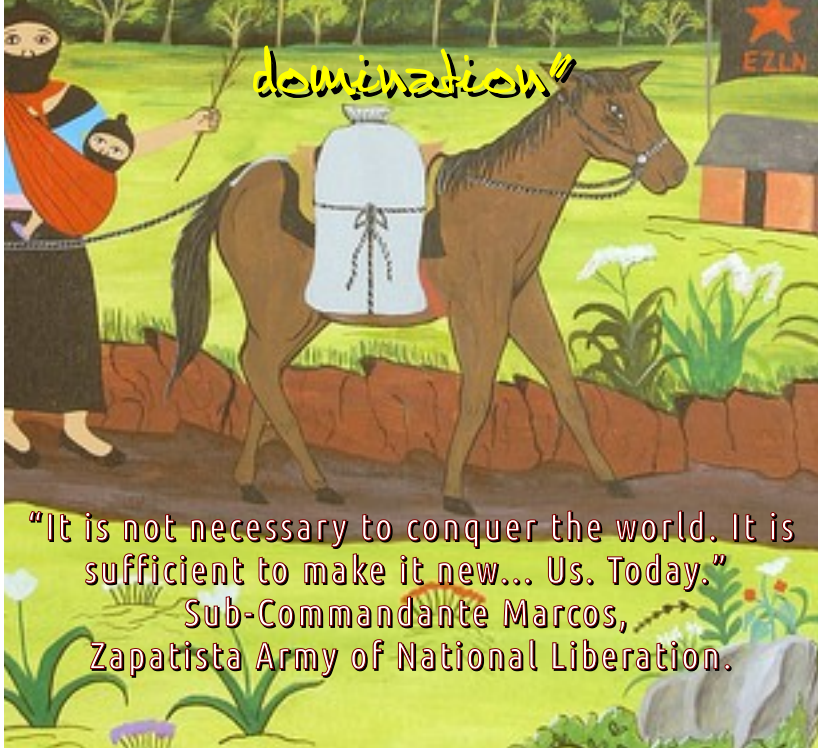


An Introduction to John Holloway

"The struggles of dignity tear
open the fabric of capitalist
domination"



"It is not necessary to conquer the world. It is
sufficient to make it new... Us. Today."

Sub-Commandante Marcos,
Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

Umlando ka John Holloway

U John Holloway uyinculabuchopho eyikomanisi (*communist philosopher*), umsebenzi wakhe uchazwa njengogxile emizabalazweni yokuzimela kanye nenkululeko yabantu.

U Holloway wazalelwa eScotland wabamba iqhaza emizabalazweni yaseNgilandi. Wayebhala ngemizabalazo yabasebenzi bemboni yezimoto yakwa *Nissan eSunderland* ngo 1980. Njengamanje usehlala eMexico lapho eyingxenywe yomzabalazo wombutho odumile okuthiwa ama *Zapatista*. Ngonyaka ka 2002 wabhala incwadi ethi *Change the World without Taking Power* (ukushintsha izwe ngaphandle kokuphatha umbuso). Lencwadi yaba nomthelela omkhulu ekulweni nogombela kwesabo abayizikhondlakhondla zomnotho basemazweni aseMelika nase Europe kumbandakanya nokubhikishela inhlangano yezokuhweba yomhlaba (*World Trade Organisation*) eSeattle ngo November ka 1999.

Umsebenzi kaHolloway ubambelele ephuzwini lokuthi ingcindezelo iwumphumela wokuziphatha kongxiwankulu, namandla emali esetshenziswa ukwenza abanothile banothe kakhulu nabampofu babe mpofu kakhulu. Nakuba kucaca ukuthi abanye bethu imizabalazo ayibhekene nje kuphela nokulwa nongxiwankulu kodwa singakucacisa ukuthi ukulwa nongxiwankulu kusemqoka kakhulu. Uma sibuka Abahlali basemjondolo siyathola ukuthi babelokhu bekuphawula ukuthi ukubaluleka komhlaba akugxile ekusetshenzisweni kwawo imiphakathi hayi inani ongathengiswa ngalo. Okunye esingakubuka umzabalazo wabasebenzi basezimayini wokulwelwa amaholo angcono nokuphathwa kwezimayini ngokuhlanganyela, lomzabalazo uyingxenywe yokulwa nongxiwankulu. Lamaphuzu asemqoka ukwenza sikhone ukuxoxisana noHolloway.

U Holloway uhlezi egcizelela ukuthi umzabalazo uqala kubantu basemazingeni emiphakathi njengoba besuke bephikisana nengcindezelo. Lokhu kubonakala ngenkathi abantu bezabalazela ukuthola umhlaba, amanzi kanye negesi nangokuthi badle imihlaba bazixhumele bona ugesi namanzi kokunye, baze benze imibhikisho ngokuvimba imigwaqo nezinhlabaluhide. Indlela ababambisene ngayo ikhombisa ukunakekelana, ukuhloniphana kanye nokungacwasani. U Holloway naye uyakuveza ukuthi lendlela yokwenza iyo enomthelela wokukhulisa nokuqinisa imizabalazo yokulwa nongxiwankulu. U Holloway uhlukile kwamanye amashoshozela emizabalazo ngoba wona abuka imiphakathi njengabantu abangazi lutho abafanelwe ukufundiswa ukuthi uyini umzabalazo.

La eNingizimu Afrika lokhu kubonakala ngokusobala uma kubhekwa indlela izinhlango ezisebenza nemiphakathi ezenza ngayo. Lezinhlango azilandeli okufunwa imiphakathi futhi azilaleli imibono yemiphakathi kodwa zifuna imiphakathi yenze okufunwa yizo, nezimfundiso zazo ngepolitiki zincika kwezikufunayo zona ziphikisane nokufunwa imiphakathi. U Holloway uhlukile kakhulu kulokhu ngoba yena ukholelwa ukuthi abantu bemiphakathi yibo abanamandla okwenza uguquko ngoba imizabalazo yabo isukela empilweni yemihlangemihla, lokhu okufanayo nokuhlezi kushiwo Abahlali mabekhuluma ngepolitiki ephilayo.

U Holloway ubuye athi ingcindezelo ayiqhamuki nje kuphela ohlangothini olulodwa. Uthi sonke siyizisulu zengcindezelo kangankokuthi kwalaba abacindezelwe banendlela yokuqhubezela phambili ingcindezelo. Ukholelwa ukuthi akusiko konke ukulwa nengcindezelo okwenzeka ngendlela enesizotha nesithunzi nenkululeko. Abahlali nabo bayavuma ukuthi kumele kubekhona ukwelashwa emoyeni ngaphakathi kubantu abayingxenywe yemizabalazo yemiphakathi ngoba kuyavela ukuthi ulaka lwabantu lungaholela noma kwisiphi isimo, senkululeko noma sobungozi. Abahlali babuye bakhombise ukuzimisela ukulwa nezinkomba zengcindezelo ezivela ngaphakathi kumbutho. Lapha siyabona futhi ukuxhumana kwemibono kaHolloway nowaBahlali.

Ukusebenzisana kuka Holloway nama*Zapatista* kwaveza ukuthi isithunzi sabantu, ukusetshenziswa kwamandla kanye nokulwela inkululeko kuyingxenywe yomzabalazo. U Holloway uchaza ukulwela isithunzi njengokuphikisana nokuhlanjalazwa nokwenziwa umuntukazana. Siyazi ukuthi eNingizimu Afrika abantu bahlezi begcizelela ukuthi **ubuntu** yibo obubenza baqale imizabalazo. Lendlela yokuba yingxenywe yomzabalazo igcizelela ukuthi wonke umuntu uyalingana nokuthi isithunzi somuntu wonke sibalulekile nokuthi inkululeko kuzofinyelelwa kuyo uma abantu abacindezelwe besebenza ngokuhloniphana. Zikhona izinkomba zokuthi ezingxenyeni ezithile e Ningizimu Afrika lokhu kuyenzeka.

U Holloway uveza iphuzu lama*Zapatista* ukucacisa kulokhu:

ukuhlupheka kwasihlanganisa sabamunye kwasenza sakhuluma, futhi siyazi esikukhulumayo kuyiqiniso, asikhulumi nje kuphela ngokuhlupheka kodwa nangethemba esinalo ezinhliziyweni zethu. Sikhuluma noqobo lwethu sibuka imvelaphi yethu: obaba bethu nobabamkhulu bethu babehlupheka bezabalaza, obaba babegcwele intukuthelo, sabona ukuthi asiphucwanga yonke into, kukhona okwasala okuyikho okusenza siphile sisukume siqine namadolo, lokhu ISITHUNZI sethu, isithunzi sethu siyigugu kithi sonke, senza sizizwe singabantu futhi, sizizwe sivuka kabusha ezinhliziyweni zethu, sibizelwe esithunzini sethu, emzabalazweni.

Kulesiqephu nakuba kuyinkinga ukungaphawuli ngokulingana kobulili neqhaza labesimame, lokhu kumele ngasosonke isikhathi kube umongo wemizabalazo yenkululeko. Imizabalazo iphumeleliswa ukusebenza ngokubambisana kuhlonishwe ubuntu nesithunzi somuntu wonke.

U Holloway uyaveza ukuthi emazweni amaningi izinhlangano ebezilwela inkululeko ziyaye zithathe umbuso bese ziphatha ngendlela efanayo nekade ziphikisana nayo. La eNingizimu Afrika sikwazi kahle lokhu. Iqiniso ukuthi uhulumeni wobandlululo wanqotshwa kodwa ukuxoshwa kwabantu ezindaweni, ukuvalelwa ezinkanjini, ukungabiwa komhlaba ngokulingana, ukuxhashazwa emisebenzini nokucindezelwa kwamashoshozela enkululeko kusayizinto ezenzekayo ezweni lakithi. Ukuphuma kulugibe uHolloway ululeka ngamacebo asetshenziswa ama*Zapatista*. Uthi amashoshozela emizabalazo kumele ayeke ukutshela abantu ukuthi kumele benzeni kodwa wona kufanele afunde ukulalela abantu. Uqhubeka athi ama*Zapatista* awazange athathe umbuso ohlelwe ngokwezinhlelo zababusi bengcindezelo kodwa azenzela ezawo izinhlelo okuwukubusa ngokwabelana amandla. Lapha abacindezelwe bazihlela bona ngendlela yezimiso zabo.

Umbono ka Holloway akusiko nje ukuthi umbuso uphatha ngengcindezelo, uyavuma ukuthi kukhona ohulumeni abenza kangcono nokuthi ukulwela uguquko kohulumeni kusemqoka kakhulu. Kodwa uphawula umehluko phakathi kwepolitiki yenhlupheko nepolitiki yesithunzi. Uthi ipolitiki yenhlupheko iholwa ongoti besebenzisa ubuchwepheshe, imiphakathi ayilalelwa iyatshelwa ukuthi yenzeni ngethemba lokuthi kuzobakhona ukulingana ngokwamalungelo. Kodwa ipolitiki yesithunzi yakhelwe phezu kwesisekelo sokuhlonishwa kwemibono yabantu bemiphakathi kanye nokuzikhandla kwabo. Lepolitiki izibophezela ekwakhiweni kokulingana ngamalungelo.

La eNingizimu Afrika abantu sebeke bayingxenye yemikhankaso efana ne, **No Land, No House, No Vote**, kanye nokuphikisana kokungahlinzekwa ngengqalasizinda, kubhikishelwa amakhansela kanye nezinhlangano zepolitiki. Kuyavela nokuthi kwezinye izikhathi abantu besebengasakholelwa ekuqokeni abantu abazobamela kuhulumeni kodwa bazakhele ezabo izinhlaka zobuholi. Abahlali basemjondolo bayaye bazwakalise ukwesekana kwemiphakathi okugxile ekwenzisaneni, ukuzabalazisana nasekubeni ndawonye hayi ukwenzela nokukhulumela imiphakathi. Lokhu kuxhumana kakhulu nendlela uHolloway acabanga ngayo ngemizabalazo.

Kuyaziwa ukuthi kunabathile abacabanga ukuthi banazo zonke izimpendulo, inkinga nje ukuthi abalalelwa. Kuyaziwa ukuthi ubungoti ngemizabalazo abuhlangani neqiniso ngendlela imizabalazo ehamba ngayo. Amacebo namasu ngemizabalazo akhandwa phakathi emzabalazweni, hayi ngaphandle kwemizabalazo, njengoba noMnu Sbu Zikode waBahlali esho: “amacebo omzabalazo acatshangwa emgaqweni sigijima”. Lendlela yokubuka umzabalazo ixhumana kakhulu nendlela uHolloway abuka ngayo imizabalazo.

A Short Introduction to John Holloway

John Holloway is a communist philosopher whose work is often described as being rooted in the autonomist or libertarian traditions.

Holloway was born in Scotland and was involved in important debates and struggles in Britain. He wrote, for instance, about workers' struggles at the Nissan car factory in Sunderland in the 1980s. He now lives in Mexico where he has also been politically engaged, most famously with the Zapatista movement. His 2002 book *Change the World Without Taking Power* became very influential in the struggles against corporate globalization that had moved around North America and Western Europe after the huge protests against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle in November 1999.

Holloway's work has always taken the view that the central form of oppression is that which comes from the power of money, of capitalism, and the drive to constantly use money to make more money even when this makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. Although it is clear that our struggles today are not only struggles against the mania to put profit before people it is clear that struggle against the logic of capitalism is very important to many of our struggles today. For instance Abahlali baseMjondolo have long insisted that the social value of land must come before its commercial value. The struggles of mineworkers for a fairer share of the money that is being made in the mines, or for collective ownership and control of the mines, is another example of a struggle against the logic of capitalism. This commonality provides a useful point of engagement with Holloway's work.

Holloway's work has also always stressed that struggle begins from ordinary women and men and their ordinary acts of refusal to accept the logic of oppression. This can take the form of day to day ways of living that challenge the logic of oppression (like people living on occupied land, making their own connections to water and electricity or holding meetings based on equality, mutual care and respect for dignity) or more explicit forms of politics (like marches, road blockades, land occupations etc.). And Holloway's work has always stressed that the spaces in the cracks in the system in which people can live or relate to others, even if just for a while, according to a different logic to that of capitalism, are where the roots of resistance are nourished.

All of this makes Holloway's thought very different to the forms of leftism that see the people as ignorant and argue that they need to be led by enlightened activists with the right ideas. This form of politics is always authoritarian and in South Africa the intersection between top down approaches to thinking about progressive politics and some NGOs has, along with being deeply authoritarian and grossly disrespectful of the thinking of grassroots militants, also often been clearly racialised. For these reasons some people have described it as a politics rooted in contempt for ordinary people.

However Holloway's stress on the ordinary politics of ordinary people is completely different to this politics of contempt. There are real points of connection between Holloway's commitment to looking for politics in the ordinary lives of ordinary people and what Abahlali baseMjondolo have called a living politics. These connections could provide another useful point of engagement with Holloway's thought.

Holloway has also always stressed that oppression is not something that comes only from one class of people and that all we need to do is to support the oppressed against the oppressors. He argues that we are all damaged by oppression and that the logic of oppression is also found amongst the oppressed. He is clear that not all forms of rage against oppression are dignified or emancipatory.

Abahlali baseMjondolo has always stressed the need for healing within oppressed communities as well as society as a whole and has often organised on that basis. And of course the movement has always warned that the anger of the poor can go in many directions some of which can be emancipatory but some of which can be very dangerous. The movement has also been open about confronting the logic of oppression when it emerges in struggle. This is also a point of connection that could, potentially, open up a useful line of discussion.

Holloway's engagement with the Zapatistas in Mexico led to a new focus on dignity, the nature of power and the idea that an emancipatory politics is worked out in action. He defines dignity as the refusal to accept humiliation and dehumanisation. We all know that in different kinds of struggles across South Africa people have constantly asserted their humanity as the basis for their rebellion. This politics, of insisting on the recognition of everyone's humanity and of using our shared humanity as the basis for a demand for respect, has often been ignored by the left. But it, together with the language of dignity, and political practices aimed at affirming the dignity of the oppressed, has been central to some of the strongest emancipatory politics to have emerged in South Africa.

Holloway uses the following quote from the Zapatistas to explain what it means to found a politics on dignity:

'Then that suffering that united us made us speak, and we recognised that in our words there was truth, we knew that not only pain and suffering lived in our tongue, we recognised that there is hope still in our hearts. We spoke with ourselves, we looked inside ourselves and we looked at our history: we saw our most ancient fathers suffering and struggling, we saw our grandfathers struggling, we saw our fathers with fury in their hands, we saw that not everything had been taken away from us, that we had the most valuable, that which made us live, that which made our step rise above plants and animals, that which made the stone be beneath our feet, and we saw, brothers, that all that we had was DIGNITY, and we saw that great was the shame of having forgotten it, and we saw that DIGNITY was good for men to be men again, and dignity returned to live in our hearts, and we were new again, and the dead, our dead, saw that we were new again and they called us again, to dignity, to struggle'.

There is a serious problem with the way that this statement leaves out the equality of women, which has to be central to any emancipatory project. But the idea that the right to rebel is rooted in a shared humanity and the dignity that should come with being human is one that is very familiar to some of our struggles.

Holloway has argued that around the world left wing movements have often taken state power and then run the state in ways that are similar in some ways to the regimes that they had defeated. In South Africa we know the truth of this bitter reality all too well. Apartheid was defeated but evictions, transit camps, authoritarian traditional leaders, exploitation at work, an unfair distribution of land and gross political repression all remain part of our society. Holloway's response to this problem is based on the intellectual work done in the Zapatista movement where, he says, revolutionaries had to learn to stop telling people what to do and to learn to listen. He explains that the Zapatistas concluded that the point was not to capture the power of the oppressors in the same structures set up by oppression but rather to share power throughout society. This requires the oppressed to build their own power via their own self-organisation.

Holloway's position is not that the state is always an equally oppressive structure no matter which group has captured it. He is clear that some states are much better than others and that struggles over the control and nature of the state have been important. But he draws a distinction between what he calls 'the politics of poverty' and the 'politics of dignity'. He argues that the 'politics of poverty' leads to a politics that is aimed at making change through the state via technocratic measures decided on by experts. It uses a top down system now in the hope that it will create a more equal society in the future. But the politics of dignity is rooted in immediate respect for the intelligence and agency of ordinary people. It begins from an immediate commitment to equality.

In South Africa people have supported the 'No Land! No House! No Vote Campaign!' and struggles against Ward Councillors and local party structures for a range of different reasons. But in some cases there has been a clear argument that struggle should be about building the power of the oppressed rather than in trusting that someone else will represent the oppressed in the party or the state. And of course Abahlali baseMjondolo has always been very clear that what the movement has called 'a living solidarity' requires struggling with, and speaking with, and being with, rather than acting and speaking for the oppressed. These arguments connect clearly to important themes in Holloway's work and this point of connection between the work done in our own struggles and Holloway's thought could also open up a useful discussion.

We all know that there are little groups of activists who think that they have the answer for everyone but that the real political problem is that the people won't listen to them. But anyone who has been involved in a genuine people's movement knows that dogmatic theories about how to struggle have very little to do with reality. Struggle has to be worked out on the ground. It is thought, as S'bu Zikode said, on the ground, running. This is also an important theme in Holloway's work and something that is rooted in his engagement with the Zapatistas who famously said that they 'shit on all the vanguards of the planet' and, instead, walk, together, while asking questions. The idea that the path is made by walking is another point of connection between Holloway's thought and our own struggles.

Further reading

The Red Rose of Nissan, 1987

<http://libcom.org/history/red-rose-nissan-john-holloway>

The Concept of Power & the Zapatistas, 1996

<http://libcom.org/library/concept-power-zapatistas-john-holloway>

Dignity's Revolt, 1997

<http://libcom.org/library/dignitys-revolt-john-holloway>

Going in the Wrong Direction or Mephistopheles: Not Saint Francis of Assisi, 2005

<http://libcom.org/library/going-in-the-wrong-direction-or-mephistopheles-not-saint-francis-of-assisi>

Against & Beyond the State: An interview with John Holloway, 2007

<http://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/04-against-and-beyond-the-state>

The Politics of Dignity & the Politics of Poverty, 2010

<http://abahlali.org/node/7586>

An Interview with John Holloway, 2012

<http://shiftmag.co.uk/?p=505>



John Holloway

“The struggle is lost from the beginning, long before the victorious party or army conquers state power and ‘betrays’ its promises. It is lost once power itself seeps into the struggle, once the logic of power becomes the logic of the revolutionary process, once the negative of refusal is converted into the positive of power-building.”

The booklet was written by Richard Pithouse and the translation into isiZulu was by David Ntseng.

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Cover picture is a Zapatista artwork called: "Woman with Rebel Dignity"