

The liberation struggle within the liberation struggle:

The success and failure of the “thirty years war for southern African liberation” in South Africa and beyond

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The ANC has the honour, at 100, of being amongst the very first organizational recruits to the cause of southern African liberation from white-minority rule. Moreover, in 1994, it was a key party to the final resolution of the South Africa’s own struggle within that regional struggle. It is, of course, worth reminding ourselves of the regional fact since the struggle for a free South Africa was markedly affected by a dynamics of cross-border war, a war that impinged upon South Africa’s own dynamics of change and that helped shape this country’s outcomes. In addition, the region itself today remains, in many ways, the heir to its collective past, still subordinated to South Africa and to the latter’s regional and continental sub-imperialism. For the new South Africa has become one important player in the recolonization of the entire sub-continent by “global capital” – this in spite of the southern African region’s ostensible “liberation.” But of course it bears emphasizing that South Africa itself has also been “recolonized,” albeit with the ANC’s complicity, by that very same network of global capital.

Hence the application, above, of the qualifier “ostensible” attached to the term “liberation” as used either with reference to South Africa or to the region as a whole. Much has been achieved certainly, not least in terms of the lifting of the weight of overt racist oppression, but then again not nearly enough has been achieved to have truly liberated the mass of the population in any of the countries at the forefront of erstwhile regional struggle. Indeed, in each country a struggle within a struggle - a struggle for both national and regional liberation that is cast in terms not merely of race but in terms of class, gender and democratic voice as well - continues. This is perhaps especially true in South Africa where, given the widespread popular mobilization that had in fact gone well beyond the organizational reach of the principle liberation movement (ANC), so much more had been expected. To ground this sobering point – as regards the success and the failure of both the national and regional liberation movements - is the task that this paper will set itself. In so doing it may also begin to explore the possible terms of a “next liberation struggle,” one that still cries out to be waged in both South Africa and in southern Africa more generally.