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WHO IS THE ENEMY...WHAT IS

OUR OBJECTIVE?

by

AGOSTINHO NETO

[Ed. Note: *Comrade Neto, President of the People's Liberation Movement of Angola (M.P.L.A.) delivered the following speech on February 7, 1974 at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. We are greatly indebted to the Southern Africa Committee, New York for providing us with the text of this speech for publication in Ufahamu. In reading this article, the reader should bear in mind that it was rendered before the Spinola coup.*]

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, Comrades. It is with the greatest pleasure that I am speaking before the always deeply interested audience of this University, whose preoccupation, on the part of both students and lecturers, shows a desire for a profound understanding of our continent and of the different factors affecting its development. This is a preoccupation worthy of the country's future leaders and of those who are forming them, which fact transforms the great pleasure of this meeting into a special honour.

I should like briefly to outline the fruit of my personal experience, the fruit of reflection on the national liberation struggle on our continent. This experience is simply an expression of a need experienced in Africa over the past five centuries, and most especially in the last decades, the need for each and every one of us to feel free. It is also a broader expression of the common desire of men in this world to regard themselves as free, as capable of releasing themselves from the shackles of a society in which they weaken and die as human beings.

In my opinion, the national liberation struggle in Africa cannot be dissociated from the present context in which it is taking place; it cannot be isolated from the world. A workers' strike in England, the imposition of fascism on the Chilean people or an atomic explosion in the Pacific are all phenomena of this same life that we are living and in which we are seeking ways to a happy existence for man in this world. This universal fact is however rendered particular in Africa through current political, economic and cultural concepts.

The historical bonds between our peoples and other peoples in the world are becoming ever closer, since there can be no other trend on earth. Isolation is impossible and is contrary to the idea of technical, cultural and political progress.

The problem facing us Africans now is how to transform unjust relations with other countries and peoples in the world, generally relations of political and economic subordination, without this transformation taking place to the detriment of the social progress with must of necessity be injected into action to win freedom, and without which one's behaviour would be that of a man coming out of one form of discrimination only to fall into another as negative as the first; as a simple inversion of the intervening factors. And within this same African society, the national liberation movement also seeks to ensure that the internal socio-economic forces, that is, those that evolve within each country, are restructured in the direction of progress.

In Africa we are making every effort to put a final end to paleo-colonialism, which barely exists today in the territories dominated by Portugal, contrary to the general belief, since they are in fact dominated by a vast imperialist partnership which is unjustly protecting the selfish interests of men, economic organisations and groups of countries.

The so-called white minority racist regimes are merely a consequence and a special form of paleo-colonialism in which links with the metropolises have become slack and less distinct in favour of a white minority dictatorship. This visible, clear and open form of colonialism does not prevent the existence on our continent of another more subtle form of domination which goes by the name of neo-colonialism, in which he who exploits is no longer identified by the name coloniser, but acts in the same way at various levels.

However, internal forms of subjugation caused by fragmentation into small ethnic or linguistic groupings, by the development of privileged classes endowed with their own dynamism, are also forms of oppression linked with the visible forms known as colonialism, old or new, and racism. They easily ally themselves with imperialism and facilitate its penetration and influence.

These phenomena are universal and they are found or have been found in all societies in the world, but at the present time they are acute and very tangible in Africa, and it is here that they most concern us Africans, as well as other nations with which we have relations either of subjugation or cooperation.

Colonial and racist domination and oppression are exercised in different ways and at different levels. They do not take place in a uniform way on our continent, they do not always use the same agents, and they do not always act on the same social stratum or on the same type of political or economic organisation. For this reason, everyone, whether coloniser or colonised, feels in a different way this phenomenon which is today anachronistic and which it is desired to replace by other kinds of relations (and we Africans are not yet very clear or very much in agreement on these new kinds of relations).

Whereas for some people colonialism meant and still means forced labour, to others it is a racial discrimination, while for still others it is economic segregation and the impossibility of political advancement. But the plunder of African lands by the colonisers, the enslavement of the worker, corporal punishment and the intensive exploitation of the wealth that belongs to us are forms of the same colonialism; and the capacity of each person to apply himself to the dynamics of solving the colonial problem, with greater or lesser intelligence and clarity, depends on a broad understanding of all these factors.

And, as previously stated, action against colonialism is closely linked with and part of something else of an apparently internal nature, but which is in fact as universal as the first, which is the need for social transformations, so that humanity may be truly free in every country and every continent in the world. The way in which this aspect of the problem is tackled is also very important to the stand taken and the line to be followed in the liberation process. These two crucial problems of our continent and of our era are therefore closely interconnected with relations with foreign peoples, on the one hand, and with the relations among the ready forces within each country.

The correctness of attitude and the emotional intensity with which we embark upon action for liberation depend on how we see the world, how we foresee our country's future and the extent to which we feel in our skin the action of the foreign forces. The national liberation struggle in our era is therefore influenced not only by the historical factors determining colonialism, neo-colonialism or racist régimes, but also by its own prospects, its objectives and the way each person sees the world and life. Reaction to foreign domination, whether individual, collective or organised, must of necessity be influenced by the two factors mentioned, which have to do with both past and future history.

This is why the importance of the national liberation movements is much greater than is generally admitted, because through their activity they are transforming themselves into accelerators of history, of the development of the society within which they are acting and also outside it, imparting fresh dynamism to social processes to transcend the present stage, even that in politically independent countries.

The different types of colonisation in Africa have endowed us Africans with different ways of seeing the problem of liberation, and it is natural that it should be thus, since our consciousness cannot draw upon material to form itself except from the field of lived experience and from our possibilities of knowing the world. Sometimes we differ in our concepts and, hence, in the practical implementation of combat programmes, and the line taken in action for liberation does not always fulfill the twofold need to concentrate both on transforming the relations between peoples and intrinsically transforming the life of the nation. Hence the need to see the problem clearly and to provide clear answers to the following specific questions:

- 1) *Who is the enemy and what is the enemy?*
- 2) *What is our objective?*

The answers to these questions do not depend simply on the desire to be free; they also depend on knowledge and on a concept of the world and life, on lived experience. This means that they cannot be dissociated from acquired political ideas, from ideological positions which generally result from the origins of each and every one of us. Without wishing to go into an analysis of the Angolan problem in its specific aspects, I should nevertheless like to clarify the ideas I have just put forward and shall put forward later, basing myself on my own experience.

Angola is a vast country which today has a very low population density and which has been colonised by the Portuguese since 1482. This is the generally accepted idea. However, as far as colonisation is concerned, Portugal did not succeed in dominating all of our territory on its first contact. It took centuries before it was able to impose its political and economic rule over the whole of our people. And I wish again to emphasize that neither is it true that Angola is dominated only by Portugal. The world is sufficiently enlightened on this point to know that the political and economic interests of several world powers are involved in Angola. Portugal's administration has not prevented the presence of its partners, a presence which has been there for centuries. For example, Great Britain, the country with the largest volume of capital

investments in Angola, and the United States of America, with growing economic interests and longing to control our country's strategic position, as well as other countries of Europe, America, and Asia, are competing for the domination of our people and the exploitation of the wealth that belongs to us.

Small and backward Portugal is not the chief factor of colonisation. Without the capital of other countries, without growing investments and technical cooperation, without complicity at various levels, radical transformations would already have taken place many years ago.

Therefore, if we can say that Portugal is the manager of a series of politico-economic deals, we will see that it is not our principal enemy but merely our direct enemy. At the same time, it is the weakest link in the whole chain established for the domination of the peoples. If we look at Portugal itself, at the internal picture it presents, we see a society which is still striving to transcend an obsolete form of oligarchic government, incapable of abandoning the use of violence against its people for the benefit of just a few families, with a peasant class struggling in the most dire poverty in Europe, and where every citizen feels himself a prisoner in his own country. The Portuguese themselves are right when they say that their country is today one of the greatest disgraces of Europe and the world.

The enemy of Africa is often confused with the white man. Skin colour is still a factor used by many to determine the enemy. There are historical and social reasons and lived facts which consolidate this idea on our continent. It is absolutely understandable that a worker in the South African mines who is segregated and coerced, and whose last drop of sweat is wrung from him should feel that the white man he sees before him, for whom he produces wealth, is the principal enemy. It is for him that he builds cities and well-paved roads and maintains hygienic and salubrious conditions which he himself does not have. Consciousness, as I have said, is formed chiefly from one's experience of life. The experience of South Africa could lead to this immediate conclusion, which is to a certain extent logical and emotionally valid.

All the more so in that the society created by the colonialists, to come back to the case of Angola, created various racial defense mechanisms which were made to serve colonialism. The same poor, wretched and oppressed peasant who is exploited in his own country is the object of special attention when he establishes himself in one of "its" colonies. He is not only imbued with a lot of jingoism, but he also starts to enjoy economic and social privileges which he could never have before.

Thus he becomes a part of the system. He starts to get a taste for colonialism and becomes a watchdog of the interests of the fascist oligarchy.

However, deep in their hearts both the watchdog and the exploiter nonetheless feel themselves slaves of the system as a whole. We can therefore say today that the phenomenon of colonial or neo-colonial oppression in our continent cannot be seen in terms of the colour of individuals.

The same system as oppresses and exploits the peasant in Portugal also oppresses and exploits the Angolan citizen, using different motivation, different techniques, but always with the same goal - to exploit. And the establishment of just relations is possible between Portuguese people and Angolan, Mozambican and Guinean people, that is, the establishment of relations which prevent the exploitation of one people by another. The racial factor will play only a secondary role, and for a little time more, once relations between master and slave are ended.

An ideological understanding of this problem also makes it easier to solve it once the objectives of the liberation struggle are defined. In special conditions there are already cases where the racial problem is overcome. This is what happens in the war. There are conscious Portuguese who desert to join the nationalist ranks in one way or another. Our experience of clandestine struggle showed that there can be such racial cooperation in the struggle against the system.

In terms of what we basically want, I do not think that the national liberation struggle is directed towards inverting systems of oppression in such a way that the master of today will be the slave of tomorrow. To think in this way is to go against the current of history. Attitudes of social revenge can never be what we want, which is the freedom of humanity.

And I should like again to emphasise that the liberation struggles are not aimed solely at violently correcting the relations between peoples and especially the production relations *within the country* -- they are an important factor for the positive transformation of our entire continent and the whole world. The national liberation struggle is also a means of overthrowing a whole unjust system of oppression existing in the world. Let us look at the question pragmatically: We do not find a single country in Africa which does not maintain preferential relations with its former metropole, even through the absorption of the inevitable cultural values of a regime of a colonial type. What is more, the forms of exploitation do not end and neither, consequently, do the forms of racial discrimination,

accentuated to a greater or lesser degree. In such cases, liberation is not yet complete.

Under independence in which there is not merely apparent political independence, but also economic and cultural independence, where respect for true national values exists, so as to make it possible to abolish exploitation, I believe that the human society would find true freedom.

To answer our question, we would say that the enemy is colonialism, the colonial system, and also imperialism, which sustains the former, to the point of being the principal enemy. These enemies use on their own behalf all the contradictions they can find in the dominated society: racial, tribal, class and other factors. On them they build their foundation for exploitation and maintain it, changing its appearance when it can no longer be maintained.

Thus, in Africa formal political domination can no longer prevail, but no one is yet free from economic domination. It is present there, and it is for this very reason that I am very pleased by the formula adopted by some political parties in power in Africa when they say that they too are national liberation movements. This expresses the full significance of the phenomenon of liberation. This broader concept of national liberation has vitally important consequences as regards the necessary cooperation between the oppressed of the world. I shall therefore go on to say that national liberation must be a stage for the achievement of a vaster form of liberation, which is the liberation of humanity. If one loses sight of this idea, dynamism disappears and the essential contradictions in a country remain.

The Angolan experience has already shown that pure anti-racism cannot permit the full development of the liberation struggle. For centuries our society has had within it white people who came as occupiers, as conquerors, but who had time to establish roots, to multiply, and to live for generations and generations on our territory. This white population dominates the urban centres, giving rise to the fact of people who are racially mixed, making our society interlinked in its racial components. If the liberation struggle overlooks the realities of the country, and if formulations are taken up which are pleasing to nationalists who are sincere but not over-concerned about the aspect of the people's socio-historical development, it weakens itself and cannot attain its political and human objectives. Everyone in a country who wants to participate in whatever way in the liberation struggle should be able to do so.

The preoccupation in Africa of making the liberation struggle a racial struggle of blacks against whites is not only superficial, but we can say that it is reactionary and that this view has no future at the very time when we see more contact between blacks and whites on the continent than in the era of colonialism. The expanded relations with socialist countries and with countries which are against colonialism (in its old form), and the so-called relations of cooperation with the former metropolises have brought to Africa a noteworthy number of Europeans, Americans and Asians, more than there have ever been in any era of Africa's history. Therefore, to pose the problem as one of black against white is to falsify the question and deflect us from our objective.

What we want is an independent life as a nation, a life in which economic relations are just both between countries and within the country, a revival of cultural values which are still valid for our era.

The literary concept of negritude, born of philosophico-literary trends which have had their day, like existentialism and surrealism, posed with discernment the problem of arousing the cultural consciousness of the black man in the world, irrespective of the geographical area to which he had been dispersed. Like the idea of Pan-Africanism, the concept of negritude started at a certain point to falsify the black problem. It is and was correct to heighten the essence of cultural values which black people took to all the continents, and predominantly to the American continent. Our culture must be defended and developed, which does not mean that it must remain stagnant. Basically, and as various thinkers have asserted, the national liberation struggle is a struggle for culture. But I do not believe that cultural links in any way prevent political compartmentalisation. This has been an equivocal point in many alleged demonstrations of national liberation.

I cannot fail to express my full political identification with the struggle of the black peoples of America where they are, and to admire the vitality of descendants of Africans who today are still oppressed and segregated in American society, especially in the United States. I say *especially* in the United States, because I do not very much believe in the full freedom of blacks or the national equality in Brazil of which they talk so much and are trying to convince us. The social advancement of the black American has been noteworthy, to the extent that today the black American distinguishes himself in Africa not only by his comportment but also by his intellectual and technical level.

Only rarely do the physical characteristics of black Americans allow any doubt as to their country of origin. Thus, the phenomenon of miscegenation has produced a new kind of person. The type that the ordinary person in Angola calls a white person or a mulatto is a black person in the United States. There is therefore no physical identity and there are strong cultural differences, as there could not fail to be. Therefore, without confusing origins with political compartments, America is America and Africa is Africa.

Today we are all linked in solidarity in a liberation struggle against oppressors who have the same colour, but tomorrow there will certainly be different social personalities to be preserved. And the evolutionary process of mankind through which differences are obliterated cannot but bring about an even greater mingling of the now antagonistic ethnic groups in the United States. America has its own life, just as Angola and Mozambique have their own life. Although we have to identify with each other as black men in defending our values, I cannot conceal my sometimes illfounded concern at the way some of our brothers from the other side of the Atlantic have a messianic desire to find a Moses for a return to Africa. For many this theory is certainly out of date.

But I should like to return to the question of knowing who is our enemy. As stated previously, according to my understanding the first reactions against a system of oppression stem from the way one lives, from the way one feels this oppression. I cited the case of South Africa.

I do not wish to ignore at this moment the pressure that is exerted on the liberation movements to maintain so-called *black purity*. The case of America, where the racial struggle is the most apparent to the blacks, is often cited. What I am saying should not be taken as criticism of our brave black American brothers, who know better than anyone how to orient their struggle, how to envisage the transformation of American society so that man will be free there. But allow me also to reject any idea on the transformation of the national liberation struggle in Angola into a racial struggle.

I would say that in Angola the struggle *also* assumes a racial aspect since discrimination is a fact. The black man is exploited there. But it is fundamentally a struggle against the colonial system and its chief ally, imperialism. I also reject the idea of black liberation, since the unity of Africa is one of the principles universally accepted by the OAU, and knowing that in Africa there are Arab peoples, that there are some areas which are not black. The problem cannot be purely racial. So long as there is imperialism, it will be possible

to continue colonialism. And as I have said, for us they are the enemies.

What we want is to establish a new society where black and white can live together. Naturally, and so as not to be misinterpreted, I must add that the democratic process must be exercised in such a way that the most exploited masses (who are black) have control of political power, since they can go furthest in establishing proper rights for all. A people's struggle for political power, for economic independence, for the restoration of cultural life, to end alienation, for relations with all peoples on a basis of equality and fraternity - these are the objectives of our struggle.

These objectives are set by defining who is the enemy, by defining who are the people and what is the character of our struggle, which is a revolutionary struggle affecting not only the foundations of the colonial system but also the foundations of our own society, as a nation and as a people. But can such liberation take place at this stage?

We are in a period in which the imperialist forces are deploying themselves on the African scene with dynamism and tenacity. Together with the Portuguese colonialists, with the racist regimes in Southern Africa, imperialism is present on our continent. Its influence can be felt. Its activity is causing alarm in the life of Africa. Neo-colonialism is a fact. Everywhere in Africa there is still the need to struggle for independence, whether political in some areas, economic in others, or cultural almost everywhere. Imperialism is doing everything it can to maintain sources of raw materials and cheap labour. This is a phenomenon which is being debated not only in Africa but in the whole of the so-called Third World.

In a world divided into blocs, among which it was customary to distinguish between the socialist bloc and the capitalist bloc, non-alignment has arisen to try to seek a balance and to defend the less developed. And within this division, it is the socialists who hold high the banner of internationalism and in fact give the most support to the liberation movements. But today the socialist camp is divided, weakened by irreconcilable ideological concepts, and the relations of solidarity which made these countries an impenetrable iron fortress have broken down and are taking a long time to be restored. The relations of solidarity have changed and conflicts of greater or lesser importance have marred the avowed ideal of socialism.

Thus, in the same way as a number of African countries have on their markets products from countries dominated by the enemy, from South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia, we see with great

concern the increase by some socialist countries of commercial and cultural relations with especially Portugal. So, let us be realistic, the national liberation struggle in Africa does not have very sound bases in the international arena, and it is not political or ideological affinities that count, nor even the objectives themselves, for in most cases other interests dominate relations between the liberation forces and the world. We are in another era. The world is changing and we have to take note of this fact.

Thus, there are many cracks through which the enemy can penetrate. However, an essential factor we must recognize is that the national liberation struggle is today a cause which few people fail to support, with greater or lesser sincerity. Political independence for the African majority is an attainment of our time. And since various political currents and ideological trends are involved, with sometimes antagonistic interests, the liberation movements find themselves at grips with the problem of their political and ideological independence, the problem of preserving their personality, which must reflect the social image of the country.

To preserve independence is not easy, and sometimes the struggle is affected by our own contradictions. And contradictions can stem from different concepts from which our definition of who is the enemy and of our objectives derives. Some would like to see the liberation movement take the direction of a class struggle, as in Europe. Others would like to see it tribalised, federalised, according to their idea of a country which they do not know. Others, idealists, would like to see us heading along the path to political compromise with the enemy.

These efforts to transform the liberation movements into satellites of parties in power, subject to unacceptable paternalism, are caused by the fact that most of the liberation movements conducting an armed struggle have to do so from outside their countries.

Exile has its effects: "The worst thing the Portuguese did to us," said one of my most intelligent friends, "was to oblige us to wage a liberation struggle from abroad." I agree.

The Organization of African Unity, which has done something, especially politically, to promote the national liberation movements, will still have to help them enough for them to be independent, respecting the conventions and the programmatic involvement of different organizations, in accordance with the realities of the country. The dialogue between independent Africa and dependent Africa is still not satisfactory,

and for this very reason the political battles are not taking place with the required force.

We cannot digress on the various nuances of political action to demonstrate our shortcomings, but I do not want at this time to give the idea of having had any critical intention in my appraisal of the period we are going through in this phase of liberation. I will merely say that we could, for example, cooperate on economic matters so as to wage the battle in this field too. With regard to Portugal, its plunder of our resources, like oil, coffee, diamonds, iron, etc., products which are marketed by international bodies in which Africans participate, could be prevented or at least decreased.

And what harm would there be in involving the liberation movements in discussions on the crucial problems of our times which will certainly affect the development of our continent, like for example the broader association of Africa with the Common Market, or problems of European security? And the problem of Southern Africa? Will we be permitted to discuss it exhaustively one day? Finally, we could go on much longer reflecting on our lived experience in this national liberation struggle.

I shall end here, thanking you Mr. Chairman and all the ladies and gentlemen and comrades for your attention.

