

Address to the Mashwabada and Monica Mayathula Foundation on 28 November 2020.

By Horst Kleinschmidt

Thank you, Mayathula Foundation, for the honour to have invited me and to address you. I endorse whole-heartedly the founding of the Foundation. I commend you for commemorating and celebrating the Rev. Mashwabada Castro and Monica Mayathula. Alas, I did not know Monica but have no doubt that she was the rock in the family who deserves the same respect and honour that I pay the Rev Castro today. I knew him during the heady last days of the Christian Institute before it was banned and worked with him indirectly from exile – when we built the nascent underground the bannings had forced us into.

Just so you know my place in this piece of history. From 1972 I worked for SPRO-CAS 2¹, a part of the CI². In 1975 I was detained and in solitary confinement. From 1976, after I left for exile, I was immensely fortunate to become a support and link from outside South Africa to the new underground Ds. Beyers Naudé³, Rev. Castro Mayathula and others forged after the ban; Beyers [went underground \(did so\)](#) immediately after being banned and Castro did so even when detained in Modder B prison. I regret that I was not in Johannesburg for those formative years from 1977 – 1980 and beyond. But I was lucky to be intimately connected to work with them. This enables me to say to Mashwabada Castro and Monica's children, grandchildren and wider family: Castro embraced revolution when the time was ripe and right; he chose the hardest path during the most difficult time in our long struggle for freedom. Be proud of them. They are a beacon for us all. Their example and their values are what must prepare the guardians of fairness, of equality, of égalité, of democracy and fundamental human rights – now and always in the future.

I want you to think about a building, in the middle of Johannesburg, in Braamfontein, in Jorissen Street. Its name: Diakonia House. Here were the offices of the Christian Institute, the South African Council of Churches, the African

¹ SPRO-CAS 2 – Study Project of Christianity in apartheid society. Its second phase was to find ways to implement the findings made and published during the first phase.

² CI - Christian Institute of Southern Africa.

³ Ds. Beyers Naudé – also affectionately addressed as Oom Bey. He was the founder and director of the Christian Institute (1963-1977).

Independent Churches Association (AICA) and of the black consciousness organisations SASO and BPC⁴. This building was from 1972 onwards a uniquely dynamic center of the new internal resistance; and your father was there in the middle of it – connected to each one of the organisations in that building. Here the barricades of resistance were being erected anew. It was a dynamic and creative time, located in Diakonia House. After October 1977 the CI, SASO and BPC were of course driven out of Diakonia House but I use the name of the building as the metaphor for the seed-bed where an important part of the political thrust of the 1980's came from.

What I am imparting in public for the first time today is that after the bannings in 1977, for the next 13 years, Oom Bey operated a secret connection out of, and into, South Africa. It served the purpose of communication with the ANC⁵, and of procuring funds to build grass-roots organisations. And it served to tell of the repression they suffered inside. This was to ultimately persuade Western Governments to boycott and isolate the racist regime that had its knee on our collective neck. For those thirteen years I was fortunate to be the person abroad – first from Holland and then from London – who was his confidential counterpart.

In the hundreds of secret smuggled communications I received from Oom Bey, the name Mashwabada Castro Mayathula was never far away. In exile I came to refer to Castro by his code name: CK75 - a code to disguise his identity on paper. Castro features in several letters Oom Bey smuggled out via couriers, who mostly were visiting church dignitaries. Once abroad, the letters were passed on to me. I then passed on the information, as requested, via comrade Aziz Pahad to comrade Thabo Mbeki who reported directly to ANC President, Oliver Tambo. The replies to Oom Bey and his group came from these three ANC officials. President Tambo valued this church connection such that he dealt with it personally. *You might ask: Did the SB's⁶ find out about the communications between Oom Bey and myself?* It is my conclusion that the SB never knew of the code – in fact they never managed to intercept the communication. Yes they knew there was growing linkage between the internal leaders with the ANC leadership abroad, but the repeated refrain by the SB's to

⁴ SASO and BPC – South African Student Organisations and Black People's Convention.

⁵ ANC – African National Congress.

⁶ SB – Special Branch, the political police of the apartheid regime.

respective Cabinet Ministers over the years is: Ons kon hom nog nie op heter daad betrap nie. (We could not catch him red-handed yet). This is a tribute to the discipline and trust that existed between all those involved.

So here, in my retirement I am a belated student of the period 1976 to 1990 and I observe and share with you gladly:

Castro, as his biography records, had roots in the ANC Youth League in the 1940s. That's where he cut his political teeth. But he rises again when the next wave of resistance, the Black Consciousness Movement asserts its muscle in the 1970s. But his presence is not only there (*in the BC movement*) it is equally felt inside of the Christian Institute, SACC and the African Independent Churches' Association. I want to explore his role as a bridge builder between two distinct phases of the liberation struggle and bridge builder for a new relationship between black and white.

Recall that after WWII Africa freed itself from the colonial yoke. Ghana attained its independence in 1957 and then throughout Africa the foreign occupiers are forced to abdicate, except in Southern Africa – here Portuguese Angola and Mozambique, Ian Smith's Southern Rhodesia and Apartheid's South Africa and Namibia put a halt to the wave of freedom rolling south, despite the struggles waged. Think of the Congress of the People in 1955 and the Women's march to the Union buildings in 1956. Here - at the southern end of Africa, liberty was to be frustrated and delayed for another four decades. The push-back by apartheid culminates in the banning of the ANC and PAC in 1960. On the face of it apartheid succeeded and after 1960 we experience what we may call the doldrum years when the resistance leaders are either imprisoned, exiled, banned or banished. But gradually from 1968 onwards the oppressed and those seeking democracy and freedom gathered again and the second wave of the quest for freedom gathered strength – a bigger and more carefully organized resistance emerged: – the heroic struggles of the 1980s, that ultimately forced apartheid to concede and negotiate.

Remarkably, Castro is a child of both waves, both epochs of resistance, that of the 50s and that of the 70s. This is important! People like myself needed the wisdom, dialectic and experience of the first wave - and Castro was there and

able to talk to us – indispensable if the second build-up was to bear the fruit we yearned for. I submit that Castro was held in high regard by Oom Bey not least because of this background. Oom Bey knew very well that he was without that background.

Steve Biko, **Castro Mayathula** and others can take credit for:

- The Black Consciousness voice makes Beyers and others define what solidarity should be, if it was found wanting previously. Steve Biko rightly accused the liberals of paternalism, doing-for and speaking-for those in bondage which was tantamount to holding on to colonial and white-man's power. Black consciousness enabled the CI whites (and some others) to recognize this. It forced them to reconsider their role and place in opposition politics and struggle politics.
- Oom Bey's new solidarity hinges on moving from truth-speak to truth-act, in solidarity with the oppressed. It was a new radicalism in which he accepted that the State might charge him with treason, and he is ready to accept the possible consequences.
- Oom Bey seeks not to compromise or counter (the) Black Consciousness and remains a voice for strategic alliance and for unity. He is guided by the call for Black Consciousness as demanded at that hour predicated by Steve Biko's ultimate goal of a common humanity **of which** we all are part.
- Beyers Naudé calls this radical Christianity. It compliments Black Theology and Liberation Theology elsewhere.

Let me just say: I'm not suggesting that this is the answer or solution to the outstanding questions of class or wealth redistribution or economic justice. 1994 did not deliver on these matters and it is a challenge that remains our collective unfinished business.

So You might say: that's nice, but was it important? Does it justify reflecting upon? Allow me to elaborate. The Christian Institute and Oom Bey in particular are late-comers to the struggle – yet the late 70s and 80s show how a clandestine CI contributes at three different levels of the struggle.

- 1. A reliable and long-lasting communication between internal resistance and the external ANC leadership is built. It supported the aim that the ANC was potentially best able to unify different groups and traditions of struggle and provide leadership. Whether this was achieved is a different discussion.
- 2. A flow of significant funds was accessed for activists to operate and for grass-roots organisations to be nurtured to ultimately create the foundations for the UDF **that was born in 1983**. When this demanded underground work, this could be funded without the SB's tracing it – even in bank accounts!
- 3. A radical theology is grown on local soil that enriches and compliments radical theology across continents. Its study is wide open to students today and is as yet un-tapped.

But let us look closer at the context: Beyers Naudé is a late-comer when he is challenged by the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. The Christian Institute is only born in 1963 when Beyers Naudé is nearly 50 years of age. In his youth he had no part **in** nor connections to the Congress movement that Castro was part of. In fact Oom Bey was, in the 1950s, still deeply embedded in the Broederbond and was amongst the theological apologists for apartheid. But Sharpeville **shootings in 1960** woke him and others within the white establishment. **Finally**, in 1968 Oom Bey **is amongst the mostly** white church leaders **who proclaimed** the *Message to the People of South Africa*. **For the first time they are agreed that** apartheid **cannot be reformed**. But the Message is still truth speak by white and middle class men (in the main). In the CI they include Rev Theo Kotze, Rev Brian Brown, Rev Cedric Mayson, Prof John de Gruchy, Prof Albert Geysler, Joop de Bruin, Peter Randall, Ds Roelf Meyer and others. They rejected apartheid and they spoke the truth about its evil, but none of them had yet ever risked more than that. The fear of a banning order was the furthest censor anticipated. But, Oom Bey, in the 70s, begins to go further: his words are: “We must listen to the young Blacks”. In re-reading his oft repeated words, what he says is: listen to the voice of the oppressed class. This takes him – in the late 70s and in the 80s to give expression to statements that apartheid cannot be reformed. Without compromising his willingness to lessen the pain the others suffer, he crosses the border and, besides compassionate support, he finds ways to strengthen the underground that is in the making.

This is where it gets interesting. We have good records of the gradual radicalization of Beyers Naudé and those around him. But this does not happen solely because of their moral revulsion over the way apartheid unfolds in this period. Did they read or learn from the first struggle – the 1950s struggle? Hardly. There was little to get hold of, as I have already said. Yes BC has made them take one critical step but I submit there was another subtle and guiding hand that helped Beyers and the others catch up and then become part of the second wave of resistance. [In my view](#), it is worthy of note that Mashwabada Castro Mayathula becomes a close associate of Beyers Naudé. Castro builds an essential bridge between a past wave of resistance and the new wave unfolding in the 1970s. This point is compelling when we look at the other less-known and less celebrated staff who at that time are employed at the Christian Institute. Besides Castro, there are Vesta Smith, Rev June Chabaku, Lindiwe Miyeza, Belinda Palmer and Cecily Palmer. Maybe there were others. If you trace the histories of each of these individuals you find that they had a history either in the Women’s march to the Union Buildings or attended the Congress of the People in Kliptown or had other connections. Coincidence or not, they provided wise counsel, linking one epoch to the next.

If the CI made a key contribution to the radical new wave of opposition, it is due in no small measure to these lesser celebrated individuals. It is right to speak of them, celebrate them – with Castro the most weighty amongst them.

Ten days after the Oct 1977 bannings, Oom Bey smuggled a seven page hand-written letter to me in London. His concern is about all those now without an income. Any money that is raised, he writes, is to benefit equally CI staff and the staff of the 17 BC organisations. He writes that he has secured, via the SACC, money from Germany to pay their salaries post the ban for October, November and December 1977. On page 4 he writes: “Mashwabada [Castro] Mayathula is in detention in Modder B and will probably remain there until all the others are released. They have all been notified that they could be detained up till Aug 10, 1978. Financial support for his wife needs to be found from Jan 1978 and I am writing to Erik in this regard.”⁷ On 9 November 1977 BN writes: “The banning orders imposed on key staff members of CI + detention order

⁷ Who Erik is, is not yet proven at the time this text was first written.

imposed on Mashwabada and so many leading Blacks, [has] further complicated matters in making [the] regular flow of information to Europe very difficult.”

Black Wednesday, as the day of the bannings was subsequently called, instantly outlawed 19 organisations and included two newspapers. The Christian Institute was amongst the organisations banned as were its leadership Beyers Naudé, Theo Kotze, Cedric Mayson, Brian Brown and Peter Randall⁸. The spotlight is not adequately shone on the 42 black top officials of the newly banned organisations who were detained on that day. They were held under the Internal Security Act – not to be charged, but to be taken out of circulation for many months to come, amongst them Castro. They were held, as we know, at Modder B prison. They were not held as suspects in a pending court case, no – they were removed from society because the authorities feared they would comprehensively defy the banning of their organisations. There in Modder B they were let out of the cells during the day and gathered in the prison yard. Here they debated [so as](#) to define how to pursue their goal once they were released.

What do we know of what these Modder B detainees discussed? Some visit Oom Bey after they are released and he wrote to me in London that there were two opinions amongst the detainees: The one committed themselves to an Azapo⁹ – which was indeed launched in 1978 – it would embrace the people from the former BCM structures and be open to ANC and PAC members to join them. Their view broadly, was that both the exile organisations were spent forces and a young and new generation needed to lead the way. The other group was represented by Rev Drake Tshekeng, who argued for a strategic alliance with the ANC. I have no fast evidence, but it would not be far-fetched to assert that Castro, older and with his roots in the Congress alliance, supported Tshenkeng.

Several of the class of 42 are still around and should be urged to write down their version of these discussions in Modder B. That history needs to be told in its complexity, its different layers of argument and counter argument. This is not adversarial; it is what makes real revolutionaries show the passion and depth of the values they hold.

⁸ Donald Woods, Editor of the Daily Dispatch, was the sixth person banned on the same day.

⁹ AZAPO – Azanian People’s Organisation.

When they, separately, asked for his support, Oom Bey was first inclined to support both groups. But soon he realized that within the new underground in-the-making, trust and confidence, demanded that he make a choice. He could not be active in the resistance and one day be in the trenches of one organisation and its ideological outlook and the next day in the trenches of the other. You stood to be mistrusted and beyond that would remain aloof: a white man, once again, standing behind the lines, doing exactly what Steve Biko had warned of. Oom Bey had, I argue, left behind white do-gooderism, standing behind the lines of struggle, nodding encouragement to those in the trenches of the struggle.

In his letters to us in exile he now confronts and accepts possible charges of treason, or faces imprisonment or torture, or harm to his family, - or exile, something he considers at least twice in this period. He is keenly aware that those with whom he walked the corridors of Diakonia House had, in several cases, been killed by the SBs. They included: Mapetla Mohapi, Steve Biko, Thami ka Shezi, Abram Tiro, David Webster and Rick Turner.

Besides Ck75 (Castro Mayathula), Oom Bey is by this time 6A1K. He often writes about himself in the third person. In my call-box calls from London to an array of fifty or more call boxes in Johannesburg, Beyers never used names of people or organisations. For example: 4BGX was reference to the Christian Institute.

My last point concerns solidarity and the steps from Truth-speak to Truth-act from another angle: Beyers Naudé came from the perpetrator and not the victim class. How, with Christian principles does Truth-Speak demand Truth-Act from him, after October 1977, given this background? I loosely use the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian and pastor who in 1945 was executed for his role in the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. His theology examines his moral and ethical place as a Christian in the role to overthrow the Tyrant. Bonhoeffer asks: When is the tyrant such that the moral guilt of using violence against that tyrant, is of lesser weight, is a lesser burden than the guilt of letting the tyrant prevail. Oom Bey wrestles with this theology - which leads him in the 1980s to provide repeatedly humane help to MK

units when they seek his help. He accepts both the moral guilt for such solidarity and the chance of imprisonment for this¹⁰.

I want you to see the deeper sense of reason and purpose, of morality and ethics, of the essence of Christian radical thought that those took whose faith made them become comrades in the underground, whether they were The Rev Castro, Dr Manas Buthelezi, Dean Farisani, Rev Wolfram Kistner, Rev Frank Chikane, Ds Alan Boesak or the Rev Beyers Naudé. They don't just say: an eye for an eye, but search and question the moral and ethical foundations. The theological test they confront does not make each one come to the same conclusion – some reject even being an accessory to any form of violence. The question however requires interrogation and an answer when collectively it is decided that apartheid cannot be reformed and thus must be overthrown. Also referred to as Kairos moments, they arise when German Pastors sign the Barmen Declaration in 1934, a year after Adolf Hitler assumed power. In the South African struggle against oppression there are several such markers: The Message to the People of South Africa in 1968 is the Belhar declaration in 1982 and the Kairos declaration in 1985 equally belong here. Internationally such moments are marked by the World Association of Reformed Churches' declaration that apartheid is heresy – and when the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism provided funds to the ANC and others in the 1970's and 80's. These all point to a truth that a tyrant needs to be acted against.

This is not a thesis to take anything away from the ethics or morals of BC or ANC. No – it is to demonstrate the reasoning of those who joined the struggle through their faith. And it traces how those radical Christians like Beyers Naudé, from the perpetrator class, became true allies and partners who helped make the racist state crumble. I suggest that in this dialectic, Castro is at the right place at the right time. It is a dimension deserving of more scholarship.

¹⁰ In his Afrikaans autobiography, published in 1995 he makes reference to the help he afforded young people wanting to go into exile to be trained in guerrilla warfare

Let me conclude. Beyers Naudé is honoured for his courage, for his prophetic role, for selflessness and for the trust people placed in him – and he in them. We are deeply grateful that Castro was there to open the eyes and make uncompromising allies of – also – those from the perpetrator class.

Diakonia House was the hub that made possible what was demanded in the 1980s. Castro was denied seeing this world unfold in the 1980s due to his untimely death, but he would be pleased beyond measure if he knew he was at the center of a highly creative world that he himself helped to make real.

Let us remember those who were the inspiration at Diakonia House. The Rev. Mashwabada Castro Mayathula deserves a special place among them. It is a history yet to be written.

Thank you!

Notes:

- Rev. Motlapula June Chabaku; CI staff, women's programme, ANC Youth League and part of the Women's march of 1956. After freedom, Speaker of the Free State Provincial Assembly.
- Lindiwe Myeza: CI Women's programme. Died 2020. In 2006, former president Thabo Mbeki bestowed on Myeza the Order of the Baobab. She was described as "an icon representing bravery, resourcefulness and selflessness". She hid Tsietshi Mashinini in her Soweto home when police sought him for his role in the 1976 Soweto uprising.
- Vesta Smith – Board member of the CI, participated in the women's march of 1956, detained under the ISA in 1976.
- Oshadi Phakathi – detained on several occasions, also in 1976. Banned in 1977. Went into exile, returned in the early 1990s
- Abram Tiro – frequent visitor to SASO/BPC office in CI – expelled from University of the North, murdered by parcel bomb in exile, in Botswana, in February 1974.
- Thami Ka Shezi – staffed the SASO/BPC office at the CI in Braamfontein – pushed under a train and killed by 'an unknown white man' on the platform designated for Blacks at Germiston station.
- Steve Biko, from 1972 deputy at the CI sponsored project: Black Community Programme based in Durban. Banned and then killed by police in detention in September 1977. Frequent visitor to CI Braamfontein offices.
- Dr Bennie Khopa, director BCP, Durban, banned. Frequent visitor to CI Braamfontein.

- Mapetla Mohapi – staff of the BCP in KWT, frequently at CI offices – killed in police custody in August 1976.
- Bishop Harry Gwala, AICA and leader with Philip Kgosa of the PAC march from Langa to Cape Town.
- Alex Mbatha and his wife Khosi, veterans of the ANC in the 1960s and 1970s, used their house as a sanctuary for freedom fighters and closely associated with the CI and Beyers Naudé