

The forgotten people: Political banishment under apartheid

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In the historiography of apartheid some voices from the past have been lost – conveniently forgotten and pushed into the shadows of oft repeated struggle stories and figures with mass appeal. But these voices need to be heard in order for the present generation to be able to deal with the past. A book that opens with nine quotes on the importance of remembering the past in order to successfully take on the future clearly aims to address this. In *The Forgotten People: Political banishment under apartheid*, Dr. Saleem Badat focuses on a mostly overlooked form of repression employed by the apartheid government to maintain control of the rural areas, with which he hopes “to reinsert ‘peasants and migrants as actors and shapers along-side the black proletariat [and] the heroes of the African nationalist struggle’.” (xxiii) In this he succeeds admirably.

Political banishment during apartheid entailed the forceful removal of critics of the state or those simply accused of being “dangerous to the peace and good order” (p.14). Without an opportunity to face their accused or even hear what they were charged with, these “inciters” were taken to remote areas thousands of kilometres from their homes, healthcare and means of employment to areas where their own languages were not spoken. The physical and emotional hardships that the banished faced have been overlooked – largely because of a focus on the urban struggle and the tools of suppression that went with it. Badat points out that: The intensely repressive character of the apartheid state is well known. Less well known, however, is its operation in the rural areas, especially during the period beginning with the electoral triumph of the National Party (NP) in 1948 and ending soon after the banning in 1960 of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) (p. xiii).

In *The Forgotten People* Badat reminds the reader of those individuals who stood up against an oppressive regime and its machinations in the rural areas and the unjust treatment they faced as a result.

The book opens with a chapter that briefly traces the history of banishment in Eurasia and Africa. Beginning with ancient history, it then provides broad outlines of incidences of banishment employed by colonial powers to break the leadership in areas that they wished to colonise. This is followed by more modern examples, notably of Soviet leaders who experienced banishment without trial under the Tsarist regime and subsequently under Communist rule highlighting that banishment is typically an administrative punishment devoid of formal charges or opportunity to defend oneself in court. More modern examples from Greece, Israel and again Russia indicate how effectively banishment was used to silence those who criticised a ruling party. Whilst a short skimming of the surface of the history of political banishment, Badat uses these examples to great effect and summarises several key characteristics of political banishment from them. A brief section on the history of banishment from the days of DEIC rule to just before 1948 makes the point that banishment in South Africa was not unique to the apartheid state and in fact relied on a British colonial law, the Native Administration Act of 1927, whereby those who were considered instigators and breakers of the peace could be removed, without being formally accused or tried, thousands of kilometres away and kept there for an indeterminate period of time. Badat also provides the socio-economic context of the rural struggles and why banishment was considered such an effective response when compared to other forms of repression used by the apartheid state, such as exile and forced removals.

Whilst political banishment was applied to a relatively small (160) number during apartheid, it had very effective results in maintaining the racist order. Blending in specific case studies with historical analysis, the three chapters that follow describes some of the more notable incidences of rural uprising dealing with the uprisings from locations with relatively large numbers of banished in a loosely chronological order. This provides much needed information on rural resistance that has generally been overlooked in studies on apartheid and the struggle. Banishment seems to have been especially effective in curbing rural uprisings as they were, during the 1950's and 60's, not typically connected to the larger organisations (ANC and PAC) and the removed agitators were therefore less likely to keep up their resistance when removed from their people. It was used when there was no adequate legal point with which to

remove a suspected agitator, and it was particularly effective because it could be so long lasting since there was no specified period of time assigned to the internment.

For the most part, well known, mostly male, leaders, large organisations and major urban uprisings have been studied and reproduced in political and cultural messages at the expense of other struggle narratives, such as that of women and rural resistance. Badat addresses this shortcoming by illuminating the role of rural uprisings and reprisals as well as focusing on a few key women who were banished. Badat employs the case studies of individuals, in these chapters and the subsequent two to effectively show how little the banished individual knew of the reasons for banishment, as no formal charge was necessary nor any trial. It also shows how the victims rarely anticipated the action and often were taken away with no warning and only the clothes they had on their backs. Often, the victims were those who had already served a term in prison that the government wanted to remove but had no means of doing so through the court system.

In chapters 7 and 8, Badat provides some experiences of those subject to banishment and various responses to banishment. The privations that they faced during their forced stay on locations far removed from their people, healthcare, or shops are supported by photographs by Ernest Cole who captured the extreme loneliness, inactivity and poverty that accompanied banishment. The author emphasises that those banished were not passive victims but also reacted to and endured with courage the deprivations that the isolation brought with it: "...to view those banished to alien, often remote and desolate locations not only as victims, which they were, but also as indomitable, courageous, tenacious and resilient people capable of enduring considerable hardship and overcoming adversity" (p. 219).

While these two chapters highlight key aspects of the circumstances, brutality and injustice that went with banishment, they do tend to feel repetitive as the same information and quotes used in the individual stories in earlier chapters are used again in explaining their lived experience during banishment and in their attempts to fight it. This creates the impression that the last two chapters have not been well-integrated with the book as a whole.

Yet, despite erring on the side of repetition, the book does meet the aims of the author in that it provides much needed focus on the rural popular struggles of the 1950s and 1960s in South Africa, on an overlooked repressive

and cruel treatment in the form of banishment and in giving a voice to those who had been removed from their family and their sacrifices in fighting for justice largely forgotten by society. It also illuminates "...a much neglected and largely unknown dimension of apartheid repression, to create an awareness of banishment as part of the 'the struggle of memory against forgetting'..." (p. xxiii).