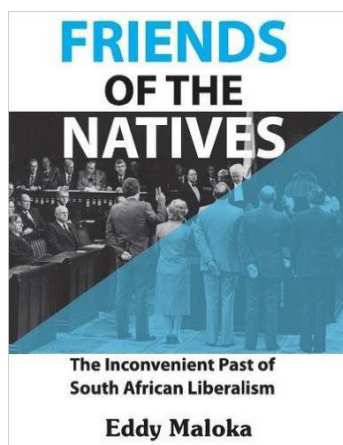


FRIENDS OF THE NATIVES: THE INCONVENIENT PAST OF SOUTH AFRICAN LIBERALISM BY EDDY MALOKA

Reviewed by Ndumiso Dladla

Department of Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology
University of South Africa
dladln@unisa.ac.za



Eddy Maloka's book is a rather unusual but very welcome addition to the existing literature of the history of South African liberalism. It is unusual for the same reason it is welcome, it is unlike most historical works on South African liberalism not written from within the tradition (of South African liberalism) but rather critically from without.

From the onset the book sets itself the task not so much of being a new history of the history of South African liberalism which he correctly argues there is more than

UNISA | university
of south africa

New Voices in Psychology
Volume 11 | Number 1 | 2015
pp. 138–149

Print ISSN 1818-6874
© 2015 Unisa Press

enough of to go around. He sets his task as the “reinterpretation of this existing history to challenge the monopoly that South African liberalism enjoys in constructing a narrative about its past, present and future”(Maloka, 2014, p.3). Maloka suggests that the monopolistic narrative heretofore constructed relies on a manipulation of the past and exaggeration of the contribution of liberalism in the historical development of present day South Africa.

The book contains 7 chapters plus introduction and conclusion. I will begin with a detailed overview of the content of the book, providing a chapter by chapter review of the early chapters (first four) dealing with historical groundwork and treat the latter chapters dealing with liberalism’s legatee the Democratic Alliance (DA) in one section. In the final part of the review essay I will turn towards the whole work offering an appraisal of its general weaknesses and strengths.

Title and Rationale

The title of the book is derived from two separate components. The first part of it “*Friends of the natives*” is a variant of the popular public and sometimes self-description of liberals in South Africa. Helen Suzman for example claims in her autobiography she once received a letter addressed to “Helen Suzman: friend of the blacks” (Maloka, 2014, p.18), another famous liberal Margret Ballinger was once referred to in a Time magazine article 1944 as “queen of the blacks...”(Maloka, 2014, p.19). It addresses the patronizing idea and political historical reality of liberals as those who act on behalf of and in the interest of blacks – the careful study of history as represented in Maloka’s book ironises this claim with every chapter. The second part of the title “*an inconvenient history of liberalism in South Africa*” speaks precisely to this irony and is drawn from an insight arising out of the speech of the first Democratic Alliance leader Tony Leon who in 2013 advised party members to “stay in the future business”(Maloka, 2014, p.19). In the speech he was advising DA members not to enter into any moral competition with the African National Congress (ANC) since he thought that the ANC would put the DA to moral shame in the record of past actions when he said “there is always a danger if you start reliving the past that a lot of inconvenient truths come out...” (Maloka, 2014, p.20) It is the study of these inconvenient truths that is the central basis of Maloka’s largely successful project.

Equal Rights for All Civilised Men (Chapter 1)

In the first chapter “equal rights for all civilized men” Maloka rightfully takes issue with the liberal tradition’s constant claim to being the oldest political tradition in the country counter posing itself to Afrikaner and African nationalism. This Eurocentric assumption made by Suzman and elsewhere RW Johnson about the non-existence of a political tradition, ideas or institutions amongst the various indigenous conquered

peoples prior to conquest is thoroughly problematic. It's an assumption which shares family resemblance with the Hegelian notion of African a-historicity (see Ramose 1999) and suggests that the precolonial kingdoms and states which were well known to even the early conquerors of the indigenous peoples of South Africa were not constitutive of "politics-proper".

Maloka's main target of criticism in this chapter is the assumption that the colour-blind franchise of the Cape was based on some tendency towards non-racialism by the British imperial government stating on the basis of Robertson's 1971 study: *Liberalism in South Africa (1948-1963)* that "*contrary to its rhetoric of equal rights for civilised men, the chief advocates of cape liberalism were certain that the civilisation of the natives was not equal to the integration of the natives into the colonial system on equal footing with the settlers*" (Maloka, 2014, p.35). He goes on to make the point that this was because one of the core assumptions of Cape liberalism was that the natives were inferior to whites by nature and needed to be civilised (Maloka, 2014, p.35). Strangely enough for a student of communism, he does not critically discuss the qualification of property or income in a colonial economy already founded on racially predicated conquest and dispossession where the possibility of earning any income at all was contingent on the vicissitudes of the exercise of white power.

Towards the end of the chapter Maloka turns to the myth of friendship itself by assessing some of the natives' believed best friends. In order to demonstrate the widespreadness of the assumption of heritable cultural hierarchy, he turns to none other than one of the contenders for "father of liberalism in South Africa" the missionary Rev. Dr John Phillip, who writes in his celebrated *Researches*:

"The first step towards the civilisation of the savage is to rouse the thinking principle. This can only be done by proposing to his mind considerations of sufficient force to overcome his native indolence. These considerations must be addressed to his passions and suited to his capacity" (Phillip, 1828, cited in Maloka, 2014, p.36).

This quotation is only a sample. There are many more horrific instances of racist assumption on the part of perhaps the most celebrated friend of the natives in South African history. The chapter is replete with many examples of celebrated liberals' racist writing and utterances and one is left after reading the survey with little doubt that civilisation meant Europeanisation and also that whites have a natural propensity for Europeanness which in others must be proved. He finally makes the point that the existence of the colour-blind franchise did not prevent the historic actuality of the Cape being a racist and racially hierarchised society with English and Afrikaners at the top respectively and so-called coloured and blacks at the bottom respectively (Maloka, 2014, p.39).

According to Maloka, once the Ciskei and Transkei were annexed in 1865 and 1885 respectively, the number of African electorate increased considerably. The response by whites was the raising of the franchise bar. Whenever a black person

“posed a credible threat of being elected to the legislature, the Cape settler politicians (including liberals) ganged together to put obstacles and were always successful in their machinations”(Maloka, 2014, p.40).

A convincing bit of evidence that corroborates this view is the fact that throughout the colour blind Cape Franchise’s three decades of existence, it never produced a single black legislator. The first chapter concludes with the end of the sovereignty and independence of the Cape Province and the formation of the South African Union.

From Segregation to Apartheid (Chapter 2)

Maloka characterises the Union’s political significance as the political unification of White South Africa (that is the English and Afrikaners) at the expense of the indigenous peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonization. He then turns to the formation of the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (ICU) and ANC (African National Congress) claiming that these formations marked a departure from the period of “disunited anti-colonial politics and the beginning of a united, nationalist movement”. The association of the ANC with anti-colonialism is very odd at this stage when one considers their petition is beginning activism predicated on their good standing as subjects of her imperial majesty and claims for instance such as Ngubane’s (1963) that the petitionist tendency arose as a result of the tutelage of the Rev Dr. Phillip whose racist enterprise we earlier discussed.

Later in the chapter Maloka turns to the development of the so-called “native problem” amongst the white intelligentsia. Maloka suggests that several ways of dealing with the so-called problem were proposed - amongst them segregation. He then suggests that liberals were on both sides of the debate both for and against segregation. Both this fact and the relationship of liberal segregation to its successor apartheid make up the rest of the discussion in this chapter. Maloka goes to some length to show that much of what is credited to apartheid whether it be group area separation, population separation, job reservation, among others, predated apartheid by several decades in the form of a widely liberally endorsed native policy that was called segregation.

He then turns to the promulgation of the native Land Act of 1913 which he says was introduced by an avowed liberal JW Sauer who was a white supremacist and crusader for segregation and minimum social contact between whites and Africans which was barely distinguishable from Hertzog’s views which are usually presented as paradigmatically conservative (Maloka, 2014).

The most important discussion in this chapter is Maloka’s then description of two false dogmas of white supremacy in South Africa which he says many liberals subscribed to. The first is the so-called *res nullius* thesis which held that South Africa was an empty land when whites arrived. According to the doctrine, Dutch

settlers arrived almost at the same time as the Bantu-speaking people who were not indigenous peoples. The indigenous people were supposedly exclusively constituted by the Khoisan whom the theory implicitly suggests were botanical entities that must have grown from the soil. The second dogma was that this purported emptiness was a result of the Mfecane instigated by the Zulu king who displaced the other Bantu inhabitants of the territories occupied by settlers east and northwards. The liberal thinker and politician Jan Hofmeyer was a chief proponent of this view together with one such liberal philosopher and founder of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Alfred Hoernlé. These dogmas were subsequently discredited in following years on the basis of evidence from the fields of history, archeology and biological anthropology as mere justificatory tenets of white supremacist ideology (Marks, 1980; Pheko, 1990).

Under discussion in this chapter is also the institution of trusteeship which Maloka sees as no more than a sophisticated guise of white supremacy which had the end of controlling and managing the indigenous people in a state of perpetual subjection rather than their liberation. He discusses a wide range of liberal thinkers and actors who were proponents of trusteeship and to show its status was held in high regard amongst liberals historically. Maloka writes “it was inconceivable in the trusteeship system, whatever its model or intended outcome, that the “wards” would engage in independent action as historical agents to remedy their [...] position in the colonial system.”(Maloka, 2014, p.62) He then surveys a few important liberal’s figure of speech and writing in which they assert themselves as the representatives of blacks. The foregoing assists him to strengthen the claim that paternalism has been a hallmark of liberal practice ever since its beginning until the present-day.

Maloka is willing to admit that while liberals were not characteristically opposed to political activism to change society, they largely subscribed to the liberal principle of “slow and patient constitutional methods rather than violence” upheld by all the great liberals including but not limited to Hoernlé, Maquard and Molteno. They were avowedly against any violence towards any end. This may seem reasonable until one considers the plight of the majority of South Africa’s indigenous and conquered people who have since 1652 suffered both at the hands of the slow violence of politically constructed poverty as well as the various eruptions of “quick violence” occasionally required to maintain the unjust power relations established since their conquest in the violent and unjust wars of colonization.

Discussing the great dilemma posed by colonialism to the liberal-minded, of how “liberty” and “equality” were to find expression in a colonial setting, the French Revolution slogan of “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” comes to mind. One crucial liberal voice, Jan Hofmeyer, in his 1945 Hoernlé lecture, argued that it was simply not so that men were created equal but that the nonsense or unreality of equality was not also to be understood as an argument against the possibility of liberty. Maloka

rightly deduces from this South African liberalism's easy historical relationship with principle inequality.

Maloka argues that the role of liberals in the elaboration of segregation and including their relationship with Hertzog is rather beyond dispute. He cites the endorsement of Brookes' pro-segregationist treatise *The History of Native Policy* as well as its publication by the Afrikaner Nationalist Press and its prescription as a text for all officials of the native affairs department to corroborate his view.

Liberalism as a Third Force (Chapter 3)

The chapter's title is derived from a speech made by famous liberal politician and writer Alan Paton in 1960. In the speech, Paton represents liberalism as a third force and alternative to the two forces of African Nationalism and Afrikaner Nationalism which were according to him increasingly approaching violent clash.

The chapter focuses on liberal developments during the early days of apartheid. Here it is argued that liberalism has waned as a force in the white community with the rise of the Afrikaner nationalists and was to become more and more irrelevant with the passing of time as the National Party (NP) won more and more white voters more and more times. Black Nationalism was also strengthening from the 1944 manifesto of the ANC youth league which Maloka claims set a strong tone for the 50s and subsequent decades.

Maloka enumerates four developments between the 50s and 60s which he reckons spelt some grim implications for liberalism in South Africa overall. 1. The rise of mass based politics and the decline of the elitism of previous decades. 2. The coming together of Indian, Coloured and African movements into a Congress alliance 3. The adoption by such an alliance of non-racialism which Maloka reckons is evidenced by the adoption of the Freedom Charter which provided "South Africa belongs to all who live in it black and white". 4. The shift to armed struggle following the ban of ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1960. I will appraise the merits of these claims in the analysis section.

After discussing at length the multi-phased metamorphosis of the liberalism and its various custodians, Maloka makes the point that this chapter will deal with the Liberal Party (LP) exclusively. Maloka assesses the LP's developmental drift leftwards over its lifespan, its shift from qualified to universal franchise, its attempts to recruit masses of black members and also its large-scale attempts to cooperate with black organisations.

In one of the book's many unashamedly Congress Movement-partisan moments, he typically over-emphasises the role and historical significance of the so-called Freedom Charter of 1955, claiming that being left out from the Kliptown meeting was one of the liberal party's greatest losses politically. His claim is that its failure to contribute to the freedom charter would prove costly and alienate it from black

organisations. This is unclear given the fact that the ANC itself experienced its largest split as a result of that same congress. He describes anti-communism as the sentiment that led to the departure of some black nationalists from the ANC and their formation of the PAC. This is disingenuous but obviously couched attempt at caricaturist historical revision.

Maloka then sets himself the task of dispelling what he calls liberal myths which have represented ANC leaders as liberals. According to him ANC leaders have always been distrustful of liberalism as well as liberals themselves. Mandela he says is one such victim. He argues that liberals attempt to corroborate or strengthen their myth of the pro-liberal Mandela by introducing what he considers a mischievous distinction between the young Mandela of the 1950s whose scathing criticisms of liberalism are well known and the late Mandela who was concerned with nation-building and national reconciliation. He claims to prove the point of Mandela's continued incredulity towards liberalism in chapter 6.

Another victim of liberal adoption according to Maloka is Albert Luthuli. Tony Leon former Democratic Party (DP) and later Democratic Alliance (DA) leader claimed in a lecture in 2001 that Luthuli was a liberal. He says this misrepresentation or misconception arises as a result of the misunderstanding of the cordial relationship between Luthuli and Alan Paton of the Liberal Party. However, he quotes a passage from Luthuli's biography in a rather feeble attempt disprove Luthuli's liberalism. The said excerpt turns out to be no more than the expression of Luthuli's understandable **opinion** about why the LP has failed to attract many much black members. Luthuli argues that the reason is simply that in a white supremacist society Africans would better identify with the same oppressed as themselves than with those who already enjoy the vote. This hardly shows he was not a liberal. He does after all quite consistently with the pillars of South African liberalism identify the vote as the primary factor of oppression.

Progressives or Conservatives (Chapter 4)

The title of chapter four is a play. Seemingly the alternation of two incompatible or mutually opposed political positions and yet the genesis of the Progressive Party (PP) (the sole representative of supposedly liberal politics in South Africa after the disbandment of the Liberal Party) was owed to the unification of those who were "progressive " within the United Party (UP) with those who were conservative amongst the now disbanded LP. Amongst the chief reasons for its formation was the desire of the UP "progressives" for a proper implementation of the Land Act and the giving to Africans the land set out in terms of that act and those for whom the Liberal Party was deemed too radical, because amongst other reasons it for instance pushed for a universal franchise and had recruited so many blacks to within its ranks. The Progressive Party of course never made any impact in electoral politics. For

13 years Helen Suzman was the sole candidate representing the party in parliament between 1962 and 1974. The Liberal Party had disbanded itself when interracial organisations had been outlawed rather than change its membership criteria. While those who could accept that condition moved to the PP. The Progressives unlike the Liberals supported a qualified franchise. The chapter goes on to argue that the PP was a white supremacist party which had its foremost goal as the continuation of white supremacy and Eurocentrism after the inevitable end of apartheid which is evidenced by its favourable stance and principle insistence towards inter alia group rights, qualified franchise and western civilization.

The Democratic Alliance and its futures: True Blue Liberalism(Chapter 5) ; Racial Denialism(Chapter 6) and Manufacturing of Fong Kong History (Conclusion)

The focus of the rest of the book from Chapter 5 to its conclusion is the DA and its multi-decade project of historical reconstruction which has seen it increasingly attempt to erase and obfuscate its inconvenient history and replace it with something completely different.

Maloka begins with an assessment of dismal performance of the DP (a successor of the Progressive Party) during the 1994 elections where it got about 1.4 percent of the vote. This according to then leader of the DP Zach de Beer was a result of the false assumption by the party that that the Indian and so-called Coloured vote would on the basis of fear of African domination in the form of the ANC and out of historical animosity towards the National Party (NP) vote for them. However, some of these minorities voted for the ANC and an overwhelming amount of them for the NP, seeing it apparently as the most likely protector from the “African domination” of the ANC.

Maloka then focuses on the post-apartheid developments of the DP. The most significant amongst these are its leadership moving to Tony Leon and its merger with the conservative NP to form the DA. He also examines its right wing tendencies and opposition of reform and affirmative action, its embrace of Thatcherism as well as its inauguration of the ‘Fight Back’ campaign. ‘Fight Back’ he shows was a propaganda campaign calling for the resuscitation of the status quo ante) predicated on an understanding of the universal franchise as an injustice against whites which needed to be resisted by its revelation as white party geared towards the protection of white interests.

In the sixth chapter, Maloka begins by treating Tony Leon’s response to a charge that the DA had become more right wing since 1994. Leon’s response was that the DA (or its predecessors) was until 1994 an anti-apartheid election front which was the best protection for the disenfranchised and now continued to be the best protection for ‘minorities’ who are excluded now.

Maloka focuses on this paradox arising from hypocrisy and opportunism in terms of which the DA defines itself racialistically as a party of minorities against the African majority. On the other hand, the DA continues to call attempts at affirmative action and transformation Verwoerdian and counter-poses these restitutive measures to the DA's own 'non-racial' meritocratic approach. Maloka goes on to show that this conservatism and racial opportunism has been an essential formula in the expansion of the DA electorally over its lifespan steadily growing from that initial 1.7% of 1994 to almost 20% in the last national elections.

In the final chapter Maloka points to the DA's continued attempt to recast itself as a liberation party. His effort here is to drive home the point finally that Liberalism in South Africa was never part of the anti-colonial struggle but rather a colonial enterprise which has sought to consolidate colonial power in the various ways the book has shown. He goes on to make the point that Liberals are in an especially powerful position for the reconstruction of history as "they control the ideological apparatus of the country. Not only do they have media behind them, but they also control universities, academic journals and the publishing industry as well as the economy itself"(Maloka, 2014, p.257).

An Appraisal of the text

Political Partisanship

One glaring limitation of the book is a result of what I suspect can be summed up as political partisanship. The author himself is a member of the ANC which seems to affect his ability to make use of the intellectual resources which arise out of the other liberation movements of South African political history.

Although the Congress of Democrats famously self-described as communists, it was the ANC's cooperation with them (the COD) in the Congress movement and the adoption of the Kliptown charter, which came as a result of the cooperation which was chiefly responsible for the exit of the Africanists from the ANC.

The author's choice of diagnosing anti-communism as the sentiment that led to the "departure of some black nationalists from the ANC and their formation of the PAC" (Maloka, 2014, p.100) is disingenuous but obviously couched attempt at caricaturist historical revision. Robert Sobukwe, the founding president of the PAC makes it clear in his 1977 interview with Gail Gerhart that the Africanists were incredulous to the very authenticity of communism amongst its wealthy upper class white representatives from the leafy Northern suburbs of Johannesburg. It was in fact opposition to white supremacy and its entrance into the ANC through the relationship with the COD and South African Communist Party (SACP) that finally caused the rupture.

The Africanists' critiques of Congress movement included the famous charge that multi-racialist politics which the movement described itself as participating

in at that time with no problem was in fact a new and insidious form of racist politics (“racialism multiplied”). The PAC then went on to describe its own position as non-racist (which the ANC adopted without substantially altering its approach). Non-Racism from the position of the Africanists meant to replace the analysis of the problem in the biologicistic obfuscation of race but to replace it with a political categorization of the competing interests in terms of their relationship with the title to territory, as European conqueror and African conquered, dispossessor and dispossessed. The Africanists were sceptical about the tenability of collaboration with ‘do-gooder whites’ while this contradiction was in existence. They understood the resolution of this contradiction as the possibility condition for the practice of non-racism.

The Black Consciousness (BC) movement famously took up this line of argument causing its break with the liberal student movement National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). The BC approach defined liberals precisely as those whites who were opposed to apartheid, so-called progressives, recognizing precisely that the opposition by whites to apartheid did not necessarily mean a love of justice and fairness.

The BC critique of liberalism captured in essays such as Biko’s *White Skins Black Souls* pointed precisely to the contradiction of white liberals’ enjoyment of white supremacy while claiming to oppose it. The BC approach became the basis of South African liberation struggle at home throughout the 1970s and undergirded important events such as the Soweto Uprising.

That Maloka not only shuns away from the intellectual resources of these movements but also chooses not to discuss them as historical factors reveals if I am correct not incompetent historical work but a blinding and self-defeating and vindictive political partisanship. It leads him to the same insidious historical revision of Fong Kong nature that he accuses the DA of in his final chapter, his is a history conveniently sanitized of the ANC’s liberation others.

The purpose of this is either the deliberate attempt to present the ANC as the sole warrior of the indigenous conquered people of South Africa on the one hand. On the other hand it has the effect of leaving the internal contradictions of the ANC undisturbed by the tensions which were brought to light by its others. Whatever his reasons, they have the effect of affecting the book’s historical quality at best or even worse: of reducing it to an artefact of propaganda.

(a) *ANC’s Liberal Heritage*

Maloka’s attempts at dispelling the notion of ANC’s own liberalism also do not succeed. It fails for example to enter into dialogue with views like Ngubane’s (1963) who credited the Rev Dr. Phillip as the inspiration for the ANC’s founding petitionist approach in the early 20th century. The ANC’s agreement to (or by some accounts responsibility for) a famously liberal constitution with a bill of rights containing an

extensive property clause which effectively constitutionalises the fruits of multi-century racial dispossession also goes undiscussed.

His over-valuation of the Freedom Charter is also disingenuous, by suggesting as he does that the liberal party died because of its failure to attend the Congress of the people in 1955 leaves glaringly open questions about how the PAC survived or was even born as a result of the precise event he would have us believe a possibility condition for authenticity as a liberation movement.

(c) Conclusion

The weaknesses of the text also include numerous typographical errors as well as an awful and scant index. All of these things aside however the book is an important read and will hopefully inspire a broader tendency towards the reinterpretation of South African history from the perspective of the oppressed.

Title: *Friends of the Natives: The Inconvenient Past of South African Liberalism*

Author: Eddy Maloka

Date: 2014

Publisher: 3rd Millenium

ISBN: 978-0620605830

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



NDUMISO DLADLA lectures in the department of Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology at the University of South Africa. His interests are mainly rooted in African philosophy, philosophy of race, philosophy of liberation and philosophy of education among others.

REFERENCES

- Biko, S. (2004). *I Write What I Like: A selection of his writings*. Picador Africa
- Marks, S. (1980). South Africa- 'The myth of the empty land'. *History Today*, 30(1).
- Moloka, E. (2014). *Friends of the Natives: An inconvenient history of liberalism in South Africa*. Durban: 3rd Millenium.

- More, M.P. (2008). Biko: Africana existentialist philosopher. In A, Mngxitama, A, Alexander, & N.C. Gibson (Eds). *Biko Lives! Contesting the legacies of Steve Biko* (pp.45-68). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- More, M.P. (2014). The Intellectual foundations of the Black Consciousness Movement. In P, Vale, L, Hamilton, & E.H. Prinsloo (Eds). *Intellectual Traditions in South Africa: Ideas, Individuals and Institutions* (pp.173-196). Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press.
- Ngubane, J.K. (1963). *An African Explains Apartheid*. London: Pall Mall Press.
- Ntloedibe, E.L. (1995). *Here is a tree: Political biography of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe*. Botswana: Century Turn Publishers.
- Pheko, S.E.K. (1990). *The betrayal of a colonised people: Issues of International Human Rights Law*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Press.
- Soske, J. (2014). The impossible concept: A genealogy of the non-racial, unpublished paper presented to the *Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar Series*, University of the Western Cape, 25 March.