

A Prose of Ambivalence: Liberation Struggle Discourse on Necklacing¹

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This article is concerned with the ambivalence that permeates liberation struggle discourse on the practice of necklacing. Through examining what was said about the killing of suspected collaborators and/or necklacing during the mid- to late 1980s by leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) and the United Democratic Front (UDF), I argue that those public positions produced a prose of ambivalence. I ask how this prose of ambivalence was produced and why that ambivalence is seemingly rendered intangible.

I suggest that the ANC and UDF were caught in a double bind. They could not explicitly condemn the practice and risk losing their mass support base, nor explicitly condone the practice and risk losing the support of important internal and international constituencies thereby giving the apartheid state the upper hand in a discursive war on the moral and political legitimacy over using violence. Yet, I argue, this ambivalence was not merely a tactical one in that underlying the liberation discourse on the practice of necklacing was/is an inherent formulation of the binary of resistance and oppression/repression. The practice understood within this framework could only be rendered as state violence or resistance. In rendering it as the latter, though uncomfortably so, the ANC and UDF proposed that it be understood within a causal framework, as the result of oppression/repression. Ambivalence about the practice of necklacing thus, I argue, was produced in the interstice of the resistance – oppression/repression binary. Leading from this, I argue more broadly that the problematic of violence and attending ambivalence within the ANC has a history that predates the discourse around necklacing. I suggest that necklacing refuses to be forgotten precisely because of its ambivalence. Indeed, it may be that the inescapable ambivalence of necklacing is the condition for the possibility that it will always also be remembered.

In the November 2007 issue of *ANC Today*, former African National Congress (ANC) and South African State President Thabo Mbeki provided a summary of the book *Oliver Tambo Remembered* (2007). In a key section of the summary entitled 'The Necklacing Must Stop', Mbeki recalled then president of the ANC

¹ This article is a version of a chapter in my M.A. thesis titled 'The Impasse of Violence: Writing Necklacing into a History of Liberation Struggle in South Africa' (University of the Western Cape, 2010). The argument presented here forms part of a wider argument concerning the writing of necklacing into the narrative of struggle history. I would like to thank Nicky Rousseau, Premesh Lalu, Andrew Bank and Maurits van Bever Donker for comments on earlier drafts of this article.

Oliver Tambo's condemnation of necklacing at the September 1987 Conference on Children in Harare, Zimbabwe. Here Tambo had said that 'this [necklacing] must stop'. Mbeki cited Kader Asmal in stating that Tambo's condemnation 'was a cry drawing on the humanism of our struggle and the need to relate means to ends'.²

The practice of placing a petrol-soaked tyre around the neck of an individual and setting it alight ('necklacing') was most pronounced during the mid-1980s when South Africa experienced intense resistance against apartheid, largely led by the exiled ANC and the United Democratic Front (UDF). It remains unclear as to the exact origins of the use of the terms 'necklace' and 'necklacing'. They appear to have entered the South African lexicon and political discourse from around September 1985.³ The practice, a manifestation of political violence, emerged predominantly in townships. Initially, those targeted were allegedly persons suspected of collaboration, either as spies or as functionaries of the apartheid state. Later, however, the lines became blurred between those suspected of collaboration and the use of the practice in deflecting the motives of murders not politically motivated. Between 400 and 700 persons are reported to having been killed by the necklace during the mid- to late 1980s.⁴

Despite the significance of necklacing in struggle history, I argue that contemporary recollections (such as Mbeki's) of its condemnation are (re)presented in a way that ignores the ambivalence which characterised the liberation struggle's discourse on necklacing.⁵ My interest in necklacing here is limited to its politicised emergence in relation to the ANC and UDF. More specifically, I ask how ambivalence with regards to necklacing was produced and why that ambivalence is seemingly rendered intangible. I argue further that traces of ambivalence towards the legacy of necklacing are still visible in post-apartheid re-articulations of the liberation struggle.

There never was an unequivocal condemnation or condonation of necklacing on the part of the ANC and UDF. Tambo and other ANC and UDF leaders condemned necklacing but did not condemn those, 'the masses', who partook in the practice. This wavering between condemnation and condonation was exacerbated by the apartheid state mainly setting the discursive terrain on the practice of necklacing. The ANC and UDF were constrained through responding to the state's discursive formation rather than setting this formation themselves.

The ANC had to justify politically its recourse to violence, while at the same time secure its position as the holder of the moral high ground within a war of propaganda between the state and itself. For the state necklace killing was not political violence. It was not rendered explicable as an act of resistance and could not be rationalised. The practice represented 'black-on-black' violence, a criminal activity, a form of barbarism and savagery. The state accused the ANC, in particular, of supporting, instigating, condoning and rationalising necklacing. This led to debate

2 T. Mbeki, 'Oliver Tambo Remembered', *ANC Today*, 7(43), 2-8 November 2001. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/anctoday/2007/text/at43.txt>

3 See R. Moosage, 'The Impasse of Violence', 6-7.

4 See R. Moosage, 'The Impasse of Violence', 1 (footnote 3).

5 See R. Moosage, 'The Impasse of Violence', 112-142.

about the ‘politics of ownership’ in relation to the practice.⁶ State accusations arose in relation to the mixed responses regarding the rise of the practice, evident from the statements made by prominent ANC and UDF leaders which will be examined below. The state emphasised any public statements made by ANC and UDF leaders that seemingly supported the practice whilst ignoring those that condemned it.

If the state set the discursive terrain on the practice of necklacing in the 1980s, this was in the absence of a clear response from the liberation movements. Indeed, the ANC and UDF have been accused of ‘a shameful shuffling of feet around the issue of the necklace’.⁷ However, the escalation of necklace killings from July 1985 meant that the issue could not be avoided. Leading figures in the ANC and UDF made a number of key statements regarding attacks on collaborators, which included necklace killings. Besides the infamous Winnie Mandela statement, ‘[w]ith our boxes of matches and necklaces, we will liberate this country’, amongst the more prominent were those of Mosiuoa Lekota, Trevor Manuel, Oliver Tambo and Chris Hani, chief of staff of *Umkhonto weSizwe* (Spear of the Nation – MK).

The question of how ambivalence in relation to necklacing has been produced must be seen in the context of the wider discourse on political violence and attending notions of resistance and causality, as evident in contemporaneous and subsequent scholarly works on the practice. If, as Joanna Ball argues, a ‘necklacing archive’ is difficult to constitute because we are unable to place the practice in a neatly labelled box with a clear sense of time, place and reason,⁸ then I might add that literature on the practice of necklacing is equally dispersed, diffused and at times ambivalent. Although a small but significant body of work on the practice has surfaced in South African studies, the discipline of history has been especially silent.⁹

Scholarly writings attempting to render the practice explicable have not been able to escape the inextricable boundedness of the interplay of the dominant necklacing discourses. Scholars have stumbled between a resistance and a witchcraft trope. The former presents a causal explanation in which resistance arises from oppression/repression, but in so doing re-articulates the ambivalent discourse of condemnation/condonation. The latter, in attempting to navigate a route through tradition and modernity, runs up against the obstacle of tradition/barbarism, which has been placed in its path by the state discourse.¹⁰ This re-articulation of the dominant discourses and their interplay speaks to the ambivalence that haunts necklacing.

6 For an examination of the state discourse on the practice of necklacing and the ways in which a ‘politics of ownership’ unfolded at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, see R. Moosage, ‘The Impasse of Violence’, 22-49, 119-131.

7 S. Mufson, *Fighting Years: Black Resistance and the Struggle for a New South Africa* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1990), 97.

8 J. Ball, ‘The Ritual of the Necklace’, 4.

9 Scholarly work dealing specifically with the practice of necklacing is sparse. The most detailed discussions feature in J. Ball, ‘The Ritual of the Necklace’; N. Nomoyi and W. Schurink, ‘*Ukunxityiswa kwempimpi itayari njengotshaba lomzabakaza*: An exploratory study of insider accounts of necklacing in three Port Elizabeth townships’ in E. Bornman, Y. Muthien, R. van Eeden and M. Wentzel, eds, *Violence in South Africa: A Variety of Perspectives* (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 1998); P. Gobodo-Madikizela, ‘Legacies of Violence: An In-Depth Analysis of Two Case Studies based on Interviews with Perpetrators of a “Necklace” Murder and with Eugene de Kock’ (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1999) and L. Praeg, *The Geometry of Violence* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2007). Elsewhere the practice of necklacing is not the main focus of enquiry but forms part of the larger research undertaken and therefore warrants the attention of scholars. See for example B. Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004).

10 See R. Moosage, ‘The Impasse of Violence’, 81-112.

An archive of necklacing can therefore be thought of productively in relation to Ranajit Guha's levels of historical discourse. Guha distinguishes between three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary discourse. If the primary discourse is meant to represent the official discourse of the state (the Raj for Guha), then I suggest thinking of the dominant liberation discourse, together with the state discourse on necklacing, as representing that primary level. Whereas for Guha, the official colonial discourse on peasant insurgencies in India silences peasant insurgents by a 'code of pacification' where 'insurgency is regarded as external to the peasant's consciousness and Cause is made to stand in as a phantom surrogate for Reason, the logic of that consciousness',¹¹ the ANC and UDF discourse on necklacing is not so much silent as it is constituted by what can be considered a prose of ambivalence.

In what follows I examine what was said by the ANC and the UDF during the mid-1980s in relation to necklacing. I argue that even when they officially condemned the practice, their position was ambivalent. There were several ways in which public positions on necklace killings tended to produce a prose of ambivalence. Firstly, the ANC and UDF were caught in a double bind in that they could not explicitly condemn the practice and risk losing their mass support base, or explicitly condone the practice and risk losing the support of important internal and international constituencies. Consequently, both organisations struggled to formulate a position without giving the state the upper hand in a discursive war on the moral and political legitimacy of using violence.

This ambivalence was not merely a tactical one. For underpinning the dominant liberation discourse on necklacing was an inherent formulation of the binary of resistance and oppression/repression. Understood within this framework, necklacing was rendered causally as resistance arising from state oppression/repression. Ambivalence about necklacing, I suggest, was produced in the interstice of the resistance–repression binary.

I proceed to provide a brief overview of some of the ANC and UDF strategies of (violent) resistance in the early to mid-1980s. I then outline key statements made by the ANC and UDF on necklacing and/or violence in this period, before proceeding to discuss the UDF's formulation of 'defensive violence' and Chris Hani's analysis of the distinction between 'mass' and 'revolutionary violence/justice'. Both of these formulations enable an unravelling of the liberation movement's prose of ambivalence. Leading from this, through offering a reading of Govan Mbeki's *The Peasant's Revolt* (1964), I argue more broadly that the problematic of violence in the ANC has a far longer history.¹² By returning to examine Thabo Mbeki's letter, I conclude by suggesting that recalling necklacing without acknowledging its attending ambivalence functions to reintroduce surreptitiously the dominant liberation discourse on necklacing with its prose of ambivalence.

11 R. Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', *Subaltern Studies: Volume II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 46–47.

12 G. Mbeki, *South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1964).

Liberation Strategies on (Violent) Resistance

Around the same time as the state adopted 'total strategy' in the late 1970s,¹³ the ANC produced *The Green Book*, a report on lessons learnt from the Vietnamese liberation struggle. This report placed emphasis on the strengthening of the underground and the building of mass organisations. The role of MK would be to escalate the armed struggle, but as a form of political armed propaganda 'whose immediate purpose [was] to support and stimulate political activity and organisation rather than to hit at the enemy'.¹⁴ Violence, while still central to what was conceived of as the seizure of state power, would be the result of a mass revolutionary insurrectionary strategy (a 'people's war'), and in so far as MK would continue to play a leading role, this would be primarily political not military.¹⁵

Three of these strategies – the all-round vanguard activity of the underground, the united mass action of the people, and the armed offensive spearheaded by MK – formed part of what was known as 'the four pillars' strategy. The fourth pillar was the international drive to isolate the apartheid regime and win international moral, political and material support for the ANC.¹⁶

The early 1980s saw significant mass mobilisation and organisation, including the launch in August 1983 of the UDF, a front of organisations that provided a broad organisational framework as well as symbolic coherence to anti-apartheid resistance.¹⁷ The UDF, though ambivalently, propagated non-violence: the forms of resistance, largely led by the UDF, varied from rent boycotts that had begun in late 1984, to bus and food boycotts, worker stay-aways and school boycotts.

Following the boycott of black local elections in September 1984, there was escalating conflict between mobilised masses, mostly youth and students, and security forces. As political strife spread across the country, the UDF declared 1985 'From Protest to Challenge' and in January 1985 the ANC called on South Africans to 'Render South Africa Ungovernable'. The state increasingly shifted its strategy to one of 'counter-revolutionary warfare'. By July 1985 the state had declared a partial State of Emergency and on 12 July 1986 a national State of Emergency. This led to widespread detentions, a significant and increasing number of deaths as a result of security force action in protest or street violence, cross-border raids and more sinister forms of covert action.¹⁸ The first report of necklace killings, those of Councillor Benjamin Kinikini and his family members, and of Maki Skosana emerged in early 1985 in this context of a rising tide of mass political strife. Indeed,

13 See M. Swilling and M. Phillips, 'State Power in the 1980's: From "Total Strategy" to "Counter-revolutionary Warfare"' in J. Cock and L. Nathan, eds, *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989).

14 See *The Green Book* – Report of the Politico-Military Strategy Commission to the ANC National Executive Committee, August 1979. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mk/green-book.html>

15 H. Barrell, 'Conscripts of their Age: African National Congress Operational Strategy, 1976-1986' (PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1993), 207-260. See also M. Legassick, 'Armed Struggle in South Africa: Consequences of a Strategy Debate', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 21(2), 2003, 285-302.

16 See Statement of January 8 1984: President's Message for 1984. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/jan8-84.html>

17 See T. Lodge and B. Nasson, *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991); J. Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000) amongst others for detailed reviews of the UDF. See also H. Barrell for a discussion on the relation between the ANC's tactical strategies and the UDF, H. Barrell, 'Conscripts of their Age', 261-297.

18 See, for example, D. Webster, 'Repression and the State of Emergency' in G. Moss and I. Obery, eds, *South African Review 4* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), 141-172. See also *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports*, Vol. 2 (Cape Town: Juta, 1998), 134-144.

the killing of the Kinikinis followed the Langa massacre in the Eastern Cape, while that of Maki Skosana was directly linked to a sinister form of covert action.¹⁹

At its Kabwe Conference in June 1985, the ANC approved a new and intensified mass-based resistance strategy for a 'People's War'.²⁰ At the same time, it provided some legitimacy for attacks on 'soft targets' such as prominent government supporters, border area farmers, civil defence workers, state witnesses and police informers.²¹ This was seen in some quarters as a major deviation from earlier policy, departing from the ANC's earlier commitment to the Geneva Convention, and thus the protected status of non-combatants.²² However, the ANC regarded many of the above as extensions of state force and thus as legitimate targets.

Through legitimating attacks on 'soft targets', it is possible that inside South Africa this was read more broadly as legitimating the killing of collaborators. Thus, although the ANC's new policy on 'soft targets' applied specifically to armed struggle, it could have influenced the escalation of necklace killings and attacks on collaborators. This in turn created increasing pressure on the ANC and UDF to respond more clearly to necklace killings: the state had framed the practice of necklacing as barbaric, and the escalation in necklacing killings and its associated negative publicity threatened growing support locally and internationally for the liberation movements.²³ Indeed, the rise of necklace killings and the associated media attention threatened to deflect attention from increasing security force violence in the townships. Both the UDF and ANC began to make public statements on necklacing and, more broadly, on contested aspects of violence. These, however, were not always in unison: in many instances they were contradictory. It is to these statements that I now turn, highlighting an ambivalence that condemned the practice of necklacing, but condoned those who carried it out.

Between 'Condemning' and 'Condoning'

Clergymen such as the Reverend Allan Boesak and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, both patrons of the UDF, harshly condemned early necklace killings and burnings such as that of the Kinikinis and Skosana. Indeed, both clergymen are reported to have personally protected individuals from being necklaced.²⁴ This condemnation was not, however, uniform. Mufson argues that '[b]y taking violence to a new threshold, the necklace renewed the debate over the need for violence and limits on violence'.²⁵ This debate is evident in key statements made by the UDF which wavered between condemnation and condonation, despite the organisation's public stance on non-violence.

19 See R. Moosage, 'The Impasse of Violence', 7-9, 39-41. See also *TRC Report*, Vol. 2, 259-261.

20 See T. Lodge, 'The African National Congress after the Kabwe Conference' in G. Moss and I. Obery, eds, *South African Review* 4.

21 H. Barrell, 'ANC Conference: "All for the Front"', *Work in Progress*, 38, Aug. 1985, 13.

22 The ANC endorsed the Geneva Convention in 1980 binding itself to its stipulations. See 'The ANC signs the Geneva Protocols', The O'Malley Archives. <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02424/04lv0270/05lv02918/06lv02928/07lv02929.htm>

23 Negative publicity was a particular concern with the impending visit of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group in the first half of 1986. See T. Lodge, 'People's War or Negotiation? African National Congress Strategies in the 1980s' in G. Moss and I. Obery, eds, *South African Review* 5 (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), 45-46.

24 Mufson, *Fighting Years*, 98.

25 Mufson, *Fighting Years*, 96.

Jeremy Seekings posits that the escalation of violence in 1985 forced the UDF to restate its commitment to non-violence. Although it had previously adopted a non-violent policy, this was not necessarily uniform or unanimous given the UDF's wide constituencies. According to Seekings, while 'some leaders saw violence as morally suspect; others saw it as potentially counterproductive, a threat to sustained revolt; most favoured instead organisation building.'²⁶ On the other hand, others such as the Eastern Cape publicity secretary, Stone Sizane, publicly and, according to Mufson, 'unambiguously' endorsed violence.²⁷ Similarly, Transvaal UDF president Curtis Nkondo told a thousand-strong crowd gathered in a church at a funeral in Alexandra: 'Either you join the struggle or you join the police. There is no such thing as the politics of neutrality.'²⁸

This lack of unanimity played itself out in relation to the practice of necklacing. As a result, even when it restated its commitment to non-violence, this, according to Seekings, was 'qualified in that the UDF refused to condemn what it called "defensive" violence of protestors against the state and its agents'.²⁹ Indeed, at the UDF's Annual General Council in April 1985, shortly after the Langa massacre and the associated killings of the Kinikinis, Mosiuoa 'Terror' Lekota, national public secretary of the UDF, argued that the kind of violence meted out to community councillors by angry residents was not 'aggressive violence but *defensive violence*' [my emphasis]. In other words, 'councillors were using a subtle type of violence against their own people as they (the councillors) were "little Vorsters and Bothas in black skin"'.³⁰ At the same council, though, the UDF noted that 'in many areas, organisations trail behind the masses, thus making it more difficult for a disciplined mass action to take place. More often there is spontaneity of actions in the township.'³¹

At other moments the UDF denied responsibility for necklace killings and burnings. For example in March 1986, Paul Maseko, an executive UDF member, stated that police informers known to members of the UDF would 'have been killed by now had the organisation been a violent one'. He was refuting claims that the UDF was a violent organisation that burnt people to death.³² A few months later, on 7 June 1986, youths returning from a UDF meeting in Alexandra calling for the unbanning of the ANC captured a suspected informer and attempted to necklace him. He escaped and the youth necklaced his employer instead. A few days later the Alexandra Action Committee, an affiliate of the UDF, condemned the killing and promised to discipline those responsible.³³

It is apparent that when the UDF did respond to necklace killings, the killing of collaborators and the use of violence, its statements vacillated and were some-

26 Seekings, *The UDF*, 291.

27 Mufson, *Fighting Years*, 97.

28 See R.L. Abel, *Politics by Other Means: Law in the Struggle Against Apartheid, 1980-1994* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 323.

29 Seekings, *The UDF*, 135.

30 See A. Mphaki, 'Violence Justified - UDF', *Sowetan Sunday Mirror*, 7 April 1985. See K. Jochelson, 'Local Authorities on their Knees', *Work in Progress*, 4, Sept.-Oct. 1986 for a discussion on the rise of rent boycotts beginning in September 1984 and the complicity of community councillors.

31 Cited in Lodge and Nasson, *All, Here, and Now*, 76.

32 'Informers not harmed, says UDF', *Cape Times*, 25 March 1986.

33 See R.L. Abel, *Politics by Other Means*, 324-325.

times contradictory. Even when the UDF expressed a level of discomfort with the levels and forms of violence, its position was ambivalent.

To return to Lekota, while his comments were in line with the UDF's campaign to boycott local government structures and were thus part of the campaign to pressure councillors to resign, his formulation can also be read as a broader statement on violence. That statement argued that the UDF could not condemn such violence because it was 'defensive violence'. In that sense, the state was complicit, indeed responsible, for such acts of violence. The notion of 'black-on-black' violence as propagated by the state was rendered nonsensical, as violence in effect remained state violence. Moreover, 'defensive violence', to some degree, sanctioned those carrying out the act, who in this formulation were rendered as responding to violence on the part of the state and thus, in some ways, innocent.

Lekota's formulation is also evident in a statement made by Trevor Manuel, then Western Cape regional secretary of the UDF, after the lynching of an alleged informer, Moegsien Abrahams, following a UDF meeting at the Westridge Civic Centre, Mitchells Plain (Cape Town) on 25 May 1986.³⁴ Two days after the incident, Manuel released the following statement:

The UDF regrets the loss of life of Moegsien Abrahams. However, it is important we understand his untimely death in context. The context is provided by the growing polarisation and concomitant anger which flows from the apartheid ordering our society. His death occurred in a manner which the UDF cannot be held responsible for ...

Following a careful explanation of the chain of events, Manuel continued:

[T]he UDF cannot and will not take responsibility, whether directly or indirectly, for his death. The blame rests four-square on the shoulders of those responsible for the breeding of hatred and anger by their maintenance of apartheid against the will of the people. Our struggle for an end to apartheid is a struggle for an end to the very brutality which led to the death of Moegsien Abrahams and so many others.³⁵

The question here is not whether or not Moegsien Abrahams was an 'informer', or about the legitimacy of killing collaborators, but to demonstrate the continuity in the position which held that all political violence was ultimately state-sponsored violence. This move not only denies individual responsibility to those who physically killed him, but also places Abrahams in a category of fallen victims of apartheid. Thus Abrahams, a suspected informer and hence perpetrator, is also a victim. Indeed, he is a double victim both of context (read 'the system of apartheid') and of direct physical violence.

The idea of 'defensive violence' as justification is similarly evident in some comments of the ANC, although here too there was lack of unanimity. On

34 See, amongst other reports, '200 mourn man killed after UDF rally', *Cape Times*, 27 May 1986.

35 'UDF: See death "in context"', *Cape Times*, 28 May 1986.

29 October 1985 Oliver Tambo made a key statement in response to a question posed by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons in London regarding the ANC's policy on 'soft targets' and whether they condemned the killing of suspected collaborators. He referred to the ANC's call at Kabwe to intensify the struggle but recognised that the intensification of armed struggle would inevitably lead to unavoidable civilian casualties. Countering the state's notion of 'black-on-black' violence, Tambo said:

It is not really [conflict between black and black], it is conflict between, on the one side, the victims of the apartheid system and the forces that represent and defend the apartheid system on the other. *In the course of all this ... there are excesses which we do not condone, but we understand the circumstances in which all this is happening.* There has been such an onslaught on our people by the Pretoria regime, there has been so much killing and shooting – shooting of children who do not have to be killed ... This enrages the people and makes them more angry and *we can understand that they can go to excesses in the way that they respond to this unbridled violence by apartheid.*³⁶ [My emphasis]

Tambo reasserted violence as state versus liberation movement, thereby designating all those targeted by the 'comrades' as 'represent(ing) and defend(ing)' the apartheid system and 'the people' as victims of apartheid counter-revolutionary strategies. Tambo, however, acknowledged that excesses of violence had been carried out. Although the ANC did not condone these excesses, it understood 'the circumstances in which all this is happening ... we can understand that they ['the people'] can go to excesses in the way that they respond to this unbridled violence by apartheid'. In this sense, there is recourse to causality: in so far as 'the people' engage in excesses of violence, it is a result of oppression/repression. Thus the oppression/repression framework is both the explanation and legitimisation of the use of violence as well as the sanctioning of 'excesses' that may be outside formal policy.

Following Tambo's statement, a series of statements were made that openly supported violence (including necklace killings) against collaborators. On 10 October 1985 exiled ANC members and spokesmen Alosi Moloi and Tim Ngubane stated:

Among us we have people who have openly collaborated with the enemy. You have to eliminate one to save hundreds of others. We want to make the death of a collaborator so grotesque that people will never think of it.³⁷

36 OR85-12aGreat Britain. House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 1984-85. *The Situation in South Africa, Minutes of Evidence, Tuesday 29 October 1985* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1985). <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/history/or85-12a.html>

37 Cited in *Talking with the ANC...* (Johannesburg: Bureau of Information, 1986), 26-27. Note these statements were also cited and acknowledged as having been stated in the ANC's submission to the TRC. See 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission – Transcript of the African National Congress Party Political Recall in Cape Town – 12 and 13 May 1997. Day 1 – 12 May 1997.' <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/party2/anc2.htm>

In the November 1985 issue of *Sechaba*,³⁸ one Cassius Mandla stated: 'Lucrative it still is to sell out, but it carries the immediate hazard of having one's flesh and bones being reduced to unidentifiable ashes.'³⁹ Mandla's comment served as a warning to those that would 'sell out' and as to what the consequences of committing 'unspeakable acts of treachery' would be. The infamous Winnie Mandela statement followed this on 13 April 1986, and on a Radio Freedom broadcast on 4 May 1986 she declared:

Let us take all our weapons, both rudimentary and sophisticated, our necklacers [*sic*], our grenades, our machine guns ... let us fight the vigilantes, the so-called 'fathers', together with the apartheid regime, together with the police and the army.⁴⁰

In early September 1986, Tambo more unequivocally criticised the practice of necklacing at a press conference at the Non-Aligned Movement conference in Harare. Tambo stated that the ANC was 'not happy with the necklace and hoped his supporters would take this into account'. However, it was also reported: 'He [Tambo] indicated also that he felt *unable to condemn people* who used the necklace because of the brutality they faced as a result of the South African system' [my emphasis].⁴¹ Tambo further accused 'vigilantes of sometimes necklacing anti-apartheid activists and then blaming it on the ANC in the hope of discrediting the movement'.⁴² When asked about the extent of the ANC's control in South Africa, Tambo hinted that the ANC had 'structures inside South Africa to make the country ungovernable; however, it [the ANC] could not control all aspects of the revolt, such as necklacing'.⁴³ This statement thus restates the earlier ambivalence of criticising necklacing, yet being unwilling or unable to condemn those responsible for necklace killings.

Some weeks later though, in October 1986, then ANC secretary-general Alfred Nzo was reported as having said to the London *Sunday Times*: '[w]hatever the people decide to use to eliminate those enemy elements is their decision. If they decide to use necklacing we support it.'⁴⁴

In September 1987 Tambo, again in Harare, this time at the Harare Conference on Children, made a further statement in which he called for the practice to stop. This 'official'⁴⁵ condemnation of the practice of necklacing was widely seen as a belated response to the statement made the previous year by Winnie Mandela

38 The first issue of *Sechaba* came out in 1967. It was an ANC journal 'to be distributed internationally, a journal that would be the voice of the ANC, that would put forward our [ANC] policies and rally support for the liberation struggle of the people of South Africa ... The chief task of *Sechaba* has been to publicise and analyse the situation with the country, and to make public the policy of the ANC.' See 'Twenty Years of *Sechaba* Journal of the ANC', *Sechaba*, May 1987, 27.

39 C. Mandla, 'The Moment of Revolution is now - or never in our lifetime', *Sechaba*, Nov. 1985, 26.

40 See *Talking with the ANC*..., 27.

41 'ANC leaders condemn necklace deaths', *Weekly Mail*, 5 Sept. 1986.

42 Oliver Tambo's accusation about vigilantes speaks to the discursive strategies employed by the apartheid state in that vigilantes, according to Tom Lodge and Bill Nasson, 'functioned as proxies for the security forces'. See Lodge and Nasson, *All, Here, and Now*, 97.

43 'ANC leaders condemn necklace deaths', *Weekly Mail*, 5 Sept. 1986.

44 *Talking with the ANC*..., 27.

45 I say 'official' given the emphasis placed on it within recollections of Oliver Tambo as evidenced in the Thabo Mbeki letter.

and other statements that she and others had made.⁴⁶ In this regard, it was reported that the ANC viewed Winnie Mandela's statement as being 'unfortunate'.⁴⁷

At the Harare Conference, Tambo gave the following message to South African delegates: 'The necklace as a form of punishment should stop. It has, rightly or wrongly, served its purpose and there is no way that people should continue with it.' When asked whether the practice of necklacing as a form of punishment was wrong, an ANC spokesperson at the conference replied, 'they [people who had applied the necklace] knew very well why they had to resort to using it. Probably they were compelled by circumstances prevailing at the time.'⁴⁸ Another spokesperson responded as follows: 'Our leadership has continually made it clear that the "necklace" is not a method we advocate or support. But we are not prepared to condemn our people.'⁴⁹

It is this sentiment of the practice 'rightly or wrongly' serving its 'purpose' and of those that 'knew very well why they had to resort' to necklacing and of not being 'prepared to condemn our people' that I consider in part constitutive of a prose of ambivalence as it relates to the question of necklacing. For it appears that whilst the ANC condemned necklacing, that is the practice itself, it did not condemn those who carried out the practice. At the same time, although part and parcel of the larger national liberation struggle, Tambo was drawing a distinction between the ANC and 'the people' or 'the masses'. This distinction is most visible in Chris Hani's 'comment on the necklace', which I examine more closely now in order to demonstrate how this prose of ambivalence is further constituted, and how attempts to escape it ultimately failed.

A Prose of Ambivalence

Following Zygmunt Bauman, if by ambivalence is meant 'the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category',⁵⁰ then Chris Hani's 'comment on the necklace' should be read as the quintessential prose of ambivalence. Hani's comment appeared in a December 1986 issue of *Sechaba* and formed part of a more wide-ranging interview on the state of the struggle. He suggested that within South Africa, 'we [MK and the ANC] have become part and parcel of the ongoing mass struggles of *our people ... our people* should look forward to the situation where, in the course of *their confrontation* with the enemy, *units of MK will be with them*' [my emphasis].⁵¹ He continued by arguing:

We are going to come increasingly across a situation where comrades in anger are going to react ... That is not the policy of the ANC ... we are in a state of war ... we want to deal with the enemy personnel, the

46 It was alleged that in September 1987, Winnie Mandela had advocated taking the struggle by way of violence to the white suburbs of Pretoria. See T. Stirling, 'SA "anticipated" ANC position on Winnie Mandela', *The Citizen*, 11 Oct. 1987.

47 See 'Stop necklacing, recognize all anti-apartheid bodies', *Cape Times*, 1 Oct. 1987 and 'Ire of necklace statement: ANC shows disapproval of Winnie', *The Star*, 1 Oct. 1987.

48 See 'ANC says: "Stop the Necklace"', *Weekly Mail*, 2 Oct. 1987 in *ANC News Briefing*, 11(39), 5 Oct. 1987.

49 'Stop necklacing, recognize all anti-apartheid bodies', *Cape Times*, 1 Oct. 1987.

50 See Z. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 1.

51 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', *Sechaba*, Dec. 1986, 14-15.

police, the army, with the administration of the enemy ... But in the process *our people* are going to get angry ... *the Botha regime is solely responsible for this sort of situation. We are not authors of the situation* ... And I want to repeat that we are not responsible for this situation ... *We are a revolutionary movement.*⁵² [My emphasis]

Hani's 'comment on the necklace' was situated within a merging of the 'mass struggles of our people' and MK being there every step of the way. Necklacing, for Hani, was in part located within this assimilation of the mass struggle of 'the people' to the larger struggle with the proviso that those in the ANC were not the 'authors of the [violent] situation'. Importantly Hani asserted that the ANC was a revolutionary movement with revolutionary approaches to dealing with 'the enemy'. The category of 'the enemy', however, was not merely the apartheid regime ('the Botha regime'); it broadly included those who collaborated with that regime.

Hani proceeded to open his 'comment on the necklace' by situating South Africa as a 'colonialist power of a special type'.⁵³ Having placed the apartheid state in a field of moral indefensibility, Hani stated that in the context of a society that was 'very abnormal ... [p]eople are angry because [they] are fighting fascism in that country'.⁵⁴ Hani then linked South Africa to other situations of 'classic colonialism' such as India, Kenya and Tanganyika in which 'active collaboration by puppets' was essential to colonialism's survival.

In South Africa these collaborators were identified as 'the Black policeman, the Black special branch and the Black agent [who] stay in the same townships as we do [and who] have been the conduit through which information about our activities, about our plans ha[ve] been passed to the enemy [making] organisation and mobilisation very difficult'.⁵⁵ Hani named those considered collaborators as legitimate targets, both 'soft' and 'hard'. Indeed, at the end of 1985 an official ANC leaflet, *Take the Struggle to White Areas!*, was distributed in South Africa stating that 'we have created combat groups and mobile units to defend ourselves and our leaders by confronting the racist army, police, death squads, agents and stooges in our midst.' Before concluding, the leaflet implicitly warned those who did not throw in 'their lot with the fighters for liberation'.⁵⁶

While there was no elaboration on who the 'agents and stooges' were, though the phrasing is seemingly synonymous with collaborators, the targeting of such 'agents and stooges' was presumably part of a sanctioned discourse regarding the legitimacy of carrying out sanctioned operations against collaborators. For example, in 1983 the ANC had established 'suicide squads' or 'grenade squads' that

52 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 18.

53 See A. Mashinini, 'Preparing the Fire Before Cooking the Rice Inside the Pot: Some Burning Questions of our Revolution', *Sechaba*, April 1985, 21. See also C. Bundy, 'Around Which Corner?: Revolutionary Theory and Contemporary South Africa', *Transformation*, 8, 1989, 1-23.

54 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 18.

55 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 18.

56 'Take the Struggle to the White Areas! Make the whole of South Africa ungovernable! Paralyse apartheid!' Official ANC leaflet distributed inside South Africa in the latter half of 1985. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/ug/pam8500.html>

attacked township councillors and those considered 'collaborators'.⁵⁷ By late 1985, though, when the above-mentioned leaflet was distributed, it was not official MK cadres carrying out most of the sanctioned targeting and killing of 'stooges' or collaborators. Rather, it was predominantly local township youth mobilised by the UDF and other organisations.⁵⁸

Hani continued by cautioning 'the people': 'But we are saying here *our people* must be careful, in the sense that the enemy would employ provocateurs to use the necklace, even against activists' [my emphasis].⁵⁹ Tambo, in his condemning of necklace killings as elaborated earlier, had criticised the work of vigilantes in killing anti-apartheid activists and in so doing seeking to discredit the ANC.

The context for the emergence of necklace killings, for Hani, is that of oppression/repression from the apartheid regime. It is in this context of resistance then that '*the necklace was a weapon devised by the oppressed themselves* to remove this cancer from our society, the cancer of collaboration of the puppets' [my emphasis].⁶⁰ Hani explicitly stated that the practice was not a 'weapon of the ANC', ambiguously distancing the ANC from the practice of necklacing and from 'the masses'. Rather it was '*a weapon of the masses themselves* to cleanse the townships from the very disruptive and even lethal activities of the puppets and collaborators' [my emphasis].⁶¹ In this sense, necklacing as resistance was ascribed to the 'masses themselves'.

At the same time, Hani distanced himself from but simultaneously claimed 'ownership' of 'the masses': '*We* do understand *our* people when *they* use the necklace because it is an attempt to render *our* townships, to render *our* areas and country ungovernable, to make the enemy's access to information very difficult' [my emphasis].⁶² Rendering the 'country ungovernable' as a strategy of resistance leading towards liberation enabled an understanding of why necklacing emerged amongst 'the masses' and continued to be used. In this understanding, however, the practice was also thus arguably aligned with the ANC.

Following the above, the relationship between those that could kill legitimately with those that could be legitimately killed was also blurred. In other words, when it called for a 'people's war', the ANC attempted (although failed) to clarify who was considered a legitimate target; what it did not address at all was whether killings could be conducted by members of its mass support base, as is shown by Hani.

To this point, Hani reiterates the ANC and UDF's ambivalence with regards to practices such as necklacing and burning. He positioned the state as 'fascist' and morally indefensible; the 'people/masses' were angry and lashed out at collaborators. Necklacing as resistance was not the policy or practice of the UDF or ANC,

57 Howard Barrell, however, points out that 'the lack of co-ordination between the ANC's political, military and security structures seriously compromised the development of these attacks'. See H. Barrell, *MK: The ANC's armed wing* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 57.

58 See for example M. Marks, *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001) and G. Straker, *Faces in the Revolution: The Psychological Effects of Violence on Township Youth in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1992).

59 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 15.

60 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 15.

61 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 15.

62 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 18.

but it was at the very least understandable and explicable, and thus justified (albeit ambivalently so). Where Hani differs from the formulations of Lekota, Manuel and Tambo is in his attempt to resolve the impasse between condemning and condoning through a discussion on the difference or, as I wish to argue, the interplay between what he called 'revolutionary justice' and 'traditional forms of justice'.

Several noteworthy aspects are discernible in Hani's attempt to resolve that impasse. Firstly, Hani characterised the practice of necklacing as 'traditional forms of justice'.⁶³ Interestingly Hani did not refer to necklacing as punishment, nor as violence, but as a form of justice. In so doing, a sense of legitimacy is inserted into the act of necklacing. Concomitantly however, 'traditional forms of justice' were regarded as undesirable by Hani, perhaps because of the capacity of 'tradition' to resonate with the state's characterisation of the practice as barbaric or primordial, and as a form of 'black-on-black' violence.

Hani proposed a move away from 'traditional forms of justice' to forms of justice that are 'revolutionary'. In not characterising the practice as punishment, the concept of justice, I suggest, served as a mechanism to enable a move to 'revolutionary justice'. Indeed, Hani posed the question, 'What is revolutionary justice?'⁶⁴ It appears that it was only through the setting up of revolutionary structures that the question of revolutionary justice could be actualised. He therefore stated:

One fact is that, where agents and collaborators are concerned, we should establish, where is it [*sic*] possible our own revolutionary courts where justice should be meted out. And in those courts we should involve some of our best cadres so that our forms of justice do not denigrate into kangaroo justice. *We would like to maintain revolutionary forms of justice.* [My emphasis]⁶⁵

There is an implicit association of 'traditional forms of justice' with kangaroo courts when Hani stated: 'we should involve some of our best cadres so that our forms of justice do not degenerate into kangaroo justice'. Kangaroo courts were blamed by the apartheid state as being the official institutions through which, supposedly, the ANC and the UDF were propagating the practice of necklacing as part of its 'intimidation strategy'.⁶⁶ The UDF propagated 'people's courts' from 1985 with its call to 'people's power' but kangaroo courts were criticised.⁶⁷

In 'maintaining revolutionary forms of justice', it is possible that Hani was also referring to a document released at the Kabwe Conference dealing with MK's military code that stressed the positive relationship between MK and 'the revolutionary sections of our people'.⁶⁸ Despite the document's preamble stating

63 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 18.

64 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 18.

65 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 18.

66 See R. Moosage, 'The Impasse of Violence', 43.

67 See J. Seekings, 'People's Courts and Popular Politics' in G. Moss and I. Obery, eds, *South African Review 5* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), 119. See also, 'Comrades of the Crooked Court', *Probe*, Nov. 1985 and, 'UDF Leader Condemns "Kangaroo Courts"', *Herald*, 31 Oct. 1985.

68 See 'Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Code'. This document was released at the ANC National Consultative Conference at Kabwe in June 1986. It was part of a larger document titled 'Report of Commission on National Structures, Constitutional Guidelines and Codes of Conduct', <http://www.anc.org.za/ancedocs/history/mkcode.html>

that '[r]ecognising that our army, Umkhonto we Sizwe, must define its aims and objects in clear and precise terms, and that the rights and duties of each member should be likewise defined without ambiguity ...', there was no clear definition of how collaborators were to be dealt with by members. The document stressed that all members of the ANC and combatants were required to respect the terms of the Geneva Convention and that any violation of these terms would be an offence.⁶⁹

It is suggestive that by characterising necklacing as justice and not punishment, the killing of collaborators by individuals claiming allegiance to the liberation movements, who were not members of MK but 'revolutionary sections of our people', seemingly fell outside the military ambit of MK's code of conduct. Hani continued:

We know even the negative and the positive aspects of the necklace. There is a lot of discussion of the necklace. But it is not this silly conclusion that it is Black on Black violence. The necklace has been used against those who have been actively collaborating with the enemy.⁷⁰

The negative aspects presumably are what Hani referred to earlier in his comment, namely that 'the enemy would employ provocateurs to use the necklace, even against activists'.⁷¹ The positive aspects presumably are that the necklace was effective in 'mak[ing] the enemy's access to information very difficult'. That necklacing for Hani was not 'black-on-black' violence, that 'silly conclusion', points not only to the interplay of the dominant discourses in contest for the legitimisation and justification of the use of violence, but also of Hani attempting to move away from the impasse between 'condemning' and 'condoning'.

The second notable aspect therefore is that, just as Hani's characterising of necklacing as having emerged as a form of 'traditional justice' was suggestive of the separation between 'revolutionary justice' and 'traditional forms of justice', so too it suggested a separation of 'the masses' from the movement, the ANC. In this regard three categories of subjectivities that operated within the broader liberation struggle can be discerned: 'the masses' ('the people'), the militants (MK), and the movement itself (the ANC). However, as explained above, there appears to be an oscillatory effect by Hani claiming 'the masses' as constitutive with the militants of MK and thus the ANC, whilst at the same moment an attempt at maintaining a distinction between those subjectivities.

A productive means of underscoring the significance as well as the limit of this oscillatory effect is possibly in relation to Frantz Fanon's reading of anti-colonial violence. Fanon argues that the stage preceding decolonisation 'is manifestly Manichean'. Nigel Gibson suggests that this be understood as the dualism of resistance and oppression/repression.⁷² For Fanon, the liberation movement will seek to divide collaborators from 'the people' in an attempt to isolate 'those who work for

69 'Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Code'.

70 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 18.

71 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 15.

72 N.C. Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 111.

or support “native institutions” [by] liquidating collaborators as publicly as possible to encourage others’.⁷³ Fanon does posit, however, that ‘for a man in the thick of the fight it is an urgent matter to decide on the means and the tactics to employ: that is to say, how to conduct and organise the movement. If this coherence is not present there is only a blind will to freedom, with the terrible reactionary risks which it entails.’⁷⁴

In the case of necklacing this was not, in Hani’s view, the liberation movement ‘liquidating collaborators’, but these were actions of ‘the people’, those whom Hani both sought to claim but also to separate from the liberation movement. Yet Hani stressed:

[t]he ANC will never abandon its leading role. We say to our people, whatever method you devise, there should be democratic participation, there should be democratic discussion and whatever method we use, that method should conform to the norms of the revolutionary movement. As I say we understand why the necklace has been used.⁷⁵

One can suggest that the ANC and MK did not want to abandon its leading role simply because ‘traditional forms of justice’ were employed. Rather, it is possible to read this not merely as a distinction but more as a plea for progress from ‘traditional forms of justice’ to ‘revolutionary forms of justice’.

This then is the third noteworthy aspect, namely that such a plea for progress is further enabled by Hani characterising the practice as ‘justice’, in that the ANC’s leading role was ultimately one of future governance. As with the idea of ‘revolutionary courts’ being institutions that should reflect democratic values, by 1985 the ANC had come to regard itself as a government in waiting.⁷⁶ Thus when Hani stated, ‘[t]he question of the necklace belongs to all of us, to the ANC, to the democratic movement. We should just sit down and discuss amongst ourselves how we should mete out justice’, it is possible that the interplay between the practice of necklacing as a ‘traditional form of justice’ and the call for ‘revolutionary justice’ was also a call to sense the possibility of freedom. This is akin to what Fanon had called ‘the creation of humanity by revolutionary beginnings’.⁷⁷

For Fanon, it is not violence itself that is central, but the process of liberation that is central to the “embodiment of history” and the creation of a revolutionary agency that begins to strip away colonial reification’. In other words, according to Gibson, ‘the native transcends nativehood only insofar as subjectivity is intimately connected to self-determination and is intrinsic to revolution. What now is crucial are not the traditions which initially sustained an elemental resistance, but rather the new sense of the possibility of freedom.’⁷⁸

73 See Gibson, *Fanon*, 111.

74 F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by C. Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 59.

75 Chris Hani, ‘25 years of armed struggle’, 18.

76 See for example S. Jama, ‘A Discussion Article: Questions of Justice and War’, *Sechaba*, Jan. 1985, 18.

77 Gibson, *Fanon*, 117.

78 Gibson, *Fanon*, 117.

Hani' concluded by reiterating that '[t]he movement should be vigilant to ensure that whatever sentence is passed on anybody, it is a result of participation by the revolutionary elements of our struggle.'⁷⁹

Ambivalence about necklacing in Hani's 'comment on the necklace' was produced in the interstice of the resistance—oppression/repression binary. Similar to the way in which Tambo condemned the practice of necklacing but not 'the people', Hani distinguished between 'traditional forms of justice' and 'revolutionary forms of justice' with resistance as the constitutive element of both forms of justice. Whilst Hani attempted to distinguish between 'traditional forms of justice' and 'revolutionary justice', the interplay between those characterisations of resistance rather enabled a circular logic of ambivalence towards the question of necklacing.

I want to proceed by offering a reading of Govan Mbeki's *The Peasants Revolt* (1964) so as to suggest that the problematic of violence and associated ambivalence in dealing with accused collaborators within the ANC has a history that predates the 1980s. This is followed by returning to Thabo Mbeki's letter to the 'nation' as a means of concluding in the space of ambivalence.

Tracing Ambivalence

In the late 1950s and 1960s rural protests turned violent as peasants engaged in beatings and killings of local authorities and their supporters who were seen as collaborators. The Mpondoland revolt stands out in particular because it was well structured and organised compared to the other rural revolts and uprisings of the time, which Tom Lodge describes as 'largely ... parochial affair[s]'.⁸⁰ The Mpondoland revolt broke out in March 1960 as a result of grievances such as objections to land rehabilitation, heavier taxation as the region began to contribute more to administration, and the increasingly authoritarian nature of local government in the form of tribal authorities.⁸¹ Similar to the revolts in Zeerust (1957) and Thembuland (1962-3), the brunt of peasants' anger in Mpondoland was directed at local chiefs and headmen who were regarded as collaborators and traitors to 'the people'. Chiefs who supported government policies were attacked, their homes burnt down and, in some cases, they were killed. This was particularly the case in the Mpondoland Revolt where seventeen chiefs, their headmen or their bodyguards and a further five suspected of being police informers were murdered.⁸²

I suggest that responses to, and accounts of, the attacking and killing of chiefs and informers deemed as collaborators should be read as indicative of an ambivalence on the part of the ANC. Consider Govan Mbeki's *The Peasants' Revolt* in which he provided a detailed account of the injustices against peasants in rural

79 Chris Hani, '25 years of armed struggle', 15.

80 T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), 290

81 For detailed analyses of the Mpondoland and Zeerust (1957-1959) revolts, see amongst others, Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*; S. Zondi, 'Peasant struggles of the 1950's: gaMatlala and Zeerust', *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol. 1 (1960-1970)*, South African Democracy Education Trust (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004); S. Matoti and L. Ntsebeza, 'Rural Resistance in Mpondoland and Thembuland, 1960-1963', *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol. 1 (1960-1970)*, South African Democracy Education Trust (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004).

82 See Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, 280.

areas and the response of those peasants in the form of revolt. According to Govan Mbeki, discussing both the Zeerust and Mpondoland revolts, there was a clear relationship between the ANC and the peasant insurgents, seen as one of mutual reinforcement.⁸³ He argued that what was happening in rural areas was not isolated from the broader national struggle and this was the 'vital feature' that the Mpondoland revolt disclosed; it 'convinc[ed] the leadership of the importance of the peasants in the reserve to the entire national struggle'.⁸⁴ Indeed, one of the purposes for Govan Mbeki writing *The Peasants' Revolt* was to make the case for the importance of peasants in the reserves and homelands to the entire national struggle, the case that peasants belong to 'a single common society'.⁸⁵

This link between the local and national struggle, of the local folding into a national political consciousness, speaks to the methods of resistance that Govan Mbeki propagated. In total three methods of resistance and struggle were mentioned by Govan Mbeki: hut burnings, boycotts and the ostracism of collaborators.⁸⁶ The killing of collaborators, however, was a technique of struggle that was implicitly condoned, though in a way that was ambivalent. When discussing the revolts in Zululand, Govan Mbeki states:

The anger of the resisters was now turned on these families, who were regarded as traitors. A party of over 200 attacked the collaborators, killing two. This resulted in 29 being charged, originally with murder, though in the end only 14 were convicted, on lesser charges, to various periods of imprisonment ranging from 8 to 14 years. The remarks of the judge in this case were significant. He said it was clear that there was deep resentment against Bantu Authorities and that the administration had been aware of this but had imposed the scheme in spite of opposition. In passing sentence he therefore regarded this resentment as [an] extenuating circumstance.⁸⁷

In relation to the case just cited, the original murder charge was dropped for lesser charges by the judge. On one level judgment, or rather condemnation of the killing was positioned by Govan Mbeki in relation to the very system that was meant to be resisted. On another, that system was implicitly shown to be complicit in the killing. Most striking, however, is the elision of the killing of the two collaborators in favour of an implicit condoning of the killing. This implicit condonation arose through naming it as resistance which arose from a justifiable cause.

Resentment against the Bantu authorities' and the administration's failure to address that resentment, according to Govan Mbeki, was cause for the killing of those regarded as traitors. However, the main point that is evident is the exoneration and rationalisation of violence by Govan Mbeki, turning to a resistance discourse. By way of the discussion on the subsequent trial of those accused of

⁸³ G. Mbeki, *The Peasants' Revolt*, 114, 129.

⁸⁴ G. Mbeki, *The Peasants' Revolt*, 130.

⁸⁵ See also T. Lodge, 'Charters from the Past: The African National Congress and its Historiographical Traditions', *Radical History Review*, 46(7), 1990, 172.

⁸⁶ Mbeki, *The Peasants' Revolt*, 131-133.

⁸⁷ Mbeki, *The Peasants' Revolt*, 116.

the murder and the judge's remarks that implicitly implicated the government as accomplice to the murders for not addressing the issues that the resisters had with the Bantu Authorities, the killing can be seen to be named as resistance.

The ANC's initial call to armed violence was beset by a similar ambivalence. Here an apt example is that of Chief Albert Luthuli and his apparent wavering between condoning and condemning the call to violent armed struggle. At a meeting in June 1961 of the ANC National Executive, the ANC decided that it would not change its official non-violent standpoint but that members who felt the need to begin an armed response, such as Nelson Mandela, could do so. In other words, those who opposed violence, such as Chief Albert Luthuli, did so, according to Lodge, on 'grounds of principle and not expedience'.⁸⁸

Scott Everett Couper cites a fitting example of the wavering between condemning and condoning by Luthuli and quotes Luthuli's statement in response to the Rivonia (1964) convictions: 'no one can blame brave just men for seeking justice by the use of violent methods; nor could they be blamed if they tried to create an organised force in order to ultimately establish peace and racial harmony ...' He suggests that Luthuli drafted this statement only to convey 'solidarity, not agreement' with those who resorted to violence and continues to argue that what is not recognised is the sentence that prefaced that portion of the statement: 'The African National Congress never abandoned its method of militant, non-violent struggle, and of creating in the process a spirit of militancy in the people.' Everett Couper thus argues that Luthuli 'intentionally made distinctions between "support" and "condemnation" and between the ANC that he led as President-General and the "brave just men" who could not be blamed if their patience became exhausted.'⁸⁹ This reading of Luthuli's statement has certain parallels with the ANC and UDF discourse on the practice of necklacing.

It is tempting to suggest that just as Lekota, Manuel, Tambo and Hani condemned the act of violence itself, the killing of suspected collaborators (including necklace killings), but were unwilling to condemn those who committed such acts, a similar order of ambivalence is evident in Govan Mbeki's account of the Mpondo revolt and Luthuli's statement regarding the ANC's turn to armed violent struggle.

Concluding in the Space of Ambivalence

Up to this point, I have attempted to sketch how with the emergence and politicisation of necklacing, a prose of ambivalence permeated the discourse of the ANC and UDF on the practice. I have further suggested that this order of ambivalence has a longer history within struggle discourse as discussed above. While concluding in the space of ambivalence is always to expect points of irresolution, I want to return to Thabo Mbeki's 2007 letter to the nation and his recalling of Oliver Tambo's call for necklace killings to stop.

⁸⁸ Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, 233.

⁸⁹ S.E. Couper, "'An Embarrassment to the Congresses?': The Silencing of Chief Albert Luthuli and the Production of ANC History", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35(2), June 2009, 347.

Mbeki's letter should be read as serving a dual purpose: to memorialise Tambo but also to remind the ANC's constituency and the South African 'nation', one month before the ANC's 52nd National Conference at Polokwane (16–20 December 2007), of the ideal citizen that Tambo represented. Besides the nationalist overtones in that public letter to the 'nation', Mbeki laments the passing of Tambo and valorises Tambo's contribution towards an all-inclusive South African 'nation' which includes an answer to the question of necklacing. For Tambo, that question was ultimately whether the practice of necklacing would relate to a politics of ends. His response, born out of humanism, was for it to be stopped.

For Mbeki, the question of necklacing seemingly does not constitute the same formulation of 'the need to relate means to ends' that had as its constituting subjectivity 'the masses', as it did for Tambo in 1987. Through Mbeki's recalling of the question of necklacing, the practice is seemingly rendered as being perpetrated not by 'our people' or 'the masses', but by a handful. This enables Mbeki to place necklacing beyond the legacy of the resistance–oppression/repression binary in which Tambo formulated it. It is through Mbeki re-engaging that question of necklacing and through recalling its 'official' response (the practice had to stop) that he reasserts the ANC's 'value system' which condemns the behaviour of some ANC members that would lead to the 'nation' being referred to as 'barbaric'. In this sense, Mbeki reformulates the question of necklacing in relation to ANC members, and by implication the nation, acting out of expedience in post-apartheid South Africa. Mbeki thus strategically reaffirms and relegitimises Tambo's 'official' condemnation of the practice so as to legitimise a policy espoused by Mbeki in rooting out those ANC members acting out of expedience.

Implicitly, Mbeki's attempt to obscure the ambivalence of necklacing in the country's 'immoral and amoral past' was aimed at demonstrating that it was not 'the masses', but only 'a few among our ranks' and that 'th[e] struggle did not turn our people into blood-thirsty and mindless brutes with no respect for human life and human dignity'.⁹⁰ This was a question of representation as much as it was one about the national subject. In this sense, what Mbeki's letter obscures is not only the ambivalence of the formulation of Tambo's condemnation, but also the question of necklacing and its ramifications for a history after apartheid.

I suggest that in Mbeki's letter to the 'nation', recalling Tambo's 'official' condemnation of the practice, though not its ambivalence, constitutes the possibility of also assigning necklacing to more than one category: one representational and the other ontological. A number of moves are apparent in Mbeki's rendering. Mbeki asserts a humanism in Tambo's call for the practice of necklacing to stop, thus seemingly asserting a re-presentation of the black subject in Tambo's humanist framework. In other words, Mbeki's articulation (as representative of the new state) operates to overturn the rendering of the black subject as barbarous and savage by the apartheid state; by re-articulating the ANC and UDF discourse, he inserts in its place Tambo's humanist black subject.

90 T. Mbeki, 'Oliver Tambo Remembered'.

However, and this is the second move, Mbeki includes the following sentence from his 'I am an African' speech: 'The great masses who are our mother and father will not permit that the behaviour of the few results in the description of our country and people as barbaric.'⁹¹ This perhaps points to a departure from Tambo's humanist framework. For Tambo, it was the practice of necklacing that was barbaric and not 'the behaviour of the few'. Indeed, Tambo was unwilling to condemn 'the masses' because necklacing, understood as resistance, was rendered explicable only in an oppression/repression context.

Thus the third move discernible is that Mbeki, eliding this strategic departure, links Tambo's humanist framework to a question of the constituency of the current ANC. In this sense, Mbeki seems to offer a warning to the ANC's constituency, and indeed its leadership, of slipping into a somewhat familiar formulation of being between 'condemning' and 'condoning' those among the ANC's constituency who are 'the product of our immoral and amoral past'. In other words, Mbeki is pointing to those 'criminals who, whilst wearing ANC T-shirts, have corruptly abused their positions in government to manipulate government tenders to enrich themselves and their collaborators'.⁹² In doing so, Mbeki reformulates the question of necklacing.

This reformulation, however, does not occur in the interstice of resistance and oppression/repression as it had for Tambo. I suggest rather that it is in the ramifications of a legacy of struggle that fails to attend to the ambivalence that saturates necklacing. Mbeki's reformulation operates within the same circular logic of ambivalence of Tambo, which Hani in his 'comment on the necklace' had tried, and failed, to escape. This too must qualify as a prose of ambivalence that is haunted by the spectre of necklacing; indeed it is haunted by the refusal of necklacing and its ever-present ambivalence to being forgotten. A cry indeed!

91 T. Mbeki, 'Oliver Tambo Remembered'.

92 T. Mbeki, 'Oliver Tambo Remembered'.