

COMMENTARY ON "1+10=50, 000 (IN FOUR MONTHS)"

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Peter Biehl, a White American whose daughter Amy Biehl, a young promising Full-bright Scholar who was tragically and senselessly murdered in violent prone apartheid South Africa, and Rolene Miller, a White South African and founder of a non-government organization MOSAIC, serving disadvantaged African and Colored women in South Africa, report that their grassroots enterprise has trained ten community workers who have in four months served fifty thousand individuals who had been brutalized by a vicious system that has bred a horrible cycle of violence especially against Black women. MOSAIC must be commended for offering hope and true liberation to Black women who have suffered and continue to endure intense and immeasurable pain, the legacy of apartheid South Africa. Extensive literature on the status of Black Women in South Africa document the crimes and horrors perpetrated against women by the government, men, family members, and especially White police who have raped, brutalized, and tortured them. Therefore, grassroots effort to eradicate violence or to improve the quality of life for all South Africans is welcome.

Rolene Miller accurately identifies problems and obstacles in the efforts to empower Black women to improve the quality of

their lives although I have reservations about some of her assumptions suggested by some of her pronouncements in her article. True, the apartheid regime didn't see it fit to educate the African masses, especially women. The illiteracy rate is very high. Thus, illiteracy must be tackled from every front along with other developmental projects. Training everyone with little or no education in self-help ventures that bolster human dignity, self-awareness, self-improvement, must take place at grassroots level and should be encouraged. Along with such attempts, South Africa must radically transform its school system and curriculum that continue to further the myth of White supremacy and Black inferiority. Formal education, literacy training, must go hand in hand with all other efforts to rapidly liberate the country and move it away from the horrors of apartheid.

Criticizing university education smacks of the old White liberal views that encouraged the likes of Booker T. Washington who exhorted Blacks to be patient, not to bother about political rights and higher education. Rather than rejecting the value of university training, revise it; make the curriculum more relevant; after all Africans have always trusted their intellectuals. We lived among our own people, suffered with them,

and fought the racist oppressor together. The struggle of our women must not be fragmented and separated from the over all struggle. After all, in spite of apartheid, and long before Ms. Miller entered university, Africans managed university and the English language just fine.

From her background information, Rolene Miller's involvement with Africans is relatively new. Perhaps her MOSAIC can and will draw strength from Black women and social workers such as Allen Khuzwayo, Linda Myeza, Benedict Mosala, Mampela Ramphela, to name a few, who begun grassroots efforts to train less educated women to fend for themselves, to fight injustice, to uplift their lives, long before it became fashionable to talk about the plight of Black women. The government hindered the work of Black social workers among Black people. Winnie Mandela will attest to that. Like Miller, the above — named persons, rightly asserted that women at grassroots level had to be provided with skills and knowledge to work for their own liberation, Ignorance must be totally eradicated. However, Black women were not viewed as helpless invalids, abused or not, to be redeemed by sympathetic Whites. Black women welcome any help they may receive from whatever source as chief Albert Luthuli of the African National Congress once observed... "had the (Black) women hung back, resistance would still have been faltering and uncertain... Furthermore, women of all races have had far less hesitation than men in making common cause about things basic to them."

I am a South African, a direct victim of apartheid who did not hesitate to challenge the evils of White supremacy myths, intended or unintended. Perhaps I can offer suggestions to avoid the pitfalls that ensnared many well-intended White-led organizations working for the betterment of Black communities. For example, Donald Wood a journalist who befriended Steve Biko, one of the martyrs of our struggle, was suddenly elevated to some savior of Black folks by Western media even when his association with us was at best marginal. He had benefited from discrimination laws of apartheid, bothered nothing about the plight of Blacks until his brief acquaintance with Biko made him visible. He purported to speak for us, and police harassment of his family the following four months, was suddenly painted by Westerners as being far more significant than the dehumanization and exploitation of our people. He was, intentionally or unintentionally, gaining fame and fortune at the expense of the misery of our people. Also, I want to note that, whilst the murder of Amy Biehl in South Africa was a cowardly, senseless, and brutal deed, it was an act committed by thugs who have been denounced by everyone and the Pan-Africanist Congress, the party they claim to be members of. They must be punished to the fullest extent of the law; and they have been sentenced! Amy was at the wrong place, at the wrong time while driving friends home. However, this does not warrant a rather presumptuous assertion that she died for, or in South Africa's democratic struggle. The

causes she believed in were indeed noble, however, her death was caused by criminals who did not understand the intensity of our struggle. Thousands of Africans died in South Africa even though their deaths were not publicized. They are the martyrs of our struggle for national liberation. Violence has always been directed against Blacks, not the other way around as suggested for the cause of Amy Biehl's cruel and untimely death.

May I point out, also, that it is true, African women are respectfully addressed as MAMA or MME a title denoting them as mothers, life-givers, the custodians of our traditions and customs, the mothers of our nation. How ironic that the disintegration of our society since contact situation with our oppressors and apartheid destroyed this noble view of our women, subjecting them to abuse, violence, rape, torture, and dehumanization! However, even apparently innocent statements such as "the mamas of the community—," or "the mature mamas....." while they may sound cute, exotic expressions when used by non-Africans, may actually sound condescending. They are the women of South Africa, just like their Indian, Colored and White counterparts. Lest someone suggest that we are too sensitive, an understanding of our culture for smooth interaction with us is recommended. That seems to be the strength of MOSAIC, that you train people in the community to help advance, define, develop and improve their environment. A slip of the tongue, no matter how innocent, may destroy, a noble effort.

MOSAIC deserves the help and support of all peace and justice loving people. Yet it is also the duty of MOSAIC to work with all other grassroots organizations attempting to improve the lot of our people, especially women, children, and the disabled, not in isolation, but acknowledging the courageous efforts of others even before Ms. Miller completed her studies in 1984. The Black struggle for liberation and human dignity is much longer and deeper than that. Always remember that the people you want to help must be at the center of all decisions made; they must be involved through extensive consultation even though apartheid has encouraged dependency that may be mistaken for begging for hand-outs. Through education that honors our past and present, our human dignity, and our right to self-determination and development, the human condition in South Africa can be improved. The struggle and solution efforts must be multi-dimensional and rigorous.

To conclude, may I explain the following: my comments have used words such as Africans, deliberately to contradict some of the calculated misleading by the media who have often lumped Africans, Indians and Coloreds as Blacks. This was a ploy by corporations and business that did not want to advance Africans to higher positions. They would promote Coloreds (people of mixed parentage and those Africans who were "passing") then to deflect international criticism, they would indicate they have hired Blacks. Other Coloreds too, when it was politically expedient,

called themselves Black. Societies that never made such distinctions as South Africa's racial policies made regarding people of African descent and those of mixed parentage, are often fooled by that ploy of lumping together Africans, Indians, and Coloreds as Blacks. For example, the Western Cape Province is predominantly Colored and White. Africans were deliberately restricted and kept out of that area. Even now this province is controlled by the former oppressors, Mr. de Klerk's National Party, and the Coloreds, who believe their lot is better with Whites, overwhelmingly voted for that party. The University of the Western Cape until most recently, has been a Colored university excluding Africans. Perhaps

MOSAIC will help bridge the wide gulf created by decades of apartheid, a crime against humanity as the U.N. declared. Also, hopefully, the Amy Biehl Foundation, unlike other overseas foundations from societies with histories of ethnic and cultural insensitivity, will not hesitate to deal directly with deserving organizations run by Africans who are as concerned and dedicated as Ms. Miller. Others, in spite of their professed desire to be involved with programs for the betterment of Africans, prefer to act through South African Whites with whom they are comfortable. May this venture of MOSAIC be one of many worthy projects to come to, or evolve in South Africa. □



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