

## **Julius Malema: A Racist or a Nationalist?**

*Leiyo Singo\**

### **Abstract**

*The rise of Julius Malema in the African National Congress (ANC)/South Africa's politics has received different interpretations within and beyond South Africa. First, it is because of his personality as a tricky, opportunistic and firebrand young politician; and secondly because of "uncomfortable" issues he is raising about nationalization of mines and land redistribution which contravene ANC's policy. The rise of Malema has not received a serious interrogation as many studies and discussions focus on the person of Malema and not on the issues. This article revisits the development that led to Malema's expulsion from ANC; the emergence of the new movement – the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the possible consequences of mass (youth) education by Malema to get popular support. It argues that mobilization of the desperate population that is seeking a new path or an alternative to the Neo-liberal policies is vital and therefore political activism is awaited for to spark off the anti-neoliberalism movement.*

### **Introduction**

The rise of Julius Malema in South African politics has raised different concerns and debates on the media and partly on the academia. However, there has been no a serious scholarly interrogation of the circumstances paving the way for the resurgence of political activism in Africa. The issues advocated by the likes of Malema are of paramount significance to my generation. This is so because in spite of so much optimism over the rebirth of political pluralism on the African continent in the early 1990s as a "second independence," which would usher in freedom, welfare and prosperity for Africa's long-suffering people, the continent is still on the losing side (Abrahamson, 2000). It should be understood that the struggle for democracy

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\*Undergraduate Student, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Dar es Salaam, E-mail: [singol@gmail.com](mailto:singol@gmail.com)

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in Africa was (is) a struggle for affluence, or at least a life worth living -free of abject poverty, ignorance and curable diseases. Africa yearns for freedom to self-thinking and self-development which has not been realized so far. Democracy that was imposed to Africa is the Neoliberal democracy that came to propagate a sacred market. Profit making is the essence of this democracy; in the words of a Neoliberal guru Milton Friedman "any government that pursues anti-market policies is being antidemocratic, no matter how much informed popular support they might enjoy" (Klein, 2009).

#### **Issue**

Julius Malema -former ANC Youth League President together with two other comrades namely Sindiso Magaqa (former Secretary General of ANC Youth League) and Floyd Shivambu (former spokesperson of ANC Youth League) were suspended and later on the latter and Julius Malema were expelled from ANC on disciplinary grounds in accordance with the ruling of the ANC disciplinary machinery - the National Disciplinary Committee (NDC). According to the thirteen pages document delivered by Derek Hanekom (chairperson) on behalf of ANC National Disciplinary Committee, "The Respondent, Julius Malema, was found guilty of contravening Rules 25.5(c) and (i) of the ANC Constitution for expressing his personal views at a press conference of the ANC Youth League on 31 July 2011 which sought to portray the ANC government and its leadership under President Zuma in a negative light in relation to the African agenda and which had the potential to sow division and disunity in the ANC, and for expressing his personal views on Botswana which contravened ANC policy."<sup>1</sup> The views of these young men are seen as potential to sow divisions within ANC which is the heart of South African politics and major determinant of who should hold state power. The verdict further labels Malema as a repeat offender who has been guilty of hate speech and accused of singing the anti-apartheid ditty *Dubula iBhunu* (shoot the Boer) of which Zuma himself sang several times particularly during the ANC centenary in 2012. "Bring Me My Machine Gun" was his light-hearted song during electoral campaigns (Makulilo, 2013). If this is an offence then the punishment would have started with President Jacob Zuma.

Second, Malema gave his personal opinion on Khama's regime as anyone else would have done. The public sector strikes in Botswana (a rich diamond and stable economy for many years) drew attention of many and Malema being one of them used his rights to freedom of speech to share his concerns.

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Of course, he might have gone far to demand for a regime change in Gaborone but were these the sufficient factors for his expulsion?

I concur with Sizovuka and Van der Walt that this has much to do with internal power struggles within ANC as Malema's faction rose to challenge the sitting president Jacob Zuma (Sizovuka, 2013). Furthermore, while many analysts tend to ignore the noisy Juju (nickname for Julius Malema) on his call for nationalization of South African mines and redistribution of land I believe this was the very reason behind his expulsion, not necessarily because Malema is able to carry on this mission but because taking it as a political agenda and preaching it to the desperate black majority who are yet to realize the fruits of freedom and promise of the Freedom Charter is likely to change existing equilibrium (neoliberal stability). Such tremendous developments have just taken place before our eyes in Zimbabwe in the last decade; Mugabe did to Zimbabweans what Madiba could not do to South Africans. With the end of apartheid in 1994 black South Africans were able to dominate the legislature and state power but never the banks, mines or the land which are the real determinant of political power and of course the very freedom fought for.

The controversial Julius Malema is now one of the popular figures within and of course outside South Africa. To some, he is a threat and racist, yet to others he is a nationalist! "Whose reality count" should prevail? Chamber's (1997) question of whose reality can be put in other way as "whose interest matters:" Manufacturing of identities is something common, it depends on who is manufacturing them and for what ends. Mandela (and ANC of course) was labeled a "terrorist" while leading a liberation struggle for the freedom of his people! So, a patriot to one group means a terrorist to the other. In a country like South Africa where the living standards of its minority whites equal that of the Swiss while that of its majority blacks resemble that of Southern Sudan; the issue about the "haves" and the "haves not" might automatically appear as if one is talking about whites and blacks respectively and thus being distributionalist is being against the haves (whites). However, it is by no way that all whites belong to the 'haves' category while all blacks belong to the 'haves not' category for it is clear that the African political elite live in the same areas with the whites, drive the same cars and partner in business deals. So, for a robust discussion it is imperative to go beyond mere personalities and concentrate on the system that creates and widen the gap between the haves and the haves not, be it white or black.

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Cynics and many of Malema's opponents have been busy attacking his character and personality but this does not refute the truth and reality of the issues he is trying to advance for whatever reasons. This is all about a struggle to earn a living and in fact a question of class struggle. The struggle to a life of dignity; the promise of freedom and self-rule, which is access to land, employment, better working conditions, non-polluted soil and water, food, education and healthcare. Africans did not merely fight to replace the white regime with a black man regime; it was more than that. They fought for aforementioned demands irrespective of who holds power, be it white or black, male or female does not really matter. What matters is the manner in which wealth is distributed or shared among the population within a territory. During colonialism, a few section appropriated the cake at the expense of the majority. The situation is more less the same today, we are living a colonial legacy and for South Africa (the most unequal society) in particular and Africa in general the Neo-liberal model of socio-economic development has actually created "two nations in one." You have one nation of Cape Town or Nairobi type and the other of Soweto or Kibera type within a territory claiming to be one nation. A nation is by no means groups of people within a defined political boundary but who differ in everything from where they live, what they eat, where they take their younger ones for school to where they go for medical checkup as if one group is in a "paradise" on earth while the other groups are muddling through the lake of fire (hardship). With enormous enrichment of natural resources, Africa still struggles to feed her population which is lower than China's (by 2013 estimates). The richest continent yet the poorest! What is wrong with Africa and what is to be done? Who is to do it?

While critiquing the President's State of the Nation address in parliament on June 2014, Malema told President Zuma that "he is extremely scared of white people; particularly the white monopoly capital and that he don't [*sic*] have what it takes to lead the struggle for economic emancipation of the black majority."<sup>2</sup> This has been Malema's policy -economic emancipation, and the formation of his party -Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), annotates this aspiration. The new movement is actually going back to the core principles of the Freedom Charter -free land to all landless people, living wages and shorter hours of work, and free and compulsory education. Before his release from jail, Nelson Mandela wrote a short letter to his comrade emphasizing his stand and ANC policy that "the nationalisation of the mines, banks and monopoly industries is the policy of the ANC, and the change or modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable. Black economic

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empowerment is a goal we fully support and encourage.”<sup>3</sup> However, neither Mandela nor ANC have lived up this promise. It has become the opposite and indeed inconceivable. Many are still wandering as what had happened to ANC when it came to power in 1994; what had happened at independence?

Here is an African problem –self-emancipation. In the Neoliberal era, the state capture discourse finds more relevance in Africa than in anywhere else. State capture refers to the capacity of firms to shape and affect formation of the basic rules of the game (i.e. laws, regulations and decrees) through private payment to public officials and politicians. (Hellman et al, 2000). African ‘leaders’ are extremely scared of monopoly capital; no one dares to confront the giants Multinational Corporations (MNCs) partly because they are afraid and partly because they are a part of. South Africa’s independence came at a time when the African state was being redefined (adjusted); the language of reforms under the Structural Adjustment package was a dominant discourse in all governance areas. Mining codes were being reviewed, budget cuts preached by IMF, downsizing the public sector or to sum up getting the state out of the economy. It was during this period a new democracy was born. Under this context, an independent post-apartheid South Africa was ought to liberalize –get the state out of the mines, industries and banks. This meant abandoning the Freedom Charter! This is what exactly happened in 1994, ANC abandoned her policy. It was during the same decade (Adjustment decade) that *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) in Tanzania officially abandoned the Arusha Declaration which was replaced by the so-called Zanzibar declaration of 1991. The latter was designed to please those who were promoting the reforms. Addressing elders ‘*wazee wa CCM*’ in Dar es Salaam on 25 February 1991 about the party decision to adopt the Zanzibar declaration, the then party chairman and former president of Tanzania, Ali Hassan Mwinyi trying to justify the new road to Neoliberalism said (quoting from the Quran) “*likulli ajal in kitabu*” i.e. “to every age its book” (Ally et al, 2013). According to him, Arusha Declaration was relevant for the sixties not the nineties and that Tanzania had to modify her policy on Ujamaa and self-reliance in order to be able to “catch-up.” In the Neoliberal age political power is fused with corporate, and public officials (presidents, ministers) simply become the public relation officers of the bourgeois class. In this context a state is no longer a custodian of people’s rights and therefore the latter are betrayed, and remain insecure and defenseless. Chomsky (2000) captures it more clearly, viewing Neoliberalism as “a particular form of globalization that has been instituted by state and corporate power, with

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primacy given to the rights of investors, financial institutions and so on, and with people being incidental." One does not need to be a Marxist to understand this, he or she just needs to ask what happened with the South African government when it allowed its security forces to open fire to the Marikana mineworkers who were striking for better working conditions (promise of the Freedom Charter); or where President Jonathan of Nigeria was when more than 200 school girls were abducted by Boko Haram. Of course, the president was at the prestigious Transcorp Hilton hotel in Abuja attending the World Economic Forum (WEF) organized by those with economic might "the developers." He was busy with the lectures provided to him by "experts" on how to create conducive environment for foreign investment in Nigeria.

Business and profit take primacy over people's life, which is actually the opposite of the old African proverb that "the chief rules over people, not land." This scenario is all over across the continent; those with capital have become the sole decision makers; they are called investors "development partners" "technical experts" and are conferred all necessary immunities to attract them to develop us! Development is no longer people driven neither owned by them. The study conducted by Kweka to examine how decision to give land to foreign investors for biofuels in four districts in Tanzania shows that the villagers were ignored, bypassed and cheated on the process and when they demanded accountability were silenced by state authorities, "villagers pointed out that power was used to silence them and their complaints. They gave an example of how a village leader put in a lock-up by a district leader for talking over the radio about what the investor had done to the village, and for seeking help with the contract from his friend who is a lawyer. Thus, the villagers' freedom to talk and get knowledge on issues that are facing them is also denied in the process of decision making" (Kweka, 2011).

The better development ideas are to be imported from Europe, America and of course from the World Bank 'the World Knowledge Bank' the so called technical experts are to come from there, but one could be curious to ask a question, what is the use of our universities? Why do we take people to school if their education cannot be utilized to solve our problems? With state capture a state becomes like a robot that can do nothing without command from an external force. This is a sad reality confronting Africa. If you are robbed of your ability to think for yourself then you cease to be rational and indeed you become captive. Mark Hobart eloquently argue that "what is

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signally absent in most public discussion of development are the ways in which the knowledge of the peoples being developed are ignored or treated as mere obstacles to rational progress. In order for them to be able to progress, these people have first to be constituted as 'underdeveloped' and ignorant. Conversely, without such underdevelopment and ignorance, the west would not be developed and possess knowledge" (Hobart, 1993).

Of all rights the right to think and freedom to make your own mistakes is a fundamental right. This right is taken and that is why our captives are extremely scared of monopoly capital. What Malema and EFF are telling the people of Africa particularly the youth who are unemployed or humiliated by monopoly capital is that there is a need to transform the existing socio-economic relations, to redefine mining codes and land policies in favour of African peasants and poor workers. This is not a South African concern; it is a continental call. Conventionally, some may view this narrowly as just Malema's project on the way up the ladder, the rise of another opportunistic politician. Well, this may be the part of the story but is important to have a broader look on this and try to be sober enough to know that neither Malema nor anyone else can claim to have ownership of these noble ideas of freedom, justice and equality. It is from this understanding that this article focuses not on the person of Malema but on the issues raised on the belief that ideas do have consequences.

By the power of ideas the reformers turned Europe upside down in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as a car's engine people sometimes just need a starter for a desired locomotion (social change). The young people in the continent are fed up and they are desperately seeking for a new path, an alternative to the neoliberal policies. Both the Jasmine revolution in Tunisia and face-book revolution in Egypt that swept across North Africa are substantiation of what the emerging fearless generation can do if mobilized. So to speak, new, more energetic and dynamic social movements are on the rise in the continent (Kamata, 2013). People on the ground are disappointed and they feel that their governments have become increasingly remote, inaccessible, and unresponsive to their needs. In Tanzania for example, citizens doubt the statistics of economic growth told repeatedly by the president at the end of almost every public speech he deliver. The economy growing by 6% to 7% yet house rents are increasingly higher, food prices going up from time to time and unemployment is a critical problem. Non-inclusive growth increases income inequality and widen the gap between the haves and have not since the policies in place promote growth on one side and

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unemployment (and inflation) on the other side. This is how capitalism functions (accumulation by dispossession) (Moshi, 2010). The Arab Spring was caused by the same concerns (unemployment, food insecurity). As stated earlier, food insecurity is a serious problem in Africa and with increasing trends of land grab for biofuel production, this problem will further increase.

What can be done and who can do it? Mugabe took bold decisions to reform land tenure in Zimbabwe where 80% of the productive land was under control of the minority. His decision had costs to him and his people but he did what ought to be done anyway. Many cannot do that; they are afraid to bear the consequences of being criticized, demonized or isolated by the West. However, this does not mean that this is impossible. I like history because we learn from the past success, mistakes and failures. History helps us understand the present and foresee the future, it is not just a record of past events and dates; it is about people struggling for good. The history of my continent is a struggle against slavery, colonialism, apartheid and imperialism on all its forms. The good news is that most if not all of these were defeated by the oppressed people since good shall often overcome evil. Our history is an inspiration that gives us strength, energize us and encourage us to continue on with our struggle for complete independence and true freedom.

The agenda pushed forward by Malema is the continent's agenda and I am sure that we shall experience the same in several African countries, Tanzania included because what do you expect when you have thousands of jobless graduates and poor workers who remain poor no matter how harder they work. A Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire and that sparked of unexpected revolution. Youth are zealous and if the system in place does not give them opportunities to release their potentials they will fight that system either by underground means (committing various 'crimes') or by marching to public squares as it is happening in various cities in Africa and around the globe. As I write this article, the EFF replica -Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF) is announced in Namibia with the same policy as that of South Africa. Its founders are also advocating preserving African culture by opposing homosexuality which is already criminalized in Uganda. I find myself being optimistic on these new developments because things that bring the African people together are raised and publicized. Resources and culture are what constitute man's history. Africa means our culture and our resources. The South African EFF is influenced by Mugabe's ZANU -PF, the struggle of Zimbabwe's people to own their land and mines. "The fall apart"



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is coming together! These movements are critical for awareness creation; perhaps people (even the so-called leaders) do not know the really enemy. It is absurd to blame peasants, *Mama Ntilies* and *Machingas* for not paying taxes while knowing that the major taxes in this country (Tanzania) namely Pay As You Earn (PAYE) and Value Added Tax (VAT) burden of 18% is paid by workers and everyone else respectively irrespective of their ability to pay. The untouchable investors are provided with tax exemptions and holidays as the result the government loses USD 614,634 annually. Africa is busy attracting and pleasing investors (international entrepreneurs) at all costs! The amount would have been used to build teachers' houses in two councils: the Tanzanian national budget for the fiscal year 2014/2015 allocated 500 million Tanzanian shillings (equivalent to USD 304,506) to each of the selected 40 councils for construction of the school teachers' houses.

For these trends a rethinking is a necessity, surfeit and hunger cannot coexist. People will and of course have begun to match against negligence, inequality, injustice, and hopelessness. People backing Malema and EFF directly or indirectly can justify this. Winning 25 seats in the national parliament equivalent to 6.25% of the popular vote in less than ten months after its registration as a political party is but a tremendous triumph. In May 2014 general election, EFF ranked third after ANC and AD. This is not mere populism but substance of the issues preached by emerging fearless young men and women make a lot of sense to the African people who are witnessing a second scramble for their resources. On 30 March 2012 Malema delivered a centenary lecture at Wits University and the great university hall was filled to capacity and groups of students were directed to the foyer where they could watch proceedings through monitors mounted to the walls. Supporters danced and sang struggle songs.<sup>4</sup> The same scenario happens once annually at the iconic Nkrumah Hall at the University of Dar es Salaam during Nyerere's intellectual festival week where prominent personalities/scholars deliver revolutionary lectures followed by a few days of debates and discussions. The Nyerere's Pan-African week attracts a massive number of university students and sometimes for some reasons these students just like Wits' students find themselves singing '*Kama sio juhudi zako Nyerere*' reckoning Mwalimu's efforts and the egalitarian policies this country pursued from 1967 to the late 1980s when his successors surrendered to the Neoliberal bandits. Fanon's fundamental question is left unreciprocated: "The fundamental duel which seemed to be that between colonialism and anticolonialism, and indeed between capitalism and socialism, is already losing some of its importance. What counts today, the

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question which is looming on the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth. Humanity must reply to this question, or be shaken to pieces by it" (Fanon, 1963).

The rising political activism and radicalism in the continent is just an affirmation of Fanon's prophecy that there is only two options, either to redistribute wealth or accept to confront fear, terror and extremism "be shaken to pieces." From September 11 attacks at the world capitalist centre to the September 21 (2013) Wastegate attacks in the East African capitalist hub, it is obvious that we have chosen the second option and that it does not make any sense to pretend fighting it ('the war on terror').

#### **Conclusion**

Julius Malema is a threat to some individuals and so the writings of this type. However, this is the very purpose of this piece, to upset the Neoliberal bandits and their cohorts. They were wrong, they were deceived and are still being deceived to embrace the Neoliberal policies with all slaughter they have caused to our economies and into the livelihoods of our people who are now permanently labelled "lazy and ignorant" for the purposes of keeping the development and civilization business going as usual. Submitting his manuscript of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* to the then Tanzania Publishing House for publication, the renowned scholar, Walter Rodney (brother to the University of Dar es Salaam and Africa) told the editor that "his purpose will be to upset and not please the deans of African history in London and Wisconsin."<sup>5</sup> Surely, Africa needs revolutionary scholars (who can dare to commit class suicide and align with the working people) and defiant youth to walk Malema's talk, to not just upset but uproot the class in question, to let the people speak, think independently, develop themselves, and be themselves.

#### **Notes**

1. African National Congress National Disciplinary Committee Public Announcement on the Disciplinary hearings of: Floyd Shivambu, Julius Malema, Sindiso Magaqa. Luthuli House, Johannesburg 29 February 2012.
2. News24 (June 18, 2014) Malema: Zuma Scared of White People.

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3. *Times* (January 26, 1990) "ANC Leader Affirms Support for State Control of Industry," London.
4. News24 (April 2, 2014) Zuma traumatize ANC.
5. Quoted in *Chemchemi*, April 2011 Issue No.4

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