

## **Apartheid on two continents**

Mats Svensson

**We all have a common history that crosses borders in terms of both country and time. Together with black and white in South Africa we acted forcefully, taking a stand against apartheid and defining the evil and the good. We became part of a historic decision. A decision that was made by an earlier generation and led to that many today can feel pride over our common history.**

**Today we can unfortunately read analytical reports showing that the evil remains in other parts of the world. Today we should therefore again react forcefully when this appears, when it becomes visible. Tor Sellström has in his work documented what Sweden did to fight apartheid in southern Africa. South African researchers have now found signs of apartheid in Palestine. But how do we use this knowledge? How does the world react?**

Most surfaces are covered with post-it's; yellow, green and pink. Each post-it has its place. Not carelessly posted on the wall but consciously placed with an exact distance to the rest. I look around, see a pattern but do not understand all the codes. Countries, persons, events, years, money.

The shelves are covered with books and folders. Alphabetized, based on a library structure but with the artist's own codes. Everything in its place, always in the right place. I am actually not allowed in here, no one is allowed in. Tor Sellström does not want anyone to mess anything up, change anything, move a book, a paper, a green post-it, a pen or a message.

Tor is the artist, the artist who paints a painting, an endless painting, a painting in text, art in words. Who paints to make us understand, remember, to never forgot what just was.

During the days he composes what has been thought during the night. The art of work took seven years to make. It began as a sketch in broad brush strokes. Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mocambique, Lesotho, Swaziland, South Africa. Seven years in a basement. In a dark room behind a closed door. Seven years, day in and day out. Weekday

as holiday, day as night, hour by hour. The work of art becomes larger, longer, broader and higher. Color is added to color, scraped off, new shade, words are added to words.

No one is forgotten. Everyone who was there, the renowned as the unknown, gets their place. The smallest organization as well as the large ones are referenced. Everyone gets a value, their own value. The palette contains all colors, even colors that do not exist.

Then I could see how the work of art was almost ready. Six years were completed, just one year remained. The first book, *"Sweden and National Liberation Southern Africa, I Formation of a popular opinion 1950-1970"* had just come out, 540 pages. Tor was starting to become impatient. The round the clock work, the loneliness, the sleeplessness, the constant search for facts began to take out their right. It was as if the struggle, what he described, the fight against apartheid, became part of Tor's inner struggle. It came to be about the large political currents but also about the artist's own inner storms. Tor waits anxiously to complete the last work of art with the subtitle, *"Solidarity and assistance 1970-1999."* (912 pages)

Tor writes about the struggle against apartheid and about everyone who supported the resistance. Everyone who did not wait for someone else to act, everyone who did not wait for something to over time disappear into the sand. No, the work of art describes everyone who decided that the evil must have an end, that the evil could not be handed over to the next generation.

The work of art became large since the portrayed were many and the events countless. Most of the churches participated in the struggle, but not all. Most of the political parties were there to break the grasp of evil, but not all. Many companies acted with force, but not all. In this work of art, however, all sides are included, no one has been passed over. We should not be able to forget.

Through Tor's work, we have an encyclopedia over apartheid and colonialism in our hand. Who acted and how. You can also decipher who did not act and why some stood by the side. Three volumes, two thousand pages of text with thousands of footnotes. Words, lines, pages with an unambiguous message. A message to us that as Swedes we should be proud, that we should not forget and at the same time the artist requests us to always, in each time, in each place, resist all forms of colonialism and apartheid.

I lived in Shuafat in East Jerusalem when I finished reading the last volume, the dense, ungainly, tedious volume. Have often told Tor that if someone says he has read all of the volumes he can assume that the person is lying. Thousands of pages of scholarly text just becomes too strenuous. But Jerusalem, the place where I found myself in May 2009, gave me strength. I read about something that had been, that I for long had tried to understand but that is also still going on. Then and now merged and became one.

I walked along the wall, from the south to the north. 520 km long it winds through Palestinian villages, destroyed olive groves, pasture lands. It winds through a rolling landscape, cutting off roads and paths and precluding the continuation of a social and economic life. When it is completed, another 200 km will have been built. In total, when the building of destruction is ready, Israel can boast with 720 km of separation, of killed dreams, killed hopes, destroyed lives.

It is being built on Palestinian land, on occupied territory, to steal land, to protect illegal settlers. The thousands of visitors who every year visit the holy land, who walk in the footsteps of Jesus could see the afflicted, listen to the voices, hear the stories. The visits could give a unique possibility to understand the ordinary and commonplace oppression. Unfortunately the visits are often aimed at something else, something that happened long ago. Focused on the time when the area was occupied by the Romans unlike today when the occupation power is called Israel.

And then in May 2009 I was invited to a report launching in Ramallah. The report was called "*Occupation, Colonialism, Apartheid? A re-assessment of Israel's practices in the occupied Palestinian territories under international law. Cape Town, South Africa, May 2009.*" I felt both happiness and sorrow when I got the report in my hand. Happiness that somebody dared to begin telling the truth but also sorrow over my own silence. That I had hid behind my own cowardice, my own lie, that I had not been able to see what during many years had appeared so clearly. The truth on paper came from Cape Town.

If somebody wants to try to understand apartheid, colonialism, you should seek yourself to South Africa. Rent a car, go out to Mamelody, sit at a Shibusha or in a small jazz club. Listen to the music and ask the questions. Here you can trust in that your questions will get answered. If there is anything a South African understands, it is apartheid. As the mother has breast fed her child the child has simultaneously received apartheid's whole system. As a Swede, I can never understand this. What recently happened was too disgusting and at the same time too consistent in its science. But this also implies that researchers in South Africa see, know and perceive if there are tendencies of apartheid and colonialism elsewhere.

During my years in Palestine I worked for short periods close to persons who were near President Mbeki and the Mandela couple. We worked in the Gaza Strip. Spoke to the fractions. Laughed and cried together with Hamas and Fatah. Often my South African colleagues cried out that apartheid in South Africa was a picnic compared to the West Bank and Gaza. This comparison was something that a South African often repeated verbally. What now was new was that I held in my hand a scientific report about the same thing, which processed what I so clearly felt.

After 15 months of research, Human Sciences Research Council, Cape Town, declares that what is happening in Palestine is not only occupation but also colonialism and apartheid.

There are similarities and differences between this report and Tor's books. They are both based on an extensive factual basis, not feelings. At the same time, there is a decisive difference. Tor documents who did something, how he did this and why. In the report from South Africa about the situation in Palestine, the international community is not an important actor. The international community is politically silent and there is little to report on. The authors of the report have instead chosen to analyze concepts such as colonialism and apartheid and do this in relation to legality. The books and the report consist of research at its best. Research with an address, research that means that we need to take a position, must judge, value and as humans react.

Colonialism and apartheid are expressions that we within humanity have decided to fight. They are both crimes against fundamental human rights. Each state has a legal responsibility to the international community to not be an active part of apartheid or colonialism. In accordance with this, each state has a responsibility to cooperate to end all forms of colonialism and apartheid, not recognize a form of action which has its origin in colonialism or apartheid, and not support a country committing these crimes. Sweden also stands behind this undertaking. It has been manifested under the common notion of international law.

After long periods of colonialism under which different European countries were the oppressing party and the poor in Asia, Africa and Latin America the oppressed, it became finally clear that this must be fought. Each Swede with principles of law as a guiding star stood behind this and came to support different liberation struggles around the world. In the same way, a clear understanding of Apartheid as part of the utmost evil was formed. Sweden was according to Tor the country which at an early stage took a clear position against apartheid and came to play an important role in this struggle. Many in Sweden could therefore feel happiness, joy and pride when we got to see Mandela walk out of prison after 27 years. The "terrorist" had had redress and we though apartheid had been forever exterminated.

However, Human Sciences Research Council shows that apartheid remains. Professor John Dugard was during several years the UN special rapporteur for Palestine in the UN Human Rights Council. In his final report in January 2007, he poses the following question to the international community: "What are the legal consequences of a regime of prolonged occupation with features of colonialism and apartheid for the occupied people, the Occupying Power and third States?" Third part in this case includes Sweden.

It is this question which is the starting point for the report about occupation, colonialism and apartheid. But this time we are not in southern Africa because the report places Israel under the looking glass. The authors are clear. After 15 months of intense research, they declare that the similarities between apartheid in South Africa and today's politics in Israel are many. The state Israel is guilty of colonialism as well as apartheid. The ones who have participated in the commission of the report come from different institutes in South Africa, England, Israel and Palestine.

Apartheid in South Africa had three starting points; to divide the population into groups based on race and give the white race preference in terms of rights, services and privileges. The second starting point was about dividing up the country into geographically segregated areas and transferring the population into these based on race. In addition, a person from one area could not access another area. The third prerequisite was a combination of security laws and rules created to oppress and suppress any resistance and which also strengthened a system of domination based on race.

The authors of the report consider that the Palestinian people live under a similar system. The three prerequisites are visible in the occupied territory. The system of privilege is extensive and well built, the geographically segregated areas clear and well established and the security laws are onesided and in place to among others preclude all forms of resistance, something each Palestinian is well aware of.

The South African report has been handed over to and read by every diplomat in Jerusalem, Ramallah or Tel Aviv. It is probably registered with most foreign ministries, including Sweden's. At the same time, each country with self-respect has long ago signed onto fighting apartheid in case its ugly face should surface. And now it surfaces. Researchers from South Africa with support from other countries do not hesitate.

South Africa therefore now aims the spotlight not only on Israel but also on each country within the European Union as well as the USA and others within the UN family. Researchers ask us all what the third party is going to do. Apartheid is back. Apartheid is near. A short plane ride away and you can again experience what we all thought had been buried forever. We are requested to take a stand and dare walk out on the stage and have our voice heard.

Israel bears the main responsibility to eradicate the crime it has itself created. This can be done by removing the structures and institutions that have led to apartheid and colonialism. There are also rules that demand compensation from Israel for the damage caused. Israel must also ensure that each individual in Palestine has the right to decide over his or her future, political belonging and economic and social development. For this to become possible, everyone living in Israel or within the occupied territory must be equal before the law.

In this work to ensure that each Palestinian can live freely, a third party, for example Sweden has an important voice and an important role. The international community demands in accordance with international law that also Sweden lives up to the common undertakings, to fight apartheid and colonialism in all its forms. South Africa has given us a baton and it is now therefore up to us to dare to pick it up, to begin to call a spade a spade.

---

### **Occupation, Colonialism, Apartheid?**

*A re-assessment of Israel's practices in the occupied  
Palestinian territories under international law*  
Human Sciences Research Council, HSRC  
May 2009, Cape Town, South Africa

### **Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa**

*Volume I: Formation of a popular opinion 1950-1970*  
Tor Sellström  
Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala 1999

### **Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa**

*Volume II: Solidarity and Assistance 1970-1994*  
Tor Sellström  
Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala 2002