

“About Dignity”.

(Trondheim, 3d of October 2009.)

Dear friends,

The summer of 2009, has now come to an end. I could not have helped but to notice what kind of clothes many young people have been wearing this summer. I have been very astonished by this. It does not matter whether it is in Berlin or in Stockholm, or in Trondheim for that matter. I see how fashion this year indeed suggest that people should wear ragged clothes. One should buy artfully torn expensive designer jeans. This surprises me. To tell you the truth, it affects me in a very unpleasant way. I ask myself if this kind of fashion is an expression of cynicism, childishness, ignorance, brutal commercial force, or a combination of all of it.

And it is not only ignorant and insecure teenagers who are tempted and fooled to buy these clothes. I have also seen people wear these miserable clothes, who normally regard themselves as intellectuals, experienced in the ways of the world. Even the hosts of serious talk shows on TV. An equally sad example.

My experience, and I have spent many years in different parts of the world, but primarily on the African continent, tells me one thing about clothes: poor people do anything to be clean and dressed properly. They are ashamed if they are forced to wear ragged clothes.

I will give you an example. On one occasion, almost twenty years ago, I visited the northern parts of Mocambique on one occasion. Perhaps it is time for me to emphasize that I have lived for almost 25 years – part-time – in that country. What I tell you now happened in the middle of the 1980’s, when the country was suffering a brutal civil war, where the so-called “Bandidos Armados” – “armed bandits” attacked people all over the country. These bandits were an army of mercenaries controlled by the racist regime in Ian Smith’s South Rhodesia, and later the Apartheid regime in South Africa. It was a terrible war.

One day I walked along a trail in that northern part of Mocambique, heading towards a village. All of a sudden I saw a young man coming in my direction.

Perhaps he was twenty years old. He was hungry, his clothes were torn. He was one of the many victims of the ongoing war. Then I suddenly discovered something, which I will never forget for as long as I live. He had painted shoes on his feet. Instead of real shoes he had, by using the colours of the earth and different herbs, painted shoes on his feet, to keep and to defend his dignity. It is that young man I think of when I see these people today, all dressed up in ragged and expensive jeans. And I ask myself; who is it that really manages to keep their dignity.

Him or the people wearing the designer-jeans in rags?

Dignity, yes. Because that is what it is all about: dignity. Nothing else.

I told this story about the young man during one of the first meetings in the German President Köhler's seminars "Partnership for Africa". It was a chain of meetings where leaders from Africa together with young politicians and intellectuals from all over Europe and Africa, could meet and discuss how to increase and improve the cooperation between our two continents. Afterwards the former President of South Africa, Mr Thabo Mbeki came up to me and said: - That is exactly how it is. You cannot take away a person's dignity, no matter how bad the situation is.

So, when I look at all the people wearing designer jeans this summer, I think what is necessary to think: there is still a long road ahead of us before we have created global decency. Those who are rich and those who are poor share the same world. No doubt about that. But at the same time, they don't. The poor want to look clean and proper, while greedy commercial interests want to tempt and fool us into buying designed rags. Very much in the same way that different TV-companies all over the world want us to spend our Saturday nights watching game shows for adults – in Sweden they call it "Robinson" – where the participants "play starvation". I find this totally despicable. An undignified disgrace. Thus, we live in a world where ignorance and cynical commercial interests have great power. And I cannot help to think that it is exactly the way it always has been during my entire life. An ongoing struggle for man's dignity.

I was born in 1948. In Sweden, a country, which had managed to stay out of the last great World War. I guess you could say that I was very fortunate already from the beginning. Sweden was not in ashes, there were clothes to wear, food to eat and a school where I could learn how to read and write. Sweden, as a nation, would also be very much ahead economically since our industries were not destroyed when the rest of Europe lay in ruins.

At that time Sweden had not experienced war in about 130 years. Therefore I could expect to live in a country where I would not have to starve nor be drafted as a young soldier to participate in some senseless war. And I have never starved. Except when I chose to put myself in situations where I would not have money enough to buy food. When I was very young I went to Paris – that is what you did in the 50's and the 60's if you wanted to become a writer. Then, in the 60's, there were times when I went to bed hungry or picked up cigarette stubs from the streets of Paris. But I always had the possibility to return to Sweden. Thus, starvation was never real to me.

Sweden has for the last 50 years been a sort of sacred haven in the world. Righteous wars of liberation and unrighteous wars of aggression have taken place in other parts of the world. To tormented, desperate people it would have been a grace to come to a country like Sweden, far away from war, poverty and misery. I always try to imagine that this grace was given to me for free. As you all know you do not choose your parents, or when and where you are born. You could simply say that I was lucky.

However, that does not mean that poverty was completely unknown to me when I grew up. I lived in the inner parts in the north of Sweden, in Härjedalen, and I do remember that in the middle of the 50's there were some really poor people who lived there. They had food and a roof over their heads, but not much else. Their clothes were ragged, the abuse of alcohol was quite frequent and the situation in school for their children was hard. One of my earliest memories is indeed this. To see the social and economic differences between people. And that has continued. At that time in the country where I grew up and later in life in Africa, where I have lived for many years. We live in an unfair world and in unfair times. And it has been like that for as long as I can remember.

But it is not for me to stand here and try to make myself look better than I am. Although I became aware of these tangible differences when I was very young, it was not until I became 15 or 16 that I realised that I deliberately had to decide what to do with that knowledge.

One memory stands out. 1961, when I was 13 years old I participated in my first protest march. We walked with banners and placards. We protested against buying oranges from the racist regime in South Africa. Now, almost 50 years have passed. Since that time I do not know how many political manifestations I have been part of. But that is not important. What is important is the meaning of solidarity, the one and only ideology that has been essential in my life. A lot of people believe that solidarity is solely about an emotional commitment. One is upset about the atrocities committed against Palestinians in Israel or one is upset

about the dead refugees floating ashore on the coasts of Europe. Or perhaps something else. When it comes to taking action in the name of solidarity that feeling of indignation indeed plays a very important part. But more important still is the understanding that solidarity first and foremost is a question of reason. It makes perfect sense, in the name of humanity, to declare one's feeling of solidarity. Those who are egoistic, those who declare solidarity old fashioned and of no importance to the world today, they are the ones that are stupid.

The very foundation of solidarity is always the understanding that this is not about "us" and "them". It is about us, all of us. There is no better way of putting it than this: If I want my children to have a reasonable future in a just and decent world, I should also want other children to share their possibilities. As I mentioned, that is the very foundation of solidarity. And if that is the case, that I am right when I talk about solidarity as the only viable tool with which we can make the world a better place, I should also say something about all the madness that we are surrounded by today.

When people ask me which problem it is the hardest problem to find a solution for in the country in Africa that I am most familiar with, Mocambique, my answer is always the same: There is only one problem in that country, and that is poverty. All other problems can be and must be related to poverty. Lack of education, unemployment, AIDS, criminality; they are all profoundly connected to poverty. And that means, if we interpret history correctly, that we, the people living in our western part of the world, to a very high extent, are responsible for the situation and the way things are in Africa. And we are responsible in the name of colonialism and racism.

I could stand here today and tell you that Mocambique is a poor country. But really that is not true. Mocambique is a rich country that has been made poor. Mocambique has been **impoverished**. Through colonialism, and through the pillaging that the African continent has been a victim of over the course of history. Hence, the state in which we find the continent today is an **abnormal** state. I am convinced that a country like Mocambique, to use an example that we are now familiar with, could have a very bright future if the development of the country will be supported by peace, foreign aid and progress. If I could return to Mocambique in 50 years from now, if only for a day or for an hour or for a minute, it is my strong belief that I would discover a country where people lead a good life. A dignified life.

Without peace nothing is possible. I remember when the peace treaty finally was signed in the beginning of the 90's between the armed bandits and the legal government Frelimo in Mocambique. All those years when the country was

marked by civil war were over and suddenly almost everyone in Maputo, the capital of Mocambique, started painting their houses. People who do not feel hope for the future do not paint their houses. Would you if you had doubts about the peaceful development in your country? But when peace at last had been secured – peace is never something you get for free – people also started to believe in the future.

During the course of 30 years Mocambique had fought two wars. The first one was a just war, the war of liberation from Portugal who refused to acknowledge their former colonies' demands of the freedom they were entitled to. That war was completely unnecessary. The Portuguese could have understood "For whom the bell tolls", to quote Hemingway. However, it was through this unnecessary war in the African colonies that dictatorship in Portugal could be overthrown. It is safe to say that the Africans helped the Portuguese to liberate themselves, while they also won their own war.

In the large cemetery in Lhanguene in Maputo, it is possible to see the endless rows of white crosses. There rest the young Portuguese men, often only 18 year old boys, who was shipped across the ocean to fight a war in the African colonies that they never really understood. I can imagine when I stand there and see all the tombstones of those who died in vain, that they, in some way, are related to all the young men, which Erich Maria Remarque wrote about in his novel "All Quiet on the Western Front". They could stand on separate shores on the river of death, waving to each other. Or the boys in Vietnam, or Iraq or, today, in Afghanistan.

Their death was not dignified. Their dignity was stolen from them while they tried to kill other people, while they tried to take away their dreams – and their dignity.

The question of war and peace and dignity has always been intimately connected with art. More than 2000 years ago Aristophanes wrote a play about war and peace, which he called "Lysistrata". We are all familiar with the plot; the women go on an erotic strike to force their men to stop killing each other. It is a play that still carries a meaning for us today. We played it at Teatro Avenida in Maputo during the civil war. I think it was 1991. A text which is more than 2000 years old still begs us to be reasonable and says: A war of aggression or to conquer is always wrong. Moreover, Aristophanes says that women give birth to children and thus, never, never start a war.

Much later the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy wrote "War and Peace". He too wrote about the madness of man's perception of war as something noble, when

in fact it renders nothing but misery. Gunther Grass wrote “The Tin Drum”, also a novel arguing against war, but in a different way. And so did the Finnish writer Väinö Linna in his astounding novel “The Unknown Soldier”.

Today, in the year of 2009, there are many different wars going on in the world. In Iraq and Afghanistan wars are fought under the leadership of the United States. To me these wars are wars of aggression and therefore unjust. You cannot and you must not fight terror with terror. In the case of Iraq we now know that what was claimed as the very reason for the war, Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, simply was not true. CIA and other American intelligence agencies looked the world in the eyes and lied straight into its face. Nor can the war in Afghanistan be justified. It is my utter belief that the only way to achieve something in these two cases is through an ongoing and intense dialogue. And that would mean that there would be no need for young men and women being flown home in black plastic body bags.

The great Turkish writer Yasar Kemal once said “what will finally save mankind is her capacity for dialogue. Her capacity to talk and to listen. The very day we lose that capacity the very foundation of our humanism will be lost”.

To me he is right. We are “Homo Narrans” – the “story telling creature”. It is our language, our capacity to analyze, to talk and to listen, and the fact that we are aware of our own mortality, which make us the unique creatures that we are. My cat cannot sit down with other cats and discuss politics and conflicts. But that is exactly what we can.

We are the unique animal of storytelling and storylistening.

I have so far in this short speech talked about righteous and unrighteous wars. I firmly believe that some of you here today do not agree with me. Probably due to pacifistic ideals that denounces every war as wrong and unnecessary. Well, we do not have to start a war simply because we disagree. Instead we can have a discussion. To me it is of course very important, even decisive, to try to avoid violence, no matter what the context. But sometimes it is not possible.

During the fight against Apartheid in South Africa, Nelson Mandela and ANC went to great efforts before finally realising that they would have to use armed force. After the fall of the Apartheid regime a truth and reconciliation commission was assembled to prevent the occurrence of an increasing circle of violence in the name of vengeance in the new South Africa. This very example and the two wars I have previously mentioned tell us the importance of

supporting and demanding a patient dialogue in a conflict.

Even though I sometimes, in the darkest hour of the night, and I am sure that I share these feelings with many of you here today, have my doubts about the future of the world and humanity, I am positive about this: man is a rational and reasonable creature. Even though we seem to live in an unreasonable world it is not too late for us to make a change. The day we really decide to make that change and start creating the righteous world that it is still possible for us to have, there will hardly be a need for black plastic bags.

There will always be conflict where there are human beings. To believe in the opposite would be nothing but an illusion. But there is nothing that says that we cannot improve and refine the tools we have to solve these conflicts.

Today it is 40 years since I arrived in Africa for the first time. And it is more than 20 years since I decided that I should spend approximately six months each year in Mocambique. Every time I return to Europe after spending a longer or shorter time in Africa, I get upset and angry. What makes me upset is the image of the African continent that is given to us, presented to us, in the media. Media tells us everything about how Africans die but nothing about how they live. The image in media is based on half lies, half truths. Moreover it is an image filled with contempt. What is even more tragic is that it is not only one side of what is portrayed that is not true, but more or less every side. Let me give you a couple of examples.

There is much talk about the amount of foreign aid that is given to the African continent every year. There we must stop for a moment. Much money, we say. Well, then, let us try to find out how much money we are really talking about. I will make a comparison. This year, 2009, it is exactly 20 years since the Berlin wall was crushed. In the 20 years since that moment, the former West Germany has transferred gigantic economic resources to the former East Germany. During these 20 years, it is the same amount of money as the one given to African countries in foreign aid from European countries in the same period of time. So I think it is necessary to ask how much money it really is about. Frankly, our aid is a drop in the ocean. But the media keep telling us something completely different.

Another issue that is constantly discussed, and in some way it seems to be a favourite topic in Western mass media, is the question about corruption. Almost on a daily basis you can read about the level of corruption in Africa; all the politicians that are corrupt, all about the fact that a majority of the foreign aid ends up in the many pockets of dirty politicians. It is even possible to hear jokes

about this. One person asks the question: “Do you know which country, that receives the largest amount of foreign aid?” And then the answer that it is supposed to be Switzerland. Large amount of foreign aid finds its way into the private accounts of African politicians in Swiss banks.

One thing is very important to remember when you talk about corruption. It takes two hands for corruption to exist. There is a need for a hand that receives but there is an equal need for a hand that gives. If you then do the most elementary thing, asking yourself the Watergate question: “follow the money”, where do you end up? Naturally you will end up in the Western world, not only in Europe but also in the US. And perhaps not only in the Western world but also, in these days, in China and in India. Today those countries also are the home of large corporations who are willing to look the other way when it comes to corruption.

So if one should talk frankly about corruption it is of the essence to admit that for corruption to exist it takes two hands; our own hand as well as the African one.

Another issue, which is impossible for me as a writer to ignore, is the issue of the level of education on the African continent. And not only there but in the entire developing world, what we know as the third world. I mean that it is a disgrace to us all that in the year of 2009, millions of children, are thrown out in life without having the most basic tools of knowledge; to be able to read and write and some mathematics. And it is a disgrace to us all that we have not solved this problem already; it should have been done yesterday. And it could have been done yesterday. We simply do not care about it.

How much would it then cost to see to it that every child learns how to read and write? Well, there have been some calculations made. Those calculations are true and they tell us the following: if you want every child in the world to go to school and to learn to read and write it would cost the same amount the Western world spends on pet food every year. I am not saying that we should stop buying food for our cats and dogs, or our guinea pigs and guppies. All I am saying is that we need to understand the amount of money we are not willing to spend. To provide these children with the basic dignity that is based upon the knowledge of reading and writing.

Now I want talk about children from another point of view. In the capital of Mocambique, Maputo, there are a lot of children living on the streets. All these street children have their own story to tell. There are children ending up on the streets because their families have been shattered, due to poverty or due to the

civil war, which ended almost 15 years ago. Also, and I have to mention this, there are street children who live on the streets because they prefer it to the unbearable conditions they have at home.

Street children certainly do not have any reason to trust an adult. Some years ago I used to go to a restaurant in the centre of Maputo. Outside this restaurant there were some boys living on the streets, who looked after the cars. There were six or seven of them, and after a year or two they and I had developed what could be called a trusting relationship. Normally street children are in the habit of lying. They give you the answer they think you want; they give you the answer, which might provide them with some extra coins for the service they offer. But, as I mentioned, we started to develop a more trusting relationship.

One time I asked them what they most of all wished for in life. Their answer surprised me.

I had imagined that they would say something like: they wished for a home; a mother; better food, or proper clothes, maybe the possibility to go to school. But each and every one of the boys, they were between 8 and 12 years old, said that what they most of all wished for in life was an id-card; papers of identification that showed that they were unique, that they were not replaceable. By having an id-card they could claim their basic dignity, that they were human beings and thus irreplaceable.

For my understanding of dignity that was decisive. Yes, it was maybe one of the most profound moments of my life. Dignity is a fundamental question for us as human beings. If we deprive children of their dignity, we deprive them of a large part of their lives.

As a matter of fact the poor children are not only deprived of knowledge, food and clothes, they are already from the beginning of their lives deprived of their dignity.

Dignity and respect always go hand in hand. Let me begin to talk to you about this, by telling you yet another story. A few nautical miles outside Maputo, in the Indian Ocean, there is an island called Inhaka. When I am in Mocambique and I can find the time, I travel to that island and spend a couple of days there. Some years ago I was sitting outside the bungalow I had rented. It was in the evening. Suddenly, through the darkness, I heard the sound of drums coming from a distance. Also, I could see some fires burning from where the sound of the drums came. I knew that there was a small village there and as I sat in the warm and gentle night listening to the drums I thought that

some sort of ritual was taking place.

Then I decided to go and see for myself. So I walked towards the sound of the drums and the fires burning in the night. And when I arrived I did see that indeed a kind of ritual was taking place. It was a thanksgiving-ceremony for the rain that had returned at last. Although I was a strange white man coming through the night, I was, as almost always in Africa, very well greeted. They gave me a chair and I sat there watching the women dance and the men beating the drums. It then occurred to me that I should tell these people who I was and where I came from. When the dancing stopped for a short while, I turned to an old woman who seemed to be the head of the village. At least she was the one conducting the ceremonial dance. I told her that I very much wanted to tell everyone who I was and where I came from. She was very excited about this and by screaming something I did not understand, she had, in just a few seconds, gathered the entire village in a semi circle, surrounding me. I then started to tell them my name and where I came from in Portuguese. But the old woman interrupted me and then she said something that I will never forget for as long as I live. She said: "If you really, from the bottom of your heart, want us to understand who you are or where you come from, you have to dance for us". I can tell you that that was not exactly what I had had in mind. Because God knows that I am not a dancer and I have never dreamt of becoming a Michael Jackson in a different life. But what was I supposed to do? I could not leave. That would have been too conceited. So in some helpless effort of desperation I made some very awkward moves, trying to feel the beat of the drums, and stopped as quickly as I possibly could. Everything became absolutely quiet and the women looked at me, their mouths wide open. After a moment of silence the old woman said something that I, too, will not forget for as long as I live. She said: "Well, after having seen you dance we cannot, even in our wildest imagination, guess who you are or where you come from. But I am sure it is not your fault, it's ours".

Why do I tell this story? Well, simply because it is about language. It is about the fact that we always have to remember that language is not just something that goes from my mouth and into your ears; or from a page in a book and into your brains. Because language can be so much more. For those people, on the island of Inhaka, language and dignity, language and respect, were intimately associated with each other. To them it was not possible to take a man seriously, to be respectful of where that person came from, if they could not see that man use the language of dance. Nor could they know who I was if I did not dance. I think it is very important to remind ourselves that dignity and respect and different expressions of dignity and respect can come in many forms.

Dear friends, I have until this point spoken to you about dignity and respect. I have talked about dignity and identity and I have talked about dignity and language. But I would also like to talk to you about dignity and democracy, because dignity and democracy are defined by each other as well as being a condition for each other. Every human being, because of her dignity, is irreplaceable, and he or she has the same value as anyone else. By acknowledging that we are approaching the very definition of democracy. Everyone's equal right, everyone's equal value and that everyone has the right to vote.

About 15 years ago the first democratic elections were to be held in Mocambique. It was the first time more than one political party would be represented. Before that election took place, there were a lot of discussions. I have been told a story, that is absolutely true, about an old man, an old farmer, who, during a meeting in the countryside with people in a village, had asked a question. Before I describe his question, I will tell you a bit about why they had that meeting. Those present were being informed about how the elections would proceed. How everyone could cast his or her vote freely and that no one had the right to try to influence anyone. Furthermore the women were specifically told that no man had the right to try and influence them, something, which was quite hard for most men present to grasp. Finally they were instructed how they should place their vote in a ballot box.

Then, after that, this old man rises and asks his question. It is to him a very serious question. He asks in what way he is supposed to approach the ballot box. Should he walk up to it or should he pay his respect by crawling on his knees? Only a fool would laugh at such a question. That is, if one knows anything about how a decision is reached in Africa, by tradition. The decision is normally reached by everyone gathering under a tree and then they talk and talk until everyone has agreed, and it is also quite common that people kneel in front of a person, not to show that he is subordinate but to pay his respect. The person sent to inform the farmers explained that everyone showed the same respect by walking up to the ballot box. And the old man sat down, and he was satisfied.

Another question that was discussed in a very serious manner before the first democratic election was to be held was how to ensure that the voice of the deceased ancestors was included in the political and electoral process. Nobody, naturally, said that the bones of the dead would come up from the graves and with rattling fingers place their votes in the ballot boxes. It was much more serious than that. In most cultures in Africa, and also in other parts of the world, the relationship with the deceased ancestors is very important, it is decisive. There is an ongoing discussion on many different levels with those who have died. That is why the question about the participation of the deceased

came naturally before the first democratic election in Mocambique. Just the fact that the question was debated was an indication that something new was about to happen. But also that the people wanted their deceased ancestors to know that they were not forgotten even though they could not place their ballots in the ballot box. So it was a question of respect and a question of dignity. To us it is important to understand that dignity also is connected to the respect of traditions.

Dignity always has roots; tradition and culture.

I think, as must be clear by now, that it is very important for us to understand that if the democratic processes in Africa are to develop, we have to listen with respect and dignity to the questions that will arise along the way. Questions that are not frequently asked in our cultures, new questions. Democracy must be developed in a way so that it does not threaten the dignity of each person and each tradition. That is decisive if democracy should have a real chance to develop on the African continent. In one way they must develop their own wheels. They should not import the answers from us, they should import the questions.

Time travels fast and before I finish here this morning, I want to look back upon few things. Let us then start by travelling very far back in history; today we know that the human species, man, *Homo sapiens*, comes from Africa. We came into being somewhere in the Rift Valley, the big crevice that reaches from Ethiopia way down to Mocambique where it disappears into the Indian Ocean. There, a very long, long time ago, we separated ourselves from the apes and became what we are today – the walking bipedal animal that went “Out of Africa”.

By the way, a small parenthesis, there is a quite funny misunderstanding regarding how we left Africa and started to populate the world, all the way to Tierra del Fuego in Argentina or to Australia. Sometimes, when we talk about “Out of Africa”, we imagine that there was a group of people who suddenly stood up and said “Hey, I am tired of this, let’s go”. We all of course understand that that was not the case.

Palaeontologists, ethnologies, archaeologists and other scientists in various fields can today say quite clearly, that the human species populated the earth with the speed of five km per generation. Undeniably that renders an interesting perspective to the way, in which we moved across the world. If you imagine that you are going from Trondheim to the airport Värnäs with a speed of five

kilometres per generation, it will take a few hundred years until you reach the airport.

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But that was just a parenthesis. Also, when we talk about the human species and our early history, it is absolutely necessary to take a look at how things were, a couple of hundred years ago in Europe. If you look at a country like Norway, it is possible to state that until around the year 1850, nothing negative was ever written about Africa. Quite the opposite. In the time following the writings of Rousseau, people talked about Africa as a place where the biblical Paradise was to be found. With a sort of romantic respect people also talked about the happy savage. But even when it came to more ambitious travellers and explorers and the way they described Africa, not one evil word was ever written. On the contrary, they were impressed, in particular with places like Timbuktu in Mali. They were impressed with African culture, traditions, and their dignified lives.

But around the year 1850 everything suddenly changes. Why? Well, what happens is what still today remains the biggest and most horrible challenge when it comes to the question of dignity; racism is born. Around 1850 and a few years later, Europe starts colonizing the African continent in a much more serious way than what had been done before. And to do that Europe needs some sort of alibi, and that alibi is religion and the propagation of civilization. But also the necessity to change the image of the savage from being happy to being a miserable brute who needs to be civilized. This happens about the same time as pseudo-scientists start to talk about racist, racial, biological differences. What they really mean is that the white race is superior. And that would lead to enormous amount of suffering for the Africans during the 150 years to come.

Around 1850-60 and some twenty years onwards the very positive image of Africa is completely altered. There is no question that that change is closely connected to racism. We know that the terrible face of racism is still very much alive today in our part of the world, in a country like Norway and on a continent like Europe. But it should also be said that racism is very much alive in a country like China as well. It is not easy for African students who travel to Chinese universities to study. Racism, and thereby the shadows of colonialism is still part of our lives.

Racism is perhaps the most brutal force when it comes to the abuse human dignity. Hence, I mean that if we are serious when we talk about taking a stand for human dignity, we have to be more persistent and more forceful than ever before when we fight this hideous, nasty, sticky ailment in our societies, which is called racism. We must never forget the historical truth that racism was something we created, us Europeans.

Before I end I would like to share with you some words, spoken by the first president of Mocambique, Samora Machel. In 1975 when Mocambique had

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finally liberated themselves from Portuguese colonialism, he said something like this, if I quote quite freely: “What have we fought for in this war of liberation? What is it that we want to achieve? Well, we want to have the freedom to decide for ourselves about our future. But we must not forget that we also have been fighting for the right to dream our own dreams. We must not forget, which is perhaps the most important thing of all, that we have fought for our human dignity and that we must never ever surrender that dignity again”.

With those words I would like to end. I have been trying to discuss the question of dignity and the relationship between dignity and poverty and how the most fundamental struggle for dignity, must be done in the name of solidarity, if we are really serious in our efforts to try to contribute to make the world a better place.

Once there was a young African with painted shoes on his feet. In the streets of Trondheim today, I see young people with ragged designer jeans. This is the world we are living in. This is the world we want to change.

I think I will end with a very wise saying from Tanzania: “We have two ears but only one tongue”. That means that we should listen more and talk less. And I think that might be a good way for me to say thank you.

Thank you!

Henning Mankell

