SA economist whose work went global wrote with a deep idealism

OBITUARY: SAMPY TERREBLANCHE (1933-2018)

Sampie Terreblanche's name will live on in the hearts and minds of social scientists, economic justice activists and perhaps even a few guilt-ridden politicians. Indeed, President Cyril Ramaphosa tweeted generous condolences on Monday.

Terreblanche died on February 17 at age 84 of brain cancer. His pen channelled his quiet fury about the world's and South Africa's worsening inequality and always with crystal-clear analytical force.

By 2014, he had summed up the systemic character of West-versus-Rest exploitation, with a strong institutional focus, and drawing on the finest structural (including Marxist) critiques of global capitalism.

His last three books deserve space in any concerned citizen's library: *A History of Inequality in South Africa 1652-2002*, *Lost in Transformation*, and *Western Empires: Christianity and the Inequalities between the West and the Rest*.

Terreblanche wrote with a deep idealism in a country frequently with the highest levels of inequality and in a world whose richest have far outpaced any prior era for greed, consumption and structured exploitation.

He was first drawn to this research as a member of the 1970s Erika Theron Commission on the poverty of the coloured people in the Western Cape. In his 1980 book, *Die Wording van die Westerse Ekonomie*, he began expanding his analysis to the global stage.

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He insisted on a more realistic poverty line of R50 a day, the position of 55% of South Africans, according to Statistics South Africa, up from about 45% in 1994.

The inability to address this stain on our political democracy angered Terreblanche so much that, in his frustration, he complained mightily about the liberation government's acquiescence to corporate capital's "neocolonial" agenda.

Some critics, such as former Reserve Bank governor Tito Mbweni, describe *Lost in Transformation* as a conspiracy theory but, aside from disputes about whether the Development Bank of Southern Africa hosted elite dealing even though the promised payback by business — private sector gross fixed capital investment — only briefly materialised during the 2002-2007 minerals and consumer credit boom. Before and after, business has been on an investment strike.

In late 1997, Terreblanche was widely ridiculed by the establishment but last month the Wits Southern Centre on Inequality Studies issued its first working paper: his TRC testimony, preceded by an updated appeal to put the taxation of wealth back on the public agenda.

The balance of forces in public policy discourse prevented it this week, but next year there is an election. And, in my last long discussion with Terreblanche a month before he died, I could see how committed he remained to electoral solutions, generous social policy and tighter exchange controls that would put social democracy back into the mix.

Patrick Bond