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73



The Rainbow Myth: Dreaming of a Post-racial South African Society

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■ LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------------|--|
| AA | Affirmative Action |
| BBBEE | Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment |
| ANC | African National Congress |
| BEE | Black Economic Empowerment |
| BRICS | Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa |
| C.O.P | Congress of the people |
| LSM | Living Standards Measurement |
| MK | 'Umkhonto we Sizwe' |
| PAC | Pan Africanist Congress |
| RDP | Reconstruction Development Program |
| SACP | South African Communist Party |
| SAIRR | South African Institute of Race Relations |
| SONA | State of Nation Address |
| TRC | Truth and Reconciliation Commission |
| UDF | South African Democratic Front |
| UNFCCC COP17 | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties |
| UNSC | United Nations Security Council |



■ Introduction

South Africa's transition from the racist apartheid regime to a democratic rainbow nation in 1994 has been admired worldwide. Its apparently peaceful reconciliation and emerging economic power made South Africa a global player. Nevertheless, with the ANC in power for over twenty years, one would have expected a change from former racist and colonial structural policies. Although the so-called 'Rainbow Nation' proclaims “unity in diversity”, racialisation and identity politics in South Africa have not evolved much from apartheid's pattern. Its contradictions can be observed through actual examples such as debates around land expropriation, fees must fall movements and the striking racial inequalities.

This year, South Africa is celebrating the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela to honour his humanitarian values and aptitude as a national hero. Where does the rainbow nation stand after Nelson Mandela? Are his ideas of social justice and equality implemented in today's rainbow nation? Or were these broken promises (du Toit 2017)? This paper will trace back the original mission of a rainbow nation and compare them with the present situation.

1. The Dream of a Post-racial South African Society

Nelson Mandela's ideals incite admiration and hope for most South Africans, overseas citizens and other international observers. The mission of the South African liberation movements and its celebrated icons was to build a non-racial society based on equality and justice. This has been the foundation of the African National Congress (ANC), its political programs and the South African constitution. Nonetheless how were the policies addressing socio-economic inequalities designed and implemented to build a rainbow nation?

The ANC party founded in 1912, originally named the South African Native National Congress, created the icon Nelson Mandela, to globally mobilize against apartheid and ultimately foster reconciliation. Discussions for a new South Africa began amongst the oppressed population for freedom and rights in the early 1900's. Four decades later, in 1944 the ANC Youth league was created with new energetic and active leaders such as Walter Sisulu, Olivier Tambo and Nelson Mandela. Peaceful strikes, boycotts and demonstrations would later make way for sabotages and the armed struggle. The military wing of the ANC known as 'Umkhonto we Sizwe' or the MK, launched attacks against apartheid symbols, government and business infrastructures. The aim was to make the state ungovernable, to abolish the apartheid system and give the right to vote to every South African citizen. The South African liberation was driven by several other different ideological movements such as the South African Democratic Front (UDF), the South African Communist Party (SACP), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and many notable individuals with the goal to end apartheid. Even though the approaches of how to free South Africa diverged, a united impulse was necessary to take apartheid down.



One of the major steps was the Congress of the People (C.O.P) in 1955 that brought thousands of representatives together to formulate equal rights for all citizens of a self-ruled and liberated South Africa. The coming together of multi-racial political organizations: The South African Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Congress, the Congress of Democrats, the Congress of the People Campaign and the later leading party the African National Congress was successful. They created and adopted democratically in June 1955 the Freedom Charter in Kliptown near Soweto (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2015). It is the first time that all the racial categories of the upcoming rainbow nation met on an equal level to discuss the reconstruction and re-organization of a new South African society.

After the first democratic elections in 1994, post-apartheid South Africa was named the 'rainbow nation' by Archbishop Desmond Tutu as a symbol for hope and unity. The project was to rebuild and unify the South African population, regardless of their physical, cultural and religious differences. Although it was not presented as an official policy, the rainbow nation envisioned a new South Africa that represented peace, forgiveness and a united multi-cultural population. To celebrate diversity and to build the nation together one strategy was the acknowledgement of eleven official languages. Worldwide, South Africa is second, after India, in recognizing the most official languages. Many schools offer a curriculum with African languages; and public places, administration, goods and services are mostly expressed in at least one African language and English. While most people articulate themselves through multi-lingual modes, language still remains a principal divider in South Africa. Employment in much of South Africa is impossible without a basic knowledge of English and/or Afrikaans; these remain the elite tongues in the administration, politics, higher education and businesses, while African languages are undervalued and not required for school and career ascension. Even though the eleven languages of South Africa are a sign of diversity they remain a constant discriminatory instrument that persistently separates social categories.

The very young and progressive South African constitution of 1996, that drew inspiration from the Freedom Charter (1955) and the rainbow nation project, advocates diversity and allows progressive rights answering modern challenges. The rainbow nation's constitution is far ahead of many 'developed' countries. It is one of the first to allow marriage for all, recognize transgender rights and includes numerous socio-economic rights to rebalance those who were disadvantaged during and before apartheid. However, a progressive constitution has not been able to impact the structural remnants of apartheid, and the sources of these inequalities "are deeply rooted to historical injustices" (Johnston 2014). This is why an honest dialogue that communicates the realistic difficulties to unifying the country is needed. Today, the rainbow nation is rather an idealistic symbol that is yet to reorganise the entrenched social, racial and economic disparities constructed under apartheid.



It is very easy to turn a blind eye on South Africa's consistent racial and socio-economic inequalities. South Africa is promoted as a new "emerging power" and worldwide known as 'the' African example for good governance, modernity and an investments destination (Nkoana-Mashabane 2013): only African member of the G20, and regular member of the United Nation Security Council (UNSC). South Africa also hosted international and influential conferences and events such as the Soccer World Cup in 2010, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC COP17) in 2011, the Fifth BRICS summit in 2013 and the Tenth BRICS Summit in 2018 (Nkoana-Mashabane 2013). The international image of the country has flourished, so how can it be failing locally to provide basic needs for everyone? One would argue that it is too early to expect a non-racial nation and to rebalance the inequality levels after 24 years. Zegeye would rather argue that South Africa's representation as a non-racist rainbow nation denies the realistic state and fundamental question of racial division. Fantasizing "unity in diversity" instead of emphasizing critical reflections and taking into account the continuing wealth disparities are a reminder of how far the rainbow nation is from a "truly new South Africa" (Zegeye 2001).

2. The Myth of a Post-racial South African Society

In February 2018, President Cyril Ramaphosa emphasized during the annual State of the National Address (SONA) that for Nelson Mandela's Centenary Celebration, the ANC would follow Nelson Mandela's ideals of unity and social justice: "This year gives us an opportunity to reaffirm our vision of a non-racial society - to build a South Africa that belongs to all who live in it, black and white (...) Let us work with even greater purpose to unite our people - African, coloured, Indian and white - to build a new nation in which all have equal rights and opportunities" (Ramaphosa 2018).

The 1994 elections were a gigantic step forward and Nelson Mandela, along with fellow freedom fighters and countless South Africans pursued the path of forgiveness and living in peace with the oppressors. Nonetheless, the abolishment of racialised domination and segregation is not enough to overcome the constructed racialised injustices. The transition to a democratic South Africa is not seen as a successful achievement by all South Africans. Critical discourses and disappointment has emerged regarding an empty reconciliation process. An example, is that of the outcomes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which barely addressed the fundamental question of race, and the long history of exclusion and daily violence (Fullard et Rousseau 2009). The inability of the TRC to report and eradicate racist structures automatically left it as it was implemented during apartheid. Structural violence carries the same instruments to divide and discriminate the population based on 'race', even though masked behind the structures of society.



Apartheid's hierarchical ideology infiltrated in every level, education, politics, economy, and even in the transport system (News24 2013). For example, as much as sport is one of the most inclusive instruments in South Africa, it still carries apartheid's racial dividers; whites still predominantly represented in rugby and cricket, whereas soccer is represented by Africans (News24 2013).

At the political level, the ANC carried out numerous programs and policies following Mandela's footsteps. The Reconstruction Development Program (RDP) for example is a considerable project that tackles inequalities in schooling, housing, health, employment, youth and social security and welfare (ANC-Webpage, accessed 2018). The implementation goes along with Mandela's vision of an equal and dignified society where every person has fair access to opportunities and development. In that regard, the ANC also made the youth one of their priorities in their agenda; to value and assist youth development in dissuading unemployment, criminality and protecting vulnerable youth categories. However, no accurate and effective plan of action has been implemented besides governmental and private bursaries that assist only a section of the "gifted" students. These scenarios are determining causes of dropout rates in school as students seek to earn an income at an early age to support themselves and their families. The ANC publication on affirmative action states that: "At the moment, every white schoolchild gets three times as much spent on his or her education as every black pupil. (...) The same applies to just about every other form of governmental spending, whether on health or street lights or rubbish collection or farm support" (ANC Webpage, accessed 2018). This touches on the right to access versus the ability to access. The Bantu education system might have been abolished, and everybody might have access to the same education, nevertheless the ability to access the education system is clearly still racially divided, and almost normalized in South African society.

The current boiling debate on quality free education and "Afrikaans must fall" are intensively racially charged. The Fees Must Fall movement expresses the frustration and the anger of the majorly non-white students. It highlights how much tension there still is amongst even the born-free generation and the loopholes of a supposed equal new generation. Even though apartheid's system has been disestablished, its ideology still infiltrates into today's society. This is the most destructive trait of structural violence because it affects all individuals and is being inherited over generations (News24 2013). No drastic and sustained change was implemented in the education curriculum after apartheid regardless of the implementation of African languages. Apartheid's Eurocentric curriculum thus continues to be prevalent. Only recently students demonstrated to decolonize the curriculum, forcing one to ask why the post-apartheid school curriculum has not implemented critical and reflective classes about race. Deconstructing the ideology of apartheid should start within education institutions.



Reflecting on the past is necessary in the curriculum to overcome apartheid's ideology as many oppressed South Africans were too young to remember the trauma it has caused. They therefore live today in a society in which they are told to have equal rights but their life clearly tells them that they are not equal. The ability for these young South Africans to understand that they are still suffering from the structural remnants of apartheid is difficult and should be a national responsibility. Consistent psychological or social work support could have also been carried out more systematically. The rainbow nation is constructed on forgiveness for new unity; then again, does that determination to forgive and transcend the past come automatically? The rainbow nation's discourse seems far-off from the day-to-day struggles.

3. The Reality of Post-Apartheid South African Society

South Africa is interesting, not just because of the drastic political and social changes that have taken place since 1994, but also because of how much has remained essentially the same, especially in the economy. Originally, the aim of RDP as well as the Affirmative Action (AA) program was to empower and give access to resources to those who were denied access since the colonial era started to change the social, political and economic landscape. To transform the "country into a united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and a prosperous country" as the ANC proclaimed to stand for, the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) in 2001 and later Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Act established in 2003 gave priority to black South Africans in employment and education.

Three million RDP houses were built between 1994 and 2015 providing electricity and water as well (Bailey 2017). Originally only for the disadvantaged black population that lived in informal settlements, however these houses are sometimes being sold, highlighting the inability for such interventions to ensure lasting socio-economic change (Van Staden 2016). The main problem was that these houses were given out for free without instruments of control. This resulted in the poorest selling their houses for low prizes to the middle-class, seeing the direct benefit of getting a high amount of money. Moreover, some households could not afford to live in higher standard houses that need more investment as their household income did not increase. According to the South African Institute of Race Relations (IRR), the annual average household income has increased for both the white and black population between 1996 and 2014. Shockingly though, the proportion of the South African annual total disposable income did not progress significantly for the African category benefitting from the RDP houses. In 1996, whites disposed of 45,7 % of the total disposable income of South Africa and Africans 43,1%. Eighteen years later, in 2014, Africans only gained a 6% increase, sharing 49,1% of the total disposable income. It is shocking, looking at the demographic representation in the country in 2015: 8,3% of whites, 8,8% of coloureds, 80,5% of Africans and 2,5% of Indian/Asians.



The white minority is still earning almost half of the entire national total income. This is just one example of how the intention of affirmative action gets lost. Since the inequalities and the poverty rates are still enormously one-sided, disappointment and anger towards the post-apartheid government is more and more flagrant. Striking inequalities are more than evident in South Africa. Kayelitsha, one of the biggest townships of South Africa is few kilometres away from Camps Bay where the most expensive houses on the continent are located. Even though the Living Standards Measurements (LMS) increased for the African population between 2004 and 2014: 5% of the most prosperous living standards (LSM 10) were represented by Africans in 2004, 29% in 2014. Nevertheless, white South Africans are still ranking highest in the living standards categories. This is especially threatening for the underprivileged population and the born free generation that felt let down by their government. "The dream of a rainbow nation is history, not our reality" declared a born free journalism student" (Mafoko 2017).

This drives a strong justification that South Africa's wealth and poverty disparities continue to validate the legacy of apartheid and ask the question of veracity and sincerity in the concept of a rainbow nation. Du Toit explains that the socio-economic inequalities, the persistent obsession to racialise people and the growing levels of corruption are also the reason why South Africans are disappointed. Furthermore, these are also reasons why a nation brand has failed to create or encourage the creation of a national identity and why South Africans continue to identify themselves firstly through different racial categories (2017). All this fortifies continued exclusion rather than unity. South Africa has not been able to achieve a common national identity, an example is that of the complex place of the coloured population in the South African society. Their stigmatization and exclusion from the national belonging displays how far the country is from national unity.

As Farred argues that the integrative function of the South African citizenship has not succeeded to transcend stereotypical and dualistic societal current (2001). Another example depicts South Africans of Indian descendant, who are frequently considered first as Indians before being South African, which is also the case for other minorities. Being repeatedly called a 'mix-breed' from South Africans also displays how much individual thinking is adjoining to a racist legacy language. Inter-racial and inter-cultural relationships are still considered abnormal. Although law and policies might have changed in favour of diversity, how far have individuals, communities and societal behaviours changed? Present inter-racial interactions are understandably forged by history however improvement starts in every day behaviour and discourse.



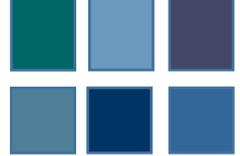
4. Conclusion

Racial division and white privilege is a reality in South Africa. Some scholars argue that colour-blind ideologies such as the rainbow nation defend white privileges and reinforces the blindness towards awareness of white privilege. Ansell assumes that the concept of unity in diversity is based on a utopian "post-race" world where the abolishment of segregation, apartheid and the legal emplacement of democracy goes with the abolishment of racial classification (Ansell 2006). Paradoxically, SAIRR's survey (IRR 2018), shows that South Africans, including Africans, answered that the government should prioritize fighting drugs and speeding up service delivery before racism and affirmative actions. This displays also the responsibility within the population that tolerates a laissez-faire behaviour towards racial inequalities, as if they would be immutable.

South Africa should not reproduce racial oppression but end it. An open debate about racial inequalities, their origins and responsibilities is needed. As well as deconstructing the value around race. Social justice has clearly not been achieved in South Africa and should, for sustainable peace and development, be prioritized on every political and societal level. It is important to remember the years of violence, the lives sacrificed, the hundreds of thousands of victims, the imprisonments, the degradation of human dignity and trans-generational trauma. The rainbow nation is a symbolic identity which neither reflects the socio-economic reality of the country nor a national identity. The post-apartheid nation has to address its own contradictions urgently in order to survive.

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