

South Africa – divided forever? *Aich man*, as we say back home, that is no straight forward question. Nonetheless, I will try to answer, this question in four blocks entitled, “where are we”, “how did we get here”, “where are we going”, and “what do we need to do”.

### **Where we are?**

In April this year South Africa was again gripped by a wave of violent attacks aimed at immigrants from other African countries. These attacks would come to be labelled as criminal, xenophobic, negrophobic, or Afrophobic. And although they were centred in Durban, the sentiments that gave rise to these attacks were not confined to these areas. There is a palpable anger felt by many South Africans towards black African immigrants who they accuse of taking South African jobs and committing crimes. Whilst it must be acknowledged that those who participated in the violence only constituted a small minority, the central sentiments of frustration and despair are felt by much broader sections of the population. Every day the country is plagued by violent protests, labour unrest, taxi violence, vigilante activity, demonstrations for better services, access to education and protests against crime. The levels of rampant poverty and inequality have inflamed passions which now constitute a flammable tinder always ready to be ignited. Furthermore, this tinder has been doused with lighter fluid by certain elements within the political establishment, which combined with the populism and opportunism of certain characteristic political entities, now threaten to engulf South Africa - but no doubt we will return to Julius Malema later on. In addition to this, it could be argued that the violence of the past has instilled a culture of violence that resides at the core of the South African narrative. All that said, I believe that these violent outbursts that target black immigrants are misdirected episodes, that they are an easy scapegoat, a lazy outlet for South African’s frustration at the socio-economic and political reality of post-apartheid South Africa.

What becomes clear is that these violent outbursts are the tip of a much larger socio-economic problem that bores to the core of South African society. The ‘sad story of the Kwerekwere’ is not the product of coincidence, nor is it a brief spark, instead it is the manifestation and consequence of a profound socio-economic malaise whose origins can be traced back to South Africa’s emergence from an apartheid state to a democratic nation.

### **How we got here?**

South Africa no doubt presents an intriguing location, as it is a place that is acutely marked by unrelenting social and political currents, and competing narratives of the past and prescriptions for the future. The conflict between the all-inclusive narrative of rainbowism is challenged by the powerful pull of nostalgia, which disrupts an intensely fractured society and has opened the door to essentialist discourses of racial and ethnic divisions. That is to say, the racial and ethnic diversity of the South African people constantly collide within a framework of rainbowism. The consequence of this intensely competitive space has been the infiltration of an aggressively africanist discourse of which race and ethnicity are vocal components.

*The first of two anecdotes I wish to share with you concerns my mother. It took place long after the release of Mandela, long after the 1994 elections, long after the glory of reconciliation.....we were in a restaurant waiting to pay for our meal when I observed how my mother's head tilted as she spoke to the white maitre D, her voice low and her entire body subdued as she bowed in front of his whiteness, such is the extent to which the psychological scars of apartheid will forever be with her.*

The apartheid regime was a pervasive bureaucracy designed to separate the races and maintain white-minority rule. It was the culmination of a long history of oppression in Southern Africa that began with the arrival of the first colonists in 1488. Since then, the various indigenous African populations have been subjected to violent domination at the hands of the white minority. The apartheid state, which came with the election of the NP in 1948, was unique with regard to its systematic organisation and exercise of domination. Constructed on a racist legal framework, it was a pervasive regime that employed both physical and psychological forms of violence to maintain its rule. It was the depth and omnipresent character of apartheid's oppressive domination that required a reconciliation process of special character. Indeed, South Africa's reconciliation process, although a great example of a nation building project which sought a creative and novel strategy to heal the brutal impact of the apartheid state, is however, as Terry Bell highlights in the title of his 2001 book, an "unfinished business".

The birth of the Rainbow Nation represented a fundamental shift in the social, political and economic landscape of the past. Diversity and integration replaced segregation and oppression, and the values of modern democracy were enshrined in what would be one of the world's most celebrated constitutions. However, despite the universally applauded transition and reconciliatory journey from authoritarian rule to democracy which was engendered in the work carried out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), more than 20 year on and prejudice and violence continues to mark contemporary South Africa. Arguably, neither the economic nor the psychological atrocities, and subsequent legacies of the apartheid period have been sufficiently addressed. Certainly, the TRC was successful in revealing many truths, however, the extent to which the TRC addressed the pervasive and widespread de-humanisation of the indigenous African populations remains questionable. To what extent can we consider those truths as sufficient grounds upon which to construct a praxis of justice. Even the Commission itself, as its work progressed, gradually seemed to realise that achieving any form of rehabilitation would be far more difficult than it had assumed, and it began to scale back expectations accordingly". More viably, Tutu began to preach a more realistic goal, which was for the TRC to "promote" reconciliation, not achieve it. And so it is, that over 20 years after "reconciliation", my mother still bows in front of whiteness, for her, South africa will forever be divided - both internally and externally.

### **Where we are going?**

I believe that in post-apartheid South Africa one can observe two distinct hegemonic political discourses that are concerned with affecting identity and belonging. The first might be termed rainbowism, which emphasizes that all South Africans have a common

shared history. Under the banner of reconciliation and nation building, rainbowism worked in tandem with the TRC which was central to the work of constructing a collective national memory. The second discourse is of africanism, which articulates an aggressively African-centred vision for the future of South Africa. It is important to remember, that whilst these two discourses are distinct in their character and tension exists between the two, these are not strictly oppositional terms, instead these fit and develop from specific political and social requirements, and should be understood within a broad discourse of transformation in South Africa. The processes of identity formation and solidification do not take place solely in the present, as these are impacted by the past and the future. It is a multi-layered existential process in which nostalgia plays a central role. Nostalgia being an act of memory that captures the subject within a romantic past, a past which imprints on both the subject's understanding of the present and aspirations for the future.

### **What needs to be done**

What is clear is that if South Africa is to successfully steer away from this crisis, then it will be required to re-examine the relationship between rainbowism and the deeply entrenched racial and ethnic discourses visible both in public and private spheres. Perhaps the only way to defeat these contradictions is to look anew at constructions of national narratives, and shift away from policies and political discourses entrenched in racial and ethnic essentialisms. For instance, policies should be reshaped along income and economic standing lines. Remember, the greatest inherent risk of race based affirmative action is in nurturing the same racial divide which underpinned apartheid. The potential of this reshaping of the discourse is a weakening of ethnic and racial boundaries and a reduction in inter-community tensions.

I am convinced that the violence we witnessed and will no doubt witness again, is merely an easy outlet, misdirected anger, as the real problem lays elsewhere. The South African subject is paralysed within a discourse that claims that *one can be whoever, as we are a nation anew*, and yet, its people remain impossibly anchored in the past. The tension between nostalgia and the dominant Rainbow Nation discourse is the catalyst for the crisis of belonging, home and identity in contemporary South Africa.

To continue along this path that is fraught with contradictions, whereby government policy remains insensitive to the complexities of identity and belonging, which are locked within a history of oppression, will only serve to further aggravate the crisis. Importantly, as we have seen, the crisis in South Africa deepens in tune with its economic problems as these serve to re-enforce and fuel the other. The outlook is bleak, as the further South Africa moves away from the immediate euphoria of the overthrow of apartheid, then the more immediate and chronic becomes the crisis. The challenge in contemporary South Africa, and one that has so far proven insurmountable, is for South Africans to detach themselves from those old racial, ethnic and nationalist categories - which so often determine their political allegiance. Speaking of lifelong political allegiance:

*In 2010 I asked my grandmother who she was going to vote for in the upcoming elections, her answer was simple and unequivocal, "Mandela", she said. Since it was over a decade since Mandela had finished his presidency and removed himself from the political arena, the depth of her answer was truly significant. Such is the extent to*

*which his shadow looms over everything that is South Africa, Mandela's currency still carries considerable weight - and perhaps even more now in death. Such that he will always be associated with the ANC, to the extent that lead firebrand Julius Malema to utter, "a vote against the ANC is a nail in Mandela's coffin".*

What is required is an honest and thorough appraisal of the predicament of the vast majority. What is required is the death of Mandela no less. The death of his currency. What is required is an ANC governance that is accountable and held to task for its shortcomings and failures. For my grandmother's generation and those like her to no longer blindly vote for the ANC. What is required is for my mother to discard the psychological chains that cause her to bow. I believe these all to be achievable, for both her sake and mine, I have to believe that.

**Thank you**