RACISM, ETHNICITY AND NATION BUILDING IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA

Joe Teffo, University of the North, South Africa

Introduction

In post apartheid South Africa whites are accusing Blacks of racism, and vice versa. The accusation is increasing in intensity and frequency. Accordingly, therefore, my thesis in this paper is that racism knows no colour. It cuts across the colour bar. If racism is not well managed and eradicated in a society, it continues to manifest itself in various guises and festers on to the marrow.

Racism is transcultural, and differs only in content and form. Paradoxically, racism comes with a collective and requires a collective to fight it. Thus both parties across the divide will have to undergo a mental exorcism, rid their minds of vestiges of racism if they want to succeed in the quest for nation building. I will argue therefore that the absence or eradication of racism is a sine qua non for the success and flourishing of nation building, especially in the post apartheid South Africa.

Sociality Personhood

In phenomenology man is not just a pure consciousness on its own apart from the world; (wo)man exists (ex-istere) in a concrete relationship with the world and with Others, (wo)man coexists. In reality (wo)man is a being-for-others - a historicity - a historical being, an integrated part of the whole. In short, a person is a social being, a gregarious being that is infinitely searching for its essence.

The characteristic dichotomous conception of man inherent in Western philosophy and largely pervasive in Cartesian philosophy is mainly responsible for the pseudo-problems fascinating even linguistic philosophy. Authentic relations, for example, are impossible for Sartre precisely because of (wo)man’s partial enslavement to Cartesianism. The lasting and disappointing result of this view was, and remains to be, the idea that the mind is of higher and greater value than the body. Consequently, the pursuits of the mind are similarly deemed to be greater and higher in value than the pursuits of the body, which are invariably regarded as inferior and unworthy of pursuits. The body, especially in its biological aspect is seen as something lowly, something which disturbs the mind. This encapsulates the ancient view, though in minute form, that the body is the unfortunate encagement of the mind, of the soul and that consequently the soul must constantly try to release itself from the imprisonment of the body. The body, in this connection, is the unworthy warden of the mind.

On this reasoning it can thus safely be concluded that dualism is the basis for alienation. And inauthentic existence is the product of alienation. This condition of alienation was caused by fragmentative dualistic philosophy that was introduced
into other non-Western philosophies. This philosophy contradicted the philosophic concept of wholeness underlying African thought. The fragmentation persists in Sartre and makes it difficult for him to reach the shores of sociality where genuine and authentic human relations reside. However, we are aware that (s)he can always revert to his/her freedom to put matters otherwise.

In Cartesian philosophy, that is, world view - viewpoint on (w)o)man and the external world, the human subject was kept captive within a machine-like body. (Wo)Man consists of a soul (mind) and body. According to Descartes the essential property of the soul (mind) is that it thinks. The soul is a spirit. The spirits are immaterial agencies capable of performing spiritual operations, loosely united with bodies, but not extended since thought is their very essence. Bodies are created, physical substances existing independently of human thought and having extension as their chief attribute. Cartesian physics regards bodies as the result of the introduction of the “vortices,” that is, whirls of motion, into extension. God is the First Cause of all motion in a system operated by its Maker. Even the bodies of animals are automatons.

Existential Phenomenology

A very important social change took place with the advent of phenomenology. Both Brentano and Husserl sought to release the human subject from captivity. Philosophical idealism as an explanatory principle became outmoded because of a desire for new and more humane relations. A new ideological and historical situation arose because of the mutability of human existence itself. Human life, human existence, as such has put an end to philosophical idealism towards the end of the nineteenth century. There was a drift toward more humane relational discourse and interrelations. This does not mean that rationalism was invalid; it merely was no longer adequate to explain and justify previous discourses against the onslaught of phenomenological ontology. A change in the content of relations involves a change in the very nature and attitudes of both parties to the discourse and/or relationship.

In this period Brentano, the leading exponent of empirical psychology switched the direction of the arrow, the direction of the intentional act away from the inner self towards the external world. To exist he argued, is to be out there at the things and with Others. It is in this spirit that Husserl said “return to the things themselves!”. We are aware that in spite of himself, Husserl found himself returning to the transcendental ego. What we would like the reader to note though, is that there was a new world-view, a new emphasis in philosophy. There was an explicit aim and an overt endeavour to rediscover the Other and other things out there in the world. Heidegger was rather more articulate on this point. For him being in the world is being-with (Mitsein). To be is to be with: either with Others or with the things themselves.

The imprisoned Cartesian subject freed, was released to be there at the things and with Others. We find this clearly illustrated in a number of other fields as well. Everything which is subjective of nature is related to an outside world. Happiness is always happiness about something or somebody. Longing is longing for something or somebody. In visualism something is visualised; in love something is loved; in hate, something is hated; and in desire something is desired. Effectively, the phenomenological school changed psychology into a theory about the outside world. Psychology became a
theory about the everyday things and everyday relations - describing the outside world. It became a discipline about living human beings with feelings, emotions and aspirations, people with a past and a future, a common destiny and a desire for harmonious coexistence.

You can only know that the Other exists when you communicate your feelings. The major principles in phenomenology are communication, affirmation, observation, participation, or sharing. Knowledge that is important is participated knowledge, that is, knowledge acquired through interaction. In phenomenology to know is to participate. For example, in Sartre's keyhole example it is accepted that it is only shared common experience that is true. In pedagogics this is the aha experience - more of a revealed truth. In the strict sense of the word it is intuitive. The freed subject in this sense was communicating with nature or the environment. The a priorism of Descartes of "I think therefore I am," was substituted by Senghor's "I feel therefore I am." Maybe we could add, "I communicate therefore I am." Feeling presupposes action or praxis. Thus the commitment to existentialism comes out of a sense of responsibility. To be committed effectively means to be responsible for the well-being of fellow beings.

**Racism and Racialism**

Racism is the social practice wherein a group of people discriminate against another group of people on the basis that the discriminated group lacks or possesses a particular biological and/or cultural characteristics. Race in and by itself is not a social problem. It only becomes a problem when it is used to the disadvantage of another group as a people. It usually goes with the subjugatory powers. This suggests that a social group without subjugatory powers cannot discriminate against another group. Biko (1978 : 25) echoes this point that “Racism is discrimination by a group against another for the purposes of subjugation or maintaining subjugation. In other words one cannot be a racist unless he has the power to subjugate”.

“Nation” refers to people who share a common territory, economy, independent state, political sovereignty, and a sense of belonging together. Nation Building must, among other things, focus on national unification and at the same time provide for the expression and protection of diversity. Nationalism has a certain rationale in the existence of a nation-state, and it does not, at least not necessarily, imply the inferiority of one nation to another. Nationalism refers to a strong devotion to one’s own nation, patriotic feelings, efforts and principles. Accordingly the new political dispensation in South Africa has created space and time for all the citizens to strive for creating a new nation, hopefully a rainbow nation. This is an ideal that all the citizens should strive for, our races notwithstanding.

The question of racism is an enormously complex one. Fanon divides racism into two categories: vulgar racism and cultural racism (McCulloch : 1983 : 119). Vulgar racism is the kind of racism in which ethno-psychology or scientific theories are used in order to prove the “African’s racial deficiency”. Among the claims in this discipline are: “the black person lacks cortex - the layer that covers the brain and facilitates the thinking process. Because of this deficiency, a black person is intellectually feeble. His thinking capacity is impaired. An African is dominated by emotions rather than reason, hence the saying that “emotion is to the Negro what reason is to the Hellene” (Caute : 1970 : 24). Historical
circumstances rendered vulgar racism anachronistic and discarded it. In this connection, Kiros writes: "The indifferent and often openly hostile reaction of the white person, however, need not dissuade the Africans of their innate right to assert their self-hood through a constructive retrieval of the past, however bleak their historical knowledge is." (1994: 28) The African historical past is in fact, as Du Bois puts it, "love of harmony and beauty, nurtured by the vast waters of culture and effective historical consciousness" (1970: 4).

Identities are arguably products of history. As historical products, identities are constructed by individuals as specific responses to their place in history. "We are not born with fixed self-conceptions. Rather, we invent our self-conceptions. Myth, religion, heresy, science and magic are simply falsehoods which buttress the highly ambiguous notion of identity that both Eurocentrists, as well as certain Afrocentrists use to justify falsehoods by presenting them as truths." (Kiros: 199: 29-30). So racialism, just like racism, cannot exist in a vacuum. Their meaning is determined by their use. That is, their context.

"Racialism" loosely refers to a mental consciousness of belonging to a particular race. Racialism is emotionally neutral. It (racialism) can be used loosely to refer to an awareness of a group of people as having a common culture, history and language. In the biological sense racialism similarly refers to a consciousness of any of the subdivisions of mankind sharing certain physical characteristics, especially colour of skin, colour and type of hair and shape of eyes and nose.

On the contrary, racism is premised on prejudice, negative attitude towards the other, or a superiority complex. It asserts that one group of persons is morally and mentally superior to another and that this superiority arises out of inherited biological differences. In the main the tenets of racism, however, lead to moral conclusions that contradict many of the most generally accepted civilized standards and values and have notoriously led to what on ordinary grounds are inconceivable crimes. Fortunately, for moral standards, the tenets of racism are not merely unsubstantiated by the facts, but in large measure contradicted by the facts, empirical facts. In this connection Hitler's Mein Kampf, in particular his assertion that Aryans are the only culture-creating people, would shed more light. Being Black in the World

In racist communities contact between whites and blacks takes the body as a point of departure. The body determines distance and relation. Hence, the black and white bodies together with their sociological schemes have always acted on their barrier (boundary) or appeal characteristics, that is, distancing and relating. The situatedness of a body in a specific locality in space and time is inextricably intertwined with the corresponding situation determination of the body. Black, for example, is not merely a biological question of pigmentation but it is also fundamentally the definition of the mode of being of the black body which is me. It is consequently my ontologico-socio-cultural definition as that particular body: a being-black-in-the-world (Schwarz-in-der-Welt-zu-sein). On this basis it is apparent that the black man can redefine and redevelop his own realistic sociological scheme taking a body as a point of departure.

The preceding consideration is relevant to Manganyi's (1977: 34) proposed solution to the problem of alienation, namely, that
the problem of alienation arising from the “split-psyche” on account of the pervasiveness of dualistic philosophy, can be resolved through “the development of a new ethic and a new attitude towards reality characterized inter alia, by an equal recognition of man’s somatic and spiritual qualities.” On the contrary, Sartre argues that alienation is a human condition, an ontological datum, and as such it cannot be transcended. Contemporary Western culture concentrates on the devaluation and standardization of the body. This is an inauthentic way of being, wherein the body is only experienced as the body-for-others (i.e. as an instrument), disregarding the fact that it can also be a body as an in-itself (object) and a for-itself (subject).

Is there a mode of existence called being-black-in-the-world? This is the most relevant and crucial question for our purpose. If there is such a mode of existence, how different is it in fundamental respects from being-white-in-the-world? Because the body occupies a central position in existence, to what extent does the body determine the experience of being-black-in-the-world? Would Sartre, had he lived in South Africa, regard the other as “hell” in the same sense he spoke about it (hell) when referring to his European community? Does the black man’s look threaten the white man’s freedom with the same intensity as does the white man’s to the black man’s freedom? I am tempted to concede that there is a vast difference. In South Africa for instance, the two sociological schemes, one, the positive for the whites and the negative for the black, result in two different existential experiences, namely, being-white-in-the-world and being-black-in-the-world.

For the black at the level of the individual scheme “he develops a personalized, idiomatic mental (image) concept of his body... he begins to know, through various subtle ways, that his black body is unwholesome: that the white body is the societal standard of wholeness” (Sartre : 1958 : 481-9). This common experience among the black indigenous majority population group calls to mind Martin Buber’s concept of dialogue. This relates to the concept of relating and distancing, namely, “us” (black) and “them” (whites). The concepts themselves refer to the in-group and the out-group. As primary forms of relating between blacks and whites these concepts are associated with fundamental differences in the way blacks and whites relate to their bodies, to other people, to objects, and to time (Sartre : 1958 : 47). Precisely because these concepts are relating and distancing, it is well nigh impossible to develop ways of action and thinking which transcend these categorical relationships between blacks and whites. Two different modes of being-in-the-world are expressed by us and them. That is, two different existential experiences: being-black-in-the-world and being-white-in-the-world (Manganyi : 1973 : 4). The tendencies and attitudes which typify these relations are pervasive worldwide, South Africa inclusive.

Black Consciousness Movement

Against this background, Manganyi and Biko, black South African citizens, sought a redefinition of the black existence and experience. The Black Consciousness Movement became a positive step in this direction. This movement is based upon the Black Consciousness philosophy. This philosophy proceeds from the premise that being-black-in-the-world is an existential fact which carries with it consequences with regard to the world experience resulting from the fact of being-black-in-the-world. This means that the Black Consciousness philosophy accepts that for all human beings the situation in which
they are placed determines not only their outlook on life but also their value system which they will subsequently assimilate and perhaps even articulate. Similarly, the Black Consciousness philosophy has used the expression “black is beautiful” in order to point out the need for psychological liberation on the part of the oppressed black people. A black person uses it to assert himself.

To allow the racialists' order to continue would be tantamount to accepting the fact of psychological oppression thereby admitting that whites in South Africa are correct to victimise blacks as scapegoats for their own sense or experience of incompleteness. This, in a nutshell, forms the basis of a need for psychological liberation on the part of blacks. It goes without saying that the racialist order in South Africa is oppressive not only psychologically, but also physically. One need only think of the many physical barriers contained in a multiplicity of abolished laws to show that in fact blacks were physically oppressed and therefore needed to be liberated from all the chains of oppression. The process will take several decades to complete. It is not enough to repeal obnoxious laws. What is required is a change of attitudes, and this does not happen at a stroke of a pen.

What is remarkable in this development, is that the Black Consciousness philosophy also takes the body as its starting point but obviously applies a different meaning to the body. The latter philosophy sees the body not only as a bearer of, but also as the medium through which the totality of human experience can be articulated, and not only that, but also as a means through which experience can lead to a process of transformation. In essence, the Black Consciousness philosophy is not only a challenge to the philosophy of dualism, and its corresponding value systems, but it also actively and consciously seeks to replace this philosophy and transform its value systems. Because this philosophy of dualism, as visited upon the South African black people’s existential experiences, is fraught with the vestiges of life-denying forces that constitute a negation of life of black people, it necessitates the imperative of its substitution. If and when this objective is achieved, then even the whites in South Africa will be redeemed from the split psyche. They will thus be relieved of the practice of scapegoating to the extent that this will either result in the natural existential balance (we are our body-psychosomatic beings) or in the restoration of the experience of completeness, the experience that we are one integrated whole. The success of Black Consciousness philosophy, if ultimately achieved, will underline wholeness as the mark of an African concept of a person. Wholeness is the hallmark of an African perspective to life as one indivisible whole. It is therefore positive to note that the restoration and recognition of wholeness will not only vindicate the African philosophical perspective, but will confirm that the integrative (holistic) approach or attitude is the only panacea for our situation and similar situations experiencing like problems under different guises.

Difference

Post modernist discourse on difference is informed by the recognition or assumption that plurality or diversity is a desirable state of affairs in developed societies. But the same cannot be unequivocally said for developing or underdeveloped societies. Whereas for developed countries difference is regarded as a positive natural coalescence of groups on a voluntary basis, for other societies it is perceived as negative and retarding progress or “civilization.”
The new world order is desirous of celebrating and promoting diversity and pluralism to the extent that such cannot be used to polarise societies. Some post-modernists allude to pluralism as a social, political and cultural complement of technologisation. Differences between entities are understood generally as that which differentiate them from one another, but also as the self-difference of an entity in and by itself.

The new discourse on difference and reconciliation in post-Apartheid South Africa is aimed at reconciling differences, thus refuting monism and emphatically rejecting any form of “exclusionism” or “reductionism” whereby the “other” becomes same, rather that the “other” as “other”. A unique subject who is an integral part of an invisible whole. On this reasoning therefore, which is very much consistent with existential philosophy, celebrating difference entails recognition of and solidarity with fellow human beings. Similarly, the discourse on difference seeks to find ways by which to guide human interactions within a context of divergent normative interests.

The discourse of globalization \textit{inter alia}, seeks to obliterate boundaries, visible and invisible, economic, political and cultural and create an “homogenous” society. However, this society is paradoxically also “heterogenous” in the sense that it recognises individual identity and celebrates plurality and difference. Accordingly, any automatic assumption of the intrinsic and continuing centrality of “the West” to the history of human progress and enlightenment has already been brought into question, not only by the terrible events of the present century, but also by a gradual recognition of a truly “world” history, in which the rise of European hegemony is put into its proper perspective, neither pre-ordained nor unique in the annals of man - (and woman) kind (Safier, 1996 : 14-15).

It is not enough to assert that diversity is desirable because if it is not well managed, it can be explosive. It must be kept under control lest unscrupulous agents exploit it to the detriment of society. To achieve “living difference” openness to the Other is necessary. Furthermore to realise this necessary imperative, societies should create a context of discovery which will debunk stereotypes which assert the impossibility of shared common values, since shared common values are a \textit{sine qua non} for harmonious co-existence.

I am painfully aware that the problem of xenophobia is bedevilling human relations in South Africa. Several arguments can be advanced in support of or against it (xenophobia). However, the ideal that all human beings should strive for is of equal treatment of the human species regardless of race, creed, and colour. Often material (economic) scarcity is the propelling force behind xenophobia. Notwithstanding the above, shared space and time, underpinned by shared normative values, should be our priceless paradise to be enjoyed by all. Legal and social parameters should be sought for the realisation of this ideal and at the same time to avert possible anarchy. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights and other statutory and otherwise organs seeking to enforce equal, fair and just treatment of people should be supported and well resourced. Accordingly, necessary limitations should be created to balance the interests of all parties concerned. For example, no country can allow an infinite influx of foreigners. Rules, by their nature, work against difference, but the constraints provided by rules are necessary for the play of difference to become meaningful. Kant's categorical imperative illuminates this
argument further, that is, in effecting positive discrimination, human dignity should not be compromised. Equals should be treated equally. However, where there is an exception to the rule it must be done with a humane face.

The Rise of Ethnic Consciousness

The new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa declares in unequivocal terms that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity." This clause, enshrined as it is in the constitution, is, as it were, not a reflection of the status quo. On the contrary, it is an ideal for which all South Africans should strive. Typical of the triumphalist syndrome of the new leaders, the rainbow nation was celebrated even before it, the rainbow nation itself, could come to fruition. In fact, recent national developments and trends suggest that the "rainbow nation", if it ever existed, seems to be reverting back to a "zebra nation", where black and white are polarised and view each other with a suspicion that is so deeply rooted that it could not even be tempered by our internationally acclaimed TRC (as the controversy surrounding its final report clearly showed). Moreover, in the "new" South Africa, it seems, one needs to be black (and, of course, have the proper political affiliations) in order to be appointed Chief Attorney General. Why is it so? What has happened to the ideal of non-racialism?

In post apartheid South Africa, racism is not felt as a mental or spiritual obstruction. It is sinking its roots across the racial divide. It has become an organisational principle of society. It is felt in the flesh and in the very practice of daily living. Media, electronic and print abound with daily practices of racism and xenophobia. One of the worst effects of racism is the way it numbs human sensibility. Empathy and solidarity are rare commodities in societies based on racist ideologies.

In one of the preceding paragraphs I indicated that there is nothing inherently wrong with racialism. So it is with ethnic identities. These are neutral social constructs that are capable of perversion and thus assuming negative overtones (Louw: 1998:149ff). For example: people who once said they were black have since the 1994 election started to assert themselves as Indians and Coloureds. Perhaps it is because the political landscape reflects a strong bias towards Africans and in particular the Xhosa ethnic group. The political arrogance of the new African elite is reminiscent of the previous political order and engenders ethnic insecurity among the minority groups. The
“muscling” of the intellectuals, journalists and politicians who speak against the new racism in South Africa militates against nation building and the nascent democracy.

Ethnic identities are also coming to the fore with, for example, complaints about Nguni-dominated national parliament by non-Xhosa and non-Zulu South Africans. National strategic positions, both in the civil service and parastatals, are perceived as preserved for the elite or aristocratic Nguni ethnic group. The same perception is prevailing in the Northern Province where the Tsonga ethnic group is perceived as trying to arrogate all power to itself. Sadly indeed such ethnic tendencies are beginning to entrench themselves in some of the tertiary institutions. For example: the appointment of a Vice-Chancellor is a politicised matter these days. Merit or scholarship is seldom considered, if at all. Political affiliation and ethnicity top the unwritten criteria. How else could it be in a situation where a student and a professor have an equal vote on Senate matters. Governing councils are a haven for political jockeying for positions by persons with dubious academic credentials.

What is currently happening in Historically Disadvantaged Institutions bear testimony to this fact.

Within the spirit of nation building we should perhaps pronounce more the virtues of a non-racial society than those of ethnic consciousness. However, this should be done in a critical way, for nation building in an ethnically diverse society is indeed a great challenge facing political and community leaders. As alluded to earlier, in any country there are always a number of integrative and disintegrative forces at work which may either support or impede the process of nation building. In this connection Malan writes: “Ethnicity is one

of these factors. In a homogeneous nation it may be highly integrative, but in a multicultural nation it may prove to be very divisive” (1988:61). Where do we go from here in the post apartheid South Africa?

Colonial prejudice succeeded in the past in implying that ethnic consciousness existed only among the underdeveloped people of the world, especially the Africans. But social scientists and engineers agree that, “...the problem of ethnic diversity and the threats it poses to some kind of “national unity” is a ubiquitous problem in almost all the new nations” (Parsons : 1975 : 81). Countries both in Africa and the Eastern bloc with an ethnic heterogeneous population find it increasingly hard to establish national unity, and many of them, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union, are compelled to opt for provincial sovereignty or to institute a form of regionalism that allows for a significant degree of self-determination to ethnic groups (Malan : 1998 : 61). Therefore, “in both industrial and industrialising nations, predictions of the demise of ...ethnicity has been incorrect. If anything, ethnicity has undergone a period of revitalisation. Even groups that were once thought to have lost their sense of ethnic identity are once again proclaiming their pride in being members of distinct ethnic groups with their own cultural traditions.” (Howard : 1986 : 270).

Events in post-independent South Africa are a grim testimony to the fact that in many countries the forces of ethnic mobilization have not been correctly judged. Ours is an ethnically heterogeneous country and the objective of nation building should be understood and owned by all, if it is to succeed. Calculated moves and strategies should be executed with the greatest circumspection. To succeed therefore, one will have to take into account existing leadership structures
and vested interests of traditional groupings, especially chieftaincy. This multicultural consciousness and approach may pave the way for unity in diversity, and the ultimate realisation of the rainbow nation. Accordingly, shared state structures need to be created which incorporate ethnic leaders from all political segments. This is far better than simply ignoring or suppressing ethnicity. Managing a highly volatile and unpredictable variable such as ethnicity necessitates vigilance and care, not overly interventionist state strategies. Since Aristotle, reason has always been projected as the decisive criterion of the definition of a human being (Ramose, 1999:13). Let humanity use this reason to conquer divisive forces, be they physical or mental, collective or individual.

To the extent that a human person strives perpetually for illusive perfection, I would urge humanity to consider racial classification and consciousness as an ontological datum, a human condition that we cannot change but live. Difference and differentiation enriches the human species, for there is always richness ind diversity. The recognition and acceptance of the other as other is the gateway to universal acceptance of the inevitability of a people involuntarily thrown into this world to share space and time. The other as other is the necessary condition for my being and I should treat her/him according to that maxim that I can at the same will it to become a universal law. As technology has reduced the world into one big village, we will have to find creative ways of living with one another, our cultural differences notwithstanding.

The preceding paragraphs confirm in a very pointed manner the paradox inherent in the expression, “the global village”. The world is flooded to a debilitating extent with the claims that the world is increasingly becoming a global village where boundaries of geography, race, and nationality are to be drawn into a new world order of peace and steady progress. The truth of the matter is that we are witnessing the contrary. Indeed what is happening in South Africa is a microcosm of a universal phenomenon. The global village remains sadly in embryo, especially for the developing and underdeveloped countries.

The much desired project of world peace and stability has been seriously compromised by the revival of ethnic tensions, prejudices, rivalries, and clashes in various parts of the world. Our contention that it is fallacious to talk about a global village, effectively one indivisible human race, is justified by global occurrences that are inimical to tranquil and flourishing global order. Ethnic cleansing, ethnic genocide, tribal inspired conflicts and warfare, heightened religious fundamentalism, increasing xenophobia and protectionism, demystifies this concept of the global village.

Somehow people are looking for new identities and symbols that will typify them as a people qua people without necessarily denying or negating the personhood of any other *homo sapiens*. Therefore, to appreciate this sudden global resurgence of ethnic consciousness, it would be helpful to take cognisance of the historical underpinnings of various ethnicities, social structures and the quest for nation building.

“Rainbowism” and Neo-Racism

The ideal of a non-racial South Africa has been cherished by blacks and whites alike since the advent of apartheid. Current reality though points to a heightened ethno-racial consciousness. Despite protestations to the contrary, racism lives on. Under the new politically correct
nomenclature racial assertiveness abounds. Confronted with this blatant and debilitating racial reality Adam poses the following prickling questions: “What has caused the demise of the non-racial dream? Who benefits from renewed ethno-racial consciousness? Does the failure of nation-building signal instability, at best, or the unravelling into worrying factions, at worst?” (1998: 13). The President, Thabo Mbeki, underscored the division when he said that there are two nations in South Africa: one black and poor, the other white and relatively prosperous.

The previous apartheid regime had a host of racial laws intended to preserve the interests of the minority group and ensure it a long political life. In this connection, we had inter alia, the Mixed Marriages Act, Immorality Act, Land Act, and Bantu Education Act. The present ANC-led government is also falling into the same trap, albeit for different reasons. This is so despite the fact that the African National Congress, as a political movement then stressed the illegitimacy of colour in their struggle against a minority regime based on racial privilege. For instance, in their quest for racial representativity, it introduced somewhat racist legislations. I have in mind here legislation like Affirmative Action, Employment Equity Bill, et cetera. These could, and are already perceived as promoting reverse discrimination. In the quest to overcome subtle or covert racism, all South Africans, despite their station in life, will have to be vigilant against its manifestation in any form.

The abolition of legal racism does not necessarily translate into the disappearance of its legacies. Similarly, South Africans should refrain from constant reference to the racial legacies of the past, lest they unwittingly engender and perpetuate racial tendencies. These tendencies manifest themselves psychologically in the main with negative forms. “Racial victims frequently internalise the dominant definitions of themselves. A majority of Coloureds and Indians vote for the party of their former oppressors because it allows those powerless middle-groups to construct for themselves an imagined ethno-racial superiority over others.” (Adam: 1998: 13). Coloureds see Africans as all-powerful, demanding all the resources, getting all the jobs - while they see themselves as continuing to be deprived. At the heart of these tensions is competition for scarce resources like jobs, housing, access to educational facilities, and blatant favouritism, nepotism, and rampant and debilitating corruption by the new political elite. The aggravating factor is the influx of foreigners with better academic credentials and a highly reputable work ethic and entrepreneurship.

**Conclusion**

If South Africans were to unite in their diversity, it would be feasible for both black and white to break with their past, and discard the scourge of racism both in thought and action. Casting a glance back at the period since the 1994 election, it seems that the rainbow nation based on the principles of non-racialism is gradually disintegrating. Similarly, ethnic tensions and tendencies that are taking root at present should be nipped in the bud. Unless all South Africans commit themselves towards the achievement of the real viable rainbow nation, the ideal of the 1994 election, of rebuilding a new South Africa, a South Africa which knows no colour or divisive ethnic affiliation, will slip into oblivion. Decisive and unpartisan political leadership is required to achieve the above. However, with Nelson Mandela having left the central arena, one is less
optimistic about the future. And with the blatant political arrogance already being displayed by the ruling class, and the level of discontent on the ground, the future is for me too ghastly to contemplate. Unless something definite happens, South Africa which is on a definite decline will be another basket case. The ANC government is increasingly divorced from the people. Ministers talk down to the people and seldom do they see them in person except during the elections. Their political and rhetorics often fan the fires of racism.

The recent surge in xenophobia should spur South Africans to create time and space for the flourishing of the ideal of universal brotherhood. Blackness just like whiteness is a mode of being and comportment in a world ruptured by alienation, hate, indifference and confusion. Since both blacks and whites are capable of being racists, it is therefore equally within their power to eradicate the scourge of racism and or ethnicity. To succeed, material inequalities will have to be significantly reduced. The manner and extent to which the class inequalities are addressed will influence the character of the nation that emerges in the long run. To this end the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has contributed immensely. Through a combination of educational programmes and a redistribution of resources we can contribute further towards the eradication of racial and ethnic prejudice.

The political leadership should also make a conscious effort not to polarise races by act or omission.

Creating a “rainbow nation” soon after emerging from such a ruptured past will be far from easy. The way we manage conflicts arising from legislation intended for the promotion of a non-racial society, will be crucial. The challenges lying ahead are numerous, diverse, and daunting. We have to rise to the occasion. In the meantime let us live and let live.
Notes and References


