

Interrogating the Idea of Transformation in the Resolution of Africa's Economic and Political rises: The Possibilities and Limits in the South Africa's Situation.

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In this essay the meaning and implications of the idea of transformation are investigated and interrogated. Equally important, to have a clear understanding of the idea of transformation as a socio-political and economic strategy aimed at redressing the complex consequences of a system that propagated injustice of the worst kind, the situation of South Africa is treated as a case study. Undeniably, South Africa's apartheid system was intended to create and perpetuate a situation of racial division, racial oppression, human degradation and economic deprivation (Mbeki 1998: 41). In contrast, the post-1994 South Africa is a country in the process of fundamental change from an apartheid hierarchy of cultures, an authoritative and unjust society to a democratic society grounded in a patriotic national cultural identity.

In South Africa the challenge of transformation has always been pre-eminently a moral struggle. Rooted in the fight against racial divisions institutionalised by apartheid, this struggle represented a profound moral quest, a larger vision of how [South Africans] should live together and treat one another (Johnson-Hill 1998: 2)

According to Makgoba (1997) and Seepe (1998), in the process of alienating and marginalizing African cultural heritage, the ideological designs of colonialism and the apartheid hegemony, distorted culture as a phenomenological concept. The objective of this whole exercise was to disorientate and disorganized the African personality and the programmes of self-identification, self-determination and self-reliance. Therefore, as a strategy to redress the consequences of the apartheid legacy in the post-1994 South Africa, the task of the socio-political and economic transformation project and nation building is to deconstruct, decenter, deideologize and dehegemonize colonial cultural imperialism and the apartheid hegemony by unapologetically creating an empowering alternative points of reference and alternative discourse.

In fact, the challenge that the socio-political and economic transformation process and nation building presents to all South Africans, *especially those who use their intellectual prowess to defend and further the interest of Africa and its people* [emphasis mine] (Mthembu 1999: 2), is to seek to redefine themselves as a new society, and map the future. As Mzamane (1998: 11) explains, this is expected to be pursued in a manner that will advance a patriotic national cultural identity of South Africa as an African country, and also to enhance the cultural, social and economic development of the whole society.

The Meaning and Implications of the Idea of Transformation

Makgoba (1997: 181) defines transformation as "an act or process whereby the form, shape or nature of something is completely changed or altered, a blueprint change." In support of Makgoba, with the post-1994 South Africa's situation vividly in his mind, Mbeki (1998: 43) explains the

idea of transformation as a process that involves "...the termination of the conflict which is inherent to the relationship of domination on the one hand and subservience on the other."

To add, Makgoba (1997: 182) maintains that transformation process, as a strategy that has as its objective to deprogram and reconstruct a society that has had its socio-political and economic relations based on the processes of alienation and marginalization, is overarching and embraces a series of related, interlinked and interdependent themes. They are equity, governance, access, affirmative action, curricula change, effectiveness and development. These themes are complicated by race, gender and the cultural dimensions.

Related to Makgoba's assertion, Mamphela (1995: 200) points out that, an important part of any process of transformation has to be transgression of social boundaries which made sense in the past but which stand in the way of creative response to a changing environment.

In this way, as demonstrated by Mamphela, the transformation process as a socio-political and economic tool for change have as its main objective the breaking of practices and experiences that in a society impinges on the harmonious socio-political relations and interaction, between individuals and communities. Specifically, it is also about ridding South Africa of practices of the apartheid system of white minority domination that have inhibited the economic development of South Africa to its full potential.

Furthermore, against the backdrop of South Africa's past history of colonialism, apartheid legacy and control by a

minority government the idea of transformation can also be explained as “a movement away from elitist control of the society to a dispensation that depends on the acceptance by a broad mass of people of the role of new governmental processes” (Togni 1996: 109). In this connection transformation can be said to be about “... progressing towards a better society – a non-racial society” (Comment 2004: 10).

South Africa's Past History of Colonialism and the Apartheid Legacy, and the Challenges of the Socio-Political and Economic Transformation Processes

In brief, Luhabe (1999: 290) describes South Africa's colonialism and the apartheid legacy as a long catalogue of mismanagement of the country's economy, the under-utilisation of human resources, concentration of ownership of means of production in the hands of a few, vast unemployment and poverty, accompanied by marginalization of the majority from economic activity, as well as massive income and social inequalities.

Concurring with Luhabe, in one of his many ably attempts to vividly describe the consequences of colonialism and the apartheid legacy, Mbeki (2004: Online) explains:

We are emerging but only emerging slowly and painfully, out of a deeply fractured society. This is a society which continues to be characterised by deep fissures which separate the black people from the white, the hungry from the prosperous, the urban from the rural, the male from the female, the disabled from the rest. *Running like fault through it all, and weaving it together into a frightening bundle of imbalance and inequality, is the question of race and colour – the fundamental consideration on which was built South African society for 300 years [emphasis mine].*

From another perspective, Mamphela (1995: 204) also reflecting on South Africa's apartheid system of white minority domination and the prospects of the future for the country in the 21st century, notes that unlike many post-colonial societies in Africa, South Africa has a viable and extensive infrastructure: transport and communications, finance and banking, tertiary education, science and technology, and so forth. *The major problem area is the development of human resources, which have been sacrificed on the altar of racial bigotry [emphasis mine].*

From the above it is clear that the problem of racial segregation has impacted horribly negative on the socio-political and economic life of South African society, and this in turn has hampered the growth and development of the country. In this relation, Togni (1996: 109) maintains that “each society is subject to its unique conditions and the process of change takes place according to a number of variables prevailing in the society.” This means for real transformation process to unfold in South Africa, the people need to acknowledge the legacy of apartheid, precisely because this will enable them to deliberately and

consciously deal with the legacy as it continues to divide the country and affect its future in the global economy (Macozoma 2000: 17).

Ten years later, in 2004, reflecting on the catalyst moment that marked the beginning of transformation process Mbeki (2004: Online) asserts,

Since time immemorial, the overwhelming majority of ... [South Africans] ... had known nothing but despair. They knew this as an incontestable matter of fact that tomorrow would not be better than yesterday; it was also fixed and given that the following day would be worse. But then, April 27, 1994 came and things changed radically and irrevocably for all South Africans.

Definitely, the historic moment that Mbeki refers to marked the beginning of the process of ending white minority rule and domination. Given this picture South Africa in the process of socio-political and economic transformation can be said to be a nation that seeks to free itself from stranglehold of its repressive pasts. More importantly, South Africa is a country that in the 21st century aspires to forge ahead in a manner that its people will be able to realise their full potential as a nation, locally, continentally and internationally.

The moral implications of the post-1994 South Africa's transformation process

In his work, titled, *Seeds of Transformation: Discerning the Ethics of a New Generation*, in which he used the University of Durban-Westville as a case study, Johnson-Hill (1998) interrogates the moral implications of the transformation process in South Africa. Looking at his findings it is obvious that the same factors that impact on the transformation processes in higher education also have a bearing on other points of social contact between individuals and communities in the post-1994 South Africa.

Considering the overarching objectives of the RDP project Johnson-Hill (1998: 197) argues that the citizenry of the post-1994 South Africa “cannot be expected automatically to relate to each other openly and fairly if they lack an understanding of who the other is, where the other has come from and where she or he is headed.” In this regard, Johnson-Hill maintains that for true transformation process to unfold in the post-1994 South Africa there is a need for what he calls ‘Other-centred’ orientation, a process which is about “... *self-critical, inclusive, emphatic reaching out to others in a spirit of compassion*” [emphasis mine] (Johnson-Hill 1998: 197). This process has as its aim to change the negative perceptions of one group about the other. In this connection he proposes for what he calls the Three Steps Toward [True] Transformation:

- i. *Learning African Languages*: Taking into cognisance the fact that language is a carrier of culture, Johnson-Hill (1998: 197) maintains that it is through the knowledge of the language of the other that one can “... be able to appreciate how the other thinks about and relates to time, space and other persons.” In

addition, knowledge of language of the other enable one to "... be able to experience how others apprehend themselves, their societies and their views of the good" (Johnson-Hill 1998: 197). Considering these factors and with reference to some of the principles of the RDP Policy Framework it is obvious that, "it would be virtually impossible to 'mobilise' others without knowledge [and understanding] of their basic moral disposition" (Johnson Hill 1998: 197). As he further observes, it is crucial to take cognisance of the fact that, "the strong intrinsic link between culture and language necessitates that, in order to reach out to the other in facts of alterity ... some effort must be made to communicate in the other's native tongue" (Johnson-Hill 1998: 198).

- ii. *Prioritising Ethico-Religious Experience* – The second step relates to the issue of religion which forms part of culture in the African thought pattern (Mbiti 1969: 2). Here Johnson-Hill (1998: 200) refers to a broader, more inclusive sense of African religiosity, "which pertains to a uniting of all things, beings and spheres (a relationality) by virtue of a life force (a power), and it is integrally linked to notions of right and wrong (a dimension of alterity)." Given this description and considering the meaning and the implications of transformation processes in the post-1994 South Africa, as Johnson-Hill (1998: 200) asserts, "to attempt to separate the religious factor from any policy document in Africa, imbued as it is with such an all-encompassing religious impulse, is to embark on a course of action which is divorced from the nexus of spiritual power, *Ntu*."
- iii. *Engendering Basic Sensitivities and Commitments* – The third step stipulates that, "if one strives to reach out to the other in an inclusive and empathetic way, then it is important not only to take the other's language seriously, but also to become more aware of the other's fears and frustrations" (Johnson-Hill 1998: 202). In the apartheid South Africa there was always false assumptions about the others fears and frustration, and this was based on ignorance and superiority complex. As a result even critical decisions were made on behalf of the other without proper consultation and consideration of the other's culture.

In agreement with John-Hill's idea of the Three Steps Toward (True) transformation, Macozoma (2000:17) asserts that "if we are going to find a common [post-1994] SA dream we need better social contact." This means a space must be created through which there will be an open and fair social contact between different racial groups and religious expressions, and this will consequentially lead to a clear understanding of the other.

3.2. The post-1994 South Africa's possibilities and limits of the socio-political and economic transformation process

In his Inaugural Address to a Joint Sitting of Parliament, on the 24 May 1994, the then President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, declared: My Government's commitment to create a people-centred society of liberty binds us to the pursuit of the goals of freedom from want, freedom from hunger, freedom from deprivation, freedom from ignorance, freedom from suppression and freedom from fear. These freedoms are fundamental to the guarantee of human dignity. They will therefore constitute part of what this Government will seek to achieve, the focal point on which our attention will be continuously focused. The things we have said constitute the true meaning, the justification and the purpose of the Reconstruction and Development Programme, without which it would lose all legitimacy (South Africa. White Paper on RDP 1994: 1).

Mandela's statement represent(ed) a desire by the leaders of the first new democratically elected government to decisively break with the tendencies and practices of the apartheid system and thus work towards establishing a new society, characterised by the equality of the national groups (Mbeki 1998: 286).

From onset it was clear that the new nation could not be created on the basis of the extraordinary imbalances that were inherited from the apartheid legacy. This meant that, basically the main objective of South Africa's transformation project and nation building was/is to "fundamentally change the country's political, economic and social landscape" (O'Brian: 2004: 4). This became clearly articulated in the Reconstruction and Development document, which was mainly inspired by the transformation policy of the African National Congress, especially some tenets of the Freedom Charter (Hudson 1997: 8).

The South African Reconstruction and Development Programme's (RDP) White Paper, as it was adopted by the Government of National Unity (GNU), after its inauguration in May 1994, was/is explained as:

an integrated, coherent socio-economic policy framework. [Which] seeks to mobilise all people and ... [the] ... country's resources toward the final eradication of the results of apartheid and the building of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future. It represents a vision for the fundamental transformation of South Africa (South Africa. White Paper on RDP 1994: 4).

As further explicitly explained in the RDP document the main objectives of South Africa's integrated process of transformation was/is to ensure that the country,

- [i] develops strong and stable democratic institutions and practices characterised by representativeness and participation,
- [ii] becomes a fully democratic and non-racial society,

- [iii] becomes a prosperous society, having embarked upon a sustainable and environmentally friendly growth and development path,
- [iv] address the moral and ethical development of society (South Africa White Paper on RDP 1994: 4).

From the perspective of the South African Chamber of Business (SACOB), O'Brien (2003: 4) notes, that with the above-mentioned overriding objectives the architects of the RDP's aim was to firmly entrench "... the values of equality and freedom, laying the foundations for the country to chart a new path to economic development, which other developing nations could follow." Furthermore, explaining the moral implications of the transformation process in the post-1994 South Africa Johnson-Hill (1998: 196) points out that, where the apartheid state was predicated on rigid racial, cultural, class and gender divisions, the post-apartheid ANC-led government strives for racial harmony, gender sensitivity and greater economic opportunities for all, especially the poorest members of society.

In agreement with Johnson-Hill, Meyer (2004: 11) describes South Africa's socio-political and economic transformation instituted by the post-1994 experiences and practices as "... a transition, from a constitution safeguarding white minority rights to one protecting equal individual rights." Undoubtedly, though much of the blemishes of colonialism and the apartheid past still have to be shed off by the post-1994 South Africa, through the transformation project (not as such in a form of the RDP of 1994 that was later abandoned by the government), enough has been achieved. It is a pity that, as it succumbed to the policy dictates and ideological pressures of the international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the African National Congress dropped the RDP project (Saul 2002:38).

In his 2004 State of the Nation Address, the President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. Thabo Mbeki, aptly captures the changes of the post-1994 South Africa (Mbeki 2004: Online). According to Mbeki (2004: Online), to cite few examples, before 1994 the following was the reality in South Africa:

- Estimates of the housing backlog ranged from 1,4 million to 3 million units and people living in shacks were between 5 million to 7,7 million;
- 60% of the population of South Africa had no access to electricity;
- 16 million people had no access to clean water;
- 22 million people did not have access to adequate sanitation;
- There were 17 fragmented departments of education with a disproportionate allocation of resources to white schools;
- There was 70% secondary school enrolment.

Ten years later in 2004, as Mbeki (2004: Online) asserts, in an attempt to create the people-centred society as

envisaged in Mandela's 1994 Inaugural Address to a Joint Sitting of Parliament, the following are the results:

- About 1,9 million housing subsidies have been provided and 1,6 million houses built for the poor of ...[South Africa];
- More than 70% households have been electrified;
- 9 million additional people now have access to clean water;
- 63% of households now have access to sanitation;
- There has been a successful formation on an integrated education system, even though there is a clear need for more resource allocation and capacity building in poor areas;
- Nutrition and early childhood interventions have been established to improve better results for children from poor backgrounds;
- By 2002 secondary school enrolment had reached 85%.

Here, very much in brief, the overriding objectives of the socio-political and economic transformation process in the post-1994 South Africa have been identified and interrogated. In his 2004 State of the Nation address Mbeki's aim was to point out what has been possible to achieve especially through the socio-political transformation processes within the first decade of democracy. Unfortunately, these changes that have come with the 27 April 1994, South Africa's first democratic elections, are appreciated by a few who are actually benefit from them materially. In this relation, Tim Modise (2004: 24) the leader of the Proudly South African, an organisation that promotes the country's products and services, announces:

We live in an era where we have witnessed and experienced history unfolding before our eyes. We also have the spirit to make things happen and I am proud of that spirit. I am proud of the fact that we are a new nation, based on a new model for a new country.

Nevertheless, what Modise observes can be said to be in line with the socio-political elements that form the core of the transformation process as envisaged in the post-1994 RDP agenda. The main aim has been to create a people centred society that will have a total brake with the tendencies and the practices of the apartheid system of minority rule and domination. Unfortunately, up to so far economic transformation has not began to benefit the majority of those who even in the pre-1994 South Africa have always been poor and hungry.

The Transformation Agenda and the Problem of the Persistence of Poverty and Economic Inequalities

However, it also needs to be pointed out that, ten years later in 2004, "South Africa still has one of the most unequal distributions of income in the world – a clear reflection of the extremely low levels of black participation in the economy and the continuation of this situation threatens to undermine the stability of [the country's] young democracy" (O' Brian 2003: 4).

Analysing the current economic situation in South Africa (which is dictated to by the global economy with its marginalizing tendencies and foreign investment) and its inability to uproot poverty, Legum (2004: 15) points out that “enviously democracy cannot survive a situation in which almost half of ... [the nation is] ... is not contributing to the economy either as producers or as effective consumers.” Indeed, in 2004 South Africa’s political and civil freedoms are flourishing; unfortunately the same cannot be said of the country’s economic freedoms, in that a great majority of the people still have no access to the country’s economic resources and they continue to be poor.

In fact, “... a select few have access to First-World opulence, luxuries, prime real estate, efficient and modern infrastructure, and cheap labour, all at Third-World prices” (McClain-Nhlapo 2004: 13). Related to this matter, Trevor Manuel (2004: Online), Minister of Finance, addressing an Association for the Advancement of Black Accountants of South Africa (ABASA) annual convention, sent a warning signal to all those who love their country, when he said: In building a post-Apartheid South Africa, we have set ourselves two objectives: to rid of the racial inequalities that were imposed on our people, and to reduce the massive amounts of poverty in our country. Only when we are making progress in both of these fronts, can we say we are defeating Apartheid.

Considering the above-mentioned facts, there is no doubt that the persistence of poverty and economic inequality poses a threat to the country’s young democracy. However, “it is crucial to note that South African democracy arrived precisely at the moment when globalisation emerged as the driving force in world politics, with far-reaching consequences for the Third World” (Jacobs and Calland 2002: 15).

Conclusion

In this essay, very much in brief, the meaning and the implications of the idea of transformation as a socio-political and economic strategy to redress a situation of social and economic injustice has been investigated and unpacked. The situation of South Africa as a nation in a transformation process has been analysed, and what the country has been able to achieve in the past ten years of democracy has been identified.

However, in the essay it has also been demonstrated that the post-1994 South Africa still have to seriously address the economic situation of the majority of its people. As a matter of fact the condition of poverty and underdevelopment is part of the blemish of colonialism and the apartheid legacy, and it is a factor that confronts most of the countries of the geopolitical South in the 21st century.

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