

Transformation – Back To Basics

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The work by the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the production of the position paper has not come at a better time. I generally agree with the analysis of the paper, especially regarding what was done to try and make South Africa a more equitable country in all aspects - now we need to focus on what is to be done to transform the country. It is difficult to come up with a wholesale solution; it is difficult to try reconcile whilst uplifting; to change things for one group of people whilst keeping them the same for another group of people; keeping whites feeling comfortable, and their lives remaining the same, whilst transforming to empower the majority that is black. Sparking dialogue is of course important, a recent example happened at UCT where dialogue led to the unanimous agreement that the statue of Rhodes must go. As we change South Africa, it is important to let those resisting or those uncomfortable with change know why things are changing. South Africa needs to transform, not just reconcile. Transformation is profound, fundamental change, altering the very nature of something. Transformational change is both radical and sustainable. Something that is transformed can never go back to exactly what it was before.

The conquest and domination of Africans by Europeans and their descendents was not just physical and economic - it was also mental and spiritual. Therefore the re-engineering of this country cannot be addressed by transforming the economy alone; it needs to deal with the psyche of not only whites but especially the psyche of black people. But the time for pity parties, blaming and seeking apologies is over. We need action that will transform. Equality in resources must translate to seeing ourselves and the other as equal human beings regardless of differences in race, culture, gender, religion, and so on. Racism is not just the attitudes and actions by whites towards blacks. It is also the accepting by blacks of the notion that we deserve to be viewed as having lower social value.

A lot of things about South Africa have changed and much more needs to change. I am of the generation that is impatient for change and does not want a single further generation to find things as they are today. I believe that we need to be critical about our past and passionate about our future. This does not mean forgetting history - to the contrary, it means knowing and understanding history for what it is and the resulting circumstances we have today. It means not being defined or arrested by history, but instead being passionate and emotional about the possibilities of tomorrow, about the South Africa we want, and being busy getting there.

We need action in many little and big ways, and one of those ways I would like to suggest is for government to make it compulsory that all schools that are “white”, in that the majority of teaching staff is white, be changed. All of these schools, public and private, should have at least 50% black teachers. And where there is

an excess of white teachers they should be employed in black schools. Carter G. Woodson, in his book *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, which analyses the education systems in Europe and America and their impact on 'the Negro', says "so-called modern education, with all its defects, however, does others so much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker peoples." This is also the case in South Africa.

From a young age white and black children who go to suburban schools mostly encounter white teachers. This defines power relations from a young age, with whites being seen as leaders and generators of ideas and knowledge. At home the majority of the white children have black maids and garden helpers. On television, white and black children are exposed to white definitions of beauty - most shows on the MNet channel are white, as are most popular American series on public channels. Adverts by big department stores like Truworths - like the one currently airing - have mostly white models, when the majority of people buying there are black. Examples are countless. This fosters a generation of white children thinking they are superior and black children who work for recognition by whites. Still in 2015 media, schools and business communicate the idea that blacks are of lower social value. Dialogues alone won't change this narrative.

Last year I was in a workshop with management of a major South African bank, which has a wide presence on the continent. When I asked the management why it is so white, and so male for that matter, the response was that they don't look at race or gender when hiring, they want the best, they are a meritocracy. The implication is that black people just aren't smart enough - clearcut racism. The same is said when questions about why rugby and cricket are so white are raised. Racist philosophy has infiltrated so much of our lives that at times people don't even know they are racist.

The history of human development is defined and littered by conquest, competition and war. Like other members of the animal kingdom, this trait to overcome others is displayed in the sports we play, in the reward systems at schools and in the work place, right through to the awarding of global prizes like the Nobels. As intelligent beings this aspect of nature has assisted us in progressing and developing amazing things such as this laptop I am typing on. It is the other aspect of competition, our need to be superior to "others" and the need we have for affirmation, that creates schisms that give way to different forms of hatred such as racism.

It is not important to go into depth about the history of racism and how it was developed as an idea, philosophy and science. But as an example, some of the exalted thinkers of Europe's Enlightenment period contributed to the widespread understanding and belief by Europeans and their descendents that "the civilized nation [Europe] is conscious that the rights of the barbarians [Africans] are

unequal to its own,” as written by Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right*. The construct of the modern global political economy is based on the philosophies of Hegel, Hume, Kant and Marx that present and justifies the colonisation and exploitation of ‘black savages’ and their lands of gold.

It is not in the best interests of South Africa for us to replicate this trajectory. It is important to have dialogues, but because some are comfortable with the status quo - because the major shift and transformation that was expected post-1994 never came - reaching consensus will be difficult. It is time to serve the interests of the majority. We need the dialogues to inspire action. We need civic education reaching every South African so that this work on transforming the country isn't about what government, business or civil society thinks, but about what we all think. For this, people need to be educated so that they can exercise their citizenship. So as we bring down statues and reclaim history, we need to educate, to re-engineer especially the awareness of black South Africans to appreciate that citizenship doesn't begin and end with voting; so that we bring up a generation of young people who are self-assured and firm about pursuing what is right at all times. We need to break the social and political culture that existed during our colonization and domination and that still persists today, and become actors that transform the current economic and social structures and systems.