



Transformation will not be realised without correction of past injustices in Azania

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Reconciliation, justice, and social cohesion are some of the buzz words that have been peddled in post-apartheid South Africa. In addition to this political 'salad', the misguided and deceptive notions of 'rainbow nation' and 'born-frees' form part of the catch phrases that have, for a long time been used to promote a false narrative of South Africa being a land of milk and honey where apartheid colonialism is dead and buried. Nothing could be further from the truth. For two parties to reconcile, there must first be conciliation between them. This conciliation should, as a prerequisite, be underpinned by willingness from both sides to cooperate and compromise on certain mutually agreed upon issues. For instance, white South Africans who are all, implicitly or explicitly, beneficiaries of Apartheid and land dispossession of Black South Africans, should have shown their remorse by giving back the land to its rightful owners – Black people. This gesture would have gone a long way to convince the then and now oppressed black majority that their former oppressors were indeed remorseful and willing to reconcile for a genuinely transformed society. However, this was never the case and without this material and economic shift in ownership of wealth and property, justice, peace, social cohesion and reconciliation will remain elusive because the downtrodden black majority remains poor and unemployed in their millions.

Class analysis of social dynamics in South Africa are often based on upward mobility of mostly so-called 'middle class' people. However, in the context of South Africa, it is quite difficult to reach a consensus on a comprehensive definition of who qualifies to be categorized as middle class. This is largely due to the untransformed economy and skewed ownership patterns and the fact that a handful black people who are often (mistakenly) called middle class, earn a fairly high salary but do not own and control wealth, in the form of property and generational wealth. The picture is often different for their white counterparts who are beneficiaries of the ill-gotten wealth that was accumulated through centuries of Apartheid colonialism. Looked at from this perspective, many black South Africans cannot wholesomely be assumed to fall under the rubric of the middle class solely based on their salaries, which often times is swallowed by 'black tax', credit and apartment rentals, amongst other things, which makes it hard for them to save and invest their money. Black tax is a term popularly used among black people to refer to the phenomena where young black professionals income is spent retrospectively due to inherited credit from homes etc. This traps most black people in debt 'from the cradle to the grave'.

Despite the fact that there is a lot of data showing that unemployment and inequality gap has been increasing since 1994, the 'black middle class' remain optimistic about reconciliation and transformation prospects in South Africa. One explanation of this positivist outlook of middle class black South Africans on issues of race relations and transformation as a whole may be that they have assumed an assimilationist psychology, where they feel that their close proximity to those who wield economic power (i.e. white people), implies that they too will one day get a share of the cake. For this reason, they are led to believe that black people as a whole are progressing.

Contrary to the overwhelming literature that subscribes to the argument that class cleavages hamper reconciliation more than race divisions, recent sporadic confrontations between black and white students in South African universities over the hegemony of Afrikaans, bear testimony to race inequalities that have been suppressed in South Africa. A few cases worth mentioning are members of the Fees Must Fall movement at Wits University who wore T-shirts which had racially charged words, expressing their anger at white supremacy and white people. The second case is the physical confrontation between white Afrikaans students and black students at the University of Pretoria over language policy of the university which continued to privilege Afrikaans speakers over other black languages. The third and last instance is the assault of black students by a mob of white Afrikaans students and their parents at a rugby match at the University of Free State. This last racially fueled confrontation was due to a protest action black students were waging against the university concerning outsourcing of workers at the university.

What these three accounts show is that race relations and racial inequality seem to have hit rock bottom and the arena in which they are playing out is university campuses. By all accounts, there seems to be new material evidence suggesting that the youth of South Africa are feeling the brunt of institutional, structural and economic racism and inequality, hence the current rupture and violence in most university campuses.

It is difficult to interrogate any topic even remotely dealing with transformation in South Africa without speaking about the land question. Slow land restitution or lack thereof is one aspect of economic transformation that has gained currency in recent years, and many now agree that the 'willing buyer willing seller' policy failed dismally in addressing the landlessness of black South Africans. This thorny issue of land redistribution could also be viewed to as retarding or slowing the efforts of reconciliation and transformation, and unfortunately the government does not seem to have the urgency required to address the challenges of landlessness of the majority.

Furthermore, asymmetrical use of class analysis over race analysis of South African transformation trajectory is problematic on many levels. Firstly, such an approach deliberately and conveniently divorces the fact that land ownership and formal economic activity in South Africa is still overwhelmingly in the hands of the white minority. Secondly, the focus of the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) on the so-called black middle class presents a problem of exclusivity of the larger working class/proletariat black South Africans. As seen in the positive sentiments of black middle class South Africans about strides made on transformation, these sentiments are not surprising as this group has essentially been co-opted by the lily white economic king makers of the South African economy. Furthermore, there is more evidence suggesting that policies such as BBBEE have been used to front black skins in white owned companies as a disguising mechanism and for compliance with the BBBEE requirements.

Unless the entire South African economic architecture is overhauled and remodeled to empower and accommodate black people, reconciliation and transformation will remain a fantasy.