

The Impact of History on the Development Capacity of South African People

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Abstract

The primary argument of this paper is founded upon the reality of the socio-psychological dysfunction that has evidently stagnated the desirable evolution of all sectors of our nation to what has to be read as civilization. The approach to this discussion does not, however, ignore the significance and urgency of attention to the mechanical skills required to manipulate the development of economic and physical environment in our world of scientific and technology. Rather, it introduces a dimension that calls for attention to the socio-psychological reset in the persons that are expected to perform the desired development functions in the various sectors. The main concern of this argument is that there is a historic factor in our modern civilization that has produced a human breed that tends to read their world, both in general and in specific contexts, through a particular lens which influences one's personal interaction with a given task in their social and physical environment. This discussion draws from various international authors in the fields of sociology and psychology to a dialogue with, at least, modern human history to develop a legible picture of the real state of incapacity today's society has acquired. The main purpose of this paper is to activate discussions and considerations on the vital historic and current factors that influence the ability of society to read elements of coexistence towards collective capacity to build the desired world. This argument, therefore, calls for special capacitation mechanisms that will give attention to the reconstruction and development of the historically destroyed mindset towards meaningful and productive activity in the world that is sought to be realized.

Keywords: Capacity, Socio-psychology, Reconstruction, History, Coexistence, Mindset

INTRODUCTION

Capacitation of society in history, to be particular, is a central opportunity that the entire globe is desperate to be equipped with for positive growth and development in all sectors of human activity. It is an equipping that informs successful education, business, sciences and technology and the development and management of the social and physical environment of human existence. It is a capacity that affirms one's sense of identity and belonging in their sociological context, thereby founding one's vision that directs the unfolding of collective civilization of society in its full spectrum.

The interest of this paper is in the socio-psychological impact of the socio-political history of Africa on human capacity for sustainable growth and development, with more focus on South Africa, and to acknowledge societal manifestations of this impact in response to such historical background.

The history of South Africa can best be read in line with Paulo Freire's (1996) understanding of human psychological response to a given set of factors in a social context. Freire sees both the oppressed and the oppressor as victims that need liberation respectively, in that it takes an oppressed person to oppress another. That is, when a person is regarded as 'inhuman' it means the person's human nature (ubuntu) has been destroyed by certain anti-human elements which destroy one's ability to see a human as human. This psycho-sociological view point sees

colonization as an act of domesticating humans by others; an act that is outside human bounds. It is this domestication that Ngugi WaThiong'o (1986) has identified as an acquired systematized syndrome of dependency and inferiority through the fragmentation of the African continent into boundaries that were locked in different colonial languages that redefined African identities. Chika Onyeani (2006), on the other hand, presents both the oppressor and the oppressed as culprits; a view which is parallel but opposite Freire's in the sense that, for some calculated purpose, Onyeani chooses to hit unsympathetically harder on the Africans' failure to break off the cage of colonization. The shortfall of Onyeani's approach, though, is his view to both the oppressor and the oppressed as persons with healthy and well capacitated mindset. His argument overlooks the natural human condition of historic socio-psychological damage that each may have been through. All these three arguments appear to, somewhat, converge at the acknowledgement that there is a relationship between human behaviour and sociological elements of coexistence.

The argument of this paper upholds that, from the history of South Africa, capacity building for sustainable growth and development in any field cannot be fruitful without focus on the socio-psychological condition that the people have acquired through the history as a critical priority. It is worth acknowledging, though, that emancipative political

and economic transformation have been remarkably realized in the country but societal mindset has, unfortunately, been left behind. That is a foundational deficit that has seen society in developmental oscillation both in leadership and management of coexistence.

The Destruction of a Nation

The myth of Africa as a dark continent of barbaric beings and cannibals has filtered through to the modern day generation to the point of innocent adoption of the notion of a continent that never had any formal economic, academic, political nor any intellectual base for sociological systems in its history, till Europe introduced some torch. The adoption of this notion is legible in the daily activities of people within and without the continent. Both those that hate and reject such notion and those that have opted to live with it, for convenience, demonstrate their absorption of such a myth in some way; in that, daily engagements of society today display an effort to resist it or accept it.

However, the works of Cheikh AntaDiop (1974), (1987) and Walter Rodney (1972) provide a wealth of pre-colonial African history and how that history evolved with the invasion of colonization and slavery; a profound history that is naturally flushed off by our psychological absorption of the opposite, no matter how well it is recorded.

Preoccupation with this historical background, on the other hand, has become the major national occupation of the day to the extreme at all levels. This is where one must ask: if, in the case of South Africa, there was no history of colonization or apartheid, what would dominate the current socio-economic occupation of the government and general society, to what future extent? The time and resources that were invested in the construction and management of the apartheid system, and the time and resources invested in the eradication of the same system and reparation of the damage it caused are, in effect, a flip between two pages of the same sheet that has held the nation off the natural socio-economic evolution process. This itself, particularly the latter, has a recurrent effect of national damage, in the sense that the apartheid past has turned out to be a camping place for political campaigns such that the effects of colonization and apartheid have remained politically sustained in the minds of the people; revived every next political campaign. This camping place is, actually, the chronic scourge that has caged the continent in the political past; and this will be until freedom of the mind is considered an urgent priority for Africa to return to its global space. This argument does not imply that the national history should be erased from the minds of people, but the concern is that the mindset and, hence activity, of both the culprit and the victim has only remained caged in the

camp, while the nation has its abandoned global space waiting to be occupied.

It is generally acknowledged that the apartheid history of South Africa was the most atrocious human experience in the modern society. The works of John Dommissie (1986) and DanHocoy (1997) provide researched findings that affirm the argument that places the socio-political history of South Africa, apartheid in particular, as the most notorious murderer of its subjects psychologically, socially, economically and medically in the world. Dommissie and Hocoy site a documented acknowledgement of this situation by the World Health Organization, identified while apartheid was still at its peak in South Africa:

“Apartheid is a major source of physical and mental ill-health because of the stress and tension it generates in the daily lives of millions of people; the destruction of social support systems such as family and the community through mass uprooting;and the pervasive insecurity, harassment and violence which characterize the psychological environment. The argument that industrialization and urbanization are the principal factors responsible for this is false – the stressfulness of the environment with all its adverse effects on health is generated by design and guaranteed by legislation, and represents a structural feature of apartheid.

The system of enforced migrant labour, police control and repression aims to dehumanize every aspect of life for the black majority, and to perpetuate its sense of powerlessness. The effects of this can be seen in the high rates of violent crime, alcoholism and drug abuse, and suicide” (WHO, 1983).

This is a direct acknowledgement of the reality that the oppressive system was generating a breed of a society that would manifest with undesirably odd behaviours against itself. Normal humans in the government of the time would have had the wisdom to calculate the eventual suicidal consequence that would turn to victimize the entire nation.

The African society in South Africa emerges into political freedom traumatized from long sustained unjust dispossession of wealth that turned them into valueless and economically dependent people. The imposition of the migrant labour system subjected highly valued men and women of family and society to forced redefinition of identities and societal roles. Yield and adaptation to abnormal living and working conditions gradually became normal and found way

to what is regarded today as the cultural systems of the society, through generations.



1. Source: International Defence and Aid Fund 1984: This is Apartheid 1984 – A Pictorial Introduction



2. Source: Louise Van Niekerk 2012: The History of South Africa. South Africa Yearbook

The International Defence and Aid Fund [IDAF] (1984) acknowledges the socio-psychological destruction of wine farm workers, through the ‘tot’ wage system, which saw a systematic breeding of an alcoholic African society predominantly in the Cape. The system, also called ‘dop’, entailed complimenting farm workers’ low wage with alcohol

as a daily fringe benefit until alcohol turned to a normal way of daily life. The same effect was seen through the spread of beer halls throughout South African townships by apartheid town councils. The success of the introduction of the beer halls was in the already disoriented self-awareness in the socialization of African migrant labour communities.

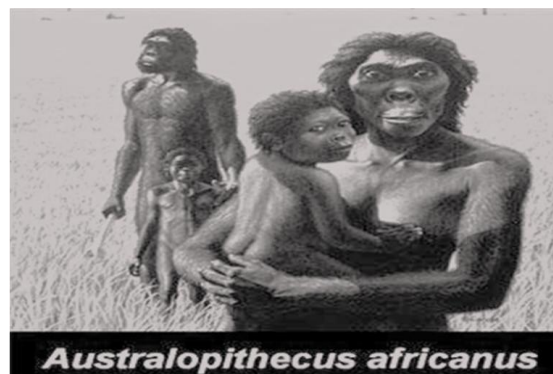


3. Source: International Defence and Aid Fund 1984: This is Apartheid – A Pictorial Introduction

The blockading of productive education from an already dizzy caged society that had generally begun to develop a feeling of inferiority, opened way to even deeper ideological redefinition of African identity by the colonizer. The convincing but somewhat controversial formulation of the theory of human evolution by Charles Darwin (1859) gave advantage to the ideological furthering of sociological placement of an African next to animals, furthest away from any other human race on the planet.

women to change their looks by corroding their dark skins with chemicals and wear artificial hairs that would make them assume different looks from who they actually are.

The evidence of such influence has, on the one hand, manifested in the attempts of darker skinned African



4. Source: Louise Van Niekerk2012: The History of South Africa. South Africa Yearbook



5. Source: Mark Byrnes 2013: Life in Apartheid-Era. South Africa



6. Source: Marissa Evans 2009: Apartheid (1948-1994) Black Past

On the other hand, the African and European races lived in hatred where the one group perceived the other not even deserving treatment equal to human beings, while the other spends all their energy and time fighting the perception and ill-treatment of the other but ending up slaughtered like the animals they were being perceived to be.



7. Source: Alemayehu Mariam 2015: Remembering the Sharville Massacre in South Africa. ZeHabesha



8. Source: Alemayehu Mariam 2015: Remembering the Sharpville Massacre in South Africa. ZeHabesha

The ideologically acquired subhuman status has been so much internalized that a deep seated hatred of both self and fellows developed naturally. That is, Africans internalized the acquired false identity which they hate and, therefore, any human that looks like them becomes a mirror of what they hate and reject, hence the recent several spikes of the so called xenophobic killings of Africans by Africans which, in real sense, is self-destruction out of self-rejection, not xenophobia. If it were, foreigners from other race groups would not have been that safely invisible.



9. Source: Charles Gimoh 2015: The Ugly face of Xenophobia in South Africa. Refugee Network International



10. Source: Charles Kumolu 2017: South Africa - Xenophobic attacks. Vanguard

The manifestation of such mental destruction is lamented worldwide. Charles Gimoh (2015) in his comments on the 2015 spike of what is seen as xenophobic attacks that claimed lives of Africans by fellow Africans. He comments: *“Black South Africa*

have metamorphosed from being oppressed victims of racial prejudice into oppressors of their fellow foreign black Africans”.

This observation, however, does not suggest that emigrants in the country have only behaved well, but that the African’s eye could only notice a fellow African, and the reaction suggests loss of human value in fellow Africans.

In parallel was the culture of violent action that was adopted in response to apartheid whenever Africans demanded change in South Africa. It is the same culture that has recurred through to this day. Any demand comes with violence and destruction to this day. The image below (11) shows a youth mass action in the days of apartheid (Blakemore, 2019) while image 12 shows a similar kind of youth mass action in 2019 (Daniel 2019). The African has not been able to return to normal.



11. Source: Erin Blakemore 2019: The Harsh Reality Of Life under Apartheid SA. History



12. Source: Luke Daniel 2019: School pupils run riot In Mthatha. The South African

The identical nature of the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre (image 13) by the government of the day and the 2012 Marikana Massacre (image 14) by the government of the new era of the South African political history presents a glaring reality of the acquired identity of indigenous Africans which reads the same even to the eye of the government of the

day. The latter is a government that is led by people that are part of the society that are being referred to as mentally unwell;a pathology that has, in many ways, demonstrated the internalized self-hatred by devaluing those that look like them.



13. Source: Pallo Jordan: Sharpeville: A Turning Point in South Africa’s History: The Pan-Africanist Journal, Uhuru Spirit, 2013



14. Source: Police linked to Marikana killing to appear in court: Town press South Africa, 2018

The part of the world society that celebrated the works of apartheid in South Africa is, today, celebrating the manifestation of the historic damage that Africans have carried along into this political freedom which has turned to be perceived as typical. Both the oppressor and the oppressed are equally culprits and victims of such past. It does not seem to be acknowledged that hatred for a fellow human is a manifestation of one’s self-hatred.

The value attached to today’s South Africans is, in fact, a migration of the apartheid entrenched racial classism to the era of political liberation but without mental liberation; a shift that has still maintained the old undeserving oppressed mindset. People choose to rather be in hygienically unfit and crime infested shack settlements as long as that is not in the wealthy but lowly esteemed rural home.



15. Source: Thobile Mathonsi 2019: The Citizen. African News Agency



16. Source: Martin Van Staden 2016: Business Day

The best upshift from the urban shack, a large family rather packs in a one and half bedroom sized low cost dwelling as long as it is urban, and that is the uppermost limit of the aspiration of the historically poor African. Martin Van Staden (2016) rightly points out that the democratic government low cost housing is a glorified version of the old apartheid dispossession that caged black South Africans in perpetual poverty and dependence. This kind of housing is what the ‘democratic’ government of the day regards as the best deserved sensible standard of emancipation for their previously dispossessed fellow Black.

It was rather foolish not to anticipate that the consequence of such human destruction would be borne by the collective nation; a genocide whose victims are on the face of every activity that the entire nation engages in.

Warped Way Forward

The recordings of the mind of the South African has, since stored uncleared historic trauma, disorientation, anger, human hatred and violence, among many. The toxicity of such psychological storage unfolds with spikes of unrestrainable violent crime and abuse of all sorts.

According to Freire’s analysis it is an oppressed mind that seeks to oppress others, meaning. That is, it takes a destroyed mind to seek pleasure in destroying fellow humans. It is an inhuman nature that causes a person to dehumanize or fail to see a human in a fellow person. If this is true, then colonization and apartheid slavery was a radiation of an inner destruction that Europe came to Africa already containing and caused further human damage. South Africa is, therefore, a victim of pre-destroyed mindsets that have radiated their inner destruction further.

Emerging into political liberation so dizzy and faced with the immediate task of rebuilding the socio-economic integrity of a country is no different from expecting bodies from under the rubble of a crushed house to rise immediately to rebuild their house. It is a somewhat unrealistic expectation for the South

African society that emerges with such extreme hunger, psychological exhaustion, anger, crushed esteem and identity to rise up from the three centuries of spun motion to extreme dizziness to, suddenly, view their environment like the rest of the world; to rise as a society whose background of dehumanization is regarded cleared enough to be able to see themselves and fellow humans with normal human eyes. The world around is celebrating the status of today’s South Africa; in a continent that has an acknowledged history of being an all-rounded springboard to the civilization of the world, but whose ability to lead and sustain itself is, today, found glaringly wanting.

If it is true that South Africa is, in its entirety, living in a state of mental illness from its political past as acknowledged earlier in this paper, it is then true that the entire nation is still trapped in the psychology of psychics; where the collective members of the psychic community view their world as sane and normal as viewed from within. It is such a mental state that has influenced people’s definitions ascribed to every element and concept that makes up one’s environment of existence; such as view to fellow humans, money and national economy, development, productivity, religion, education, leadership, responsibility, empowerment, success, fulfillment and many more. The reality of the psychic condition, unfortunately, will only be acknowledged retrospectively from without, that is, only when the abnormality has cleared off, if it does. Taking such a mentally warped nation to the global deep end of national productivity is, in fact, to make a show of how a dizzy person runs. South Africa and the rest of the continent has turned out to be a museum of historically dizzy people’s marathon.

The historic deformation of the mind and the resultant social behaviour of society has turned to be viewed generally as typical or as part of the people’s culture. Generations are born into, and adopt, the long warped social environment and find themselves joining the warped cultures as normal. This is a state of society that cannot be regarded as fit for the socio-economic reconstruction of the nation in the global space.

Capacity Building

Capacity building, in the context of this discussion, is viewed as the enhancement or further development of the already existing potential of society towards optimum performance in the restoration of the historically underdeveloped country. The Reconstruction and Development Programme [RDP] (1994) is a cardinal instrument that was crafted by the African National Congress (ANC) which was aimed at redressing the effects of the colonial and apartheid inflictions on South Africa. Critical areas of the scope of the Programme are Housing, Water and Sanitation, Electrification, Land Reform, Healthcare and Public Works. The new government has, since, successfully focused on these six areas of service delivery as a way of reconstructing and developing the ruined country.

In the naming of the Programme, it is clear that the word 'reconstruction' acknowledges that the nation was destroyed from its good original state and is, therefore, sought to be restored. A glaring deficit in the scope of the RDP is that it only lists activities that have to be executed by persons that were, themselves, destroyed and mentally deformed. There is no part in the Programme that seeks to address the state of mind of the person. From Steve Biko's argument: "*The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed*" Chiwanza (2017), it will only take a reconstructed mind to have a liberated clear view to self-identity, money, leadership, power, fellow humans, physical environment and all sorts of innovations.

Eleanor du Plooy (2018) makes a retrospective view to the 1996 work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and highlights a critical deficit that has lingered to affect this generation negatively. Du Plooy makes an important observation that the work of the TRC effectively brought the atrocities of apartheid to the open, as an initiative towards the healing of the nation, but only left the wounds open to this day. Society has continuously remained mentally unwell to the detriment of the rest of the continent.

CONCLUSION

The historic highlights in this paper seek to draw an acknowledgement that South Africans are in dire need for a socio-emotional reset for real liberation towards productivity. This is a call for initiatives that will address the individual and collective mental condition of the people of South Africa. It is, in fact, a task that almost the entire world has not made priority in all societies; a position that does not appear to be unconscious nor ignorant.

Government and community development bodies have demonstrated ability to dedicate funding and programmes that are aimed at transforming and

improving lives of societies through various skills developments but with least, if at all, dedicated attention to the reconstruction of the persons' historically warped mindset for optimum productivity. Outreach programmes are therefore also possible to directly address the mental illness that has taken toll of individuals, families and societies. This discussion, therefore, seeks to sound an alarm for action to the socio-psychological reset on the people of South Africa in their entire sociological diversity. The particular mention of South Africa does not, however, intend to imply that the rest of the continent has healed from the effects of its historic traumas.

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