

## RACIAL CONFLICTS IN SOUTH AFRICA: ARGUMENTS AND DEFECTS OF THE APARTHEID STRUCTURES

*David Berat*

Department for IPA, General secretariat of the Government of Republic Macedonia

Copyright © 2014 ISSR Journals. This is an open access article distributed under the ***Creative Commons Attribution License***, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

**ABSTRACT:** The article summarizes the racial conflicts in South Africa between the white and black population, apartheid structures, seasonal effects from the conflicts, and involvement of the United Nations in the racial issues. This paper is meant as a contributor towards the ongoing search for new means of managing ethnic conflicts in Africa. Using South Africa as a case study, it compares the management of ethnic and racial conflicts and shows the difficulties in managing deep-rooted and complex conflicts. The government of South Africa has taken bold constitutional steps to reduce tension, but the continuing ethnic and religious conflicts raise questions about the effectiveness of these mechanisms. The paper shows that ethnic conflict arose as a result of the denial of the basic human needs of access, identity, autonomy, security and equality, compounded by the autocratic roles played by the government and the military. Preservation of the ethnic peace is dependent upon the type and effectiveness of the available conflict management mechanisms and also the respective government's policy choices and decisions. For achieving a lasting peace, South Africa should challenge the actions of ethnic leaders who have used violent ethnic conflict for personal gain. The final conclusion of the paper is that ethnic conflicts are negative sum game in which there are no benefits for both sides.

**KEYWORDS:** Apartheid, Racial conflict, Racism, Repression, South Africa.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

If not mediated, conflicts become contagious and can spread quickly across borders like cancer cells. Scientist like Ted Gurr and Monty Marshall have written that most African conflicts are caused by the combination of poverty, weak states and institutions<sup>[1]</sup>.

During the 1960s, the governmental policies in terms of racial inequality in South Africa and the United States of America began to move in opposite directions. In one of them, the national government implements a program for racial segregation, and in the other, the government tried to apply policies for racial integration. As a result to that, sharp differences can be expected in rates of racial conflicts, which occurred in both countries in the past 40 years. In the mention time interval, relations in both countries were filled with conflicts.

In a contrast, in the periods after 1948, the laws of the apartheid<sup>[2]</sup> in South Africa did separation on officially defined races in all sectors of society. These laws controlled marriages, unions, work reservation, public goods and residential segregation. The rise of the apartheid in the country was marked with many restrictive laws, including the law for prohibition

---

1 Monty G. Marshall and Ted Gurr, (2001) *Peace and Conflicts "A Global Survey of Armed Conflict, Self Determination Movements and Democracy"*.

2 The apartheid was a system of legal racial segregation, implemented by the Government of the National Party of South Africa between 1948 and 1994, in which the rights of the majority African population were limited and there was established a rule by the white minority population.

of mixed marriages in 1949, and many other laws which forbid the stay of racial categories in the specific areas, known as homelands.

The black South Africans, Hindus and Coloureds<sup>[3]</sup> (and others who joined the movement against the apartheid) experienced a rise in state repression in South Africa. Since 1960, the state is increasingly attacking her opponents. The state repression forbids organizations, made political arrests, detain persons for long periods, without criminal act or any other reason. Despite these repressive measures, the racial clashes with the state authorities continue, and they are increased during the 1980s.

It is important to note that most of these conflicts were caused by colonialism, which compounded inter-racial conflict by capitalising on the isolation of racial groups. The divide and conquer method was used to pit ethnicities against each other, thus keeping the people from rising up against the colonisers. Distribution of economic resources was often skewed to favour a particular group, pushing marginalized group to use their ethnicity to mobilise for equality. Ethnicity has a strong influence on one's status in a community. Ethnic conflicts are therefore often caused by an attempt to secure more power or access more resources.

## 2 THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS AND DEFECTS OF THE APARTHEID STRUCTURES, MOBILIZATION AND SEASONAL EFFECTS

South Africa with over 40 million people has long been polarized along racial lines. The country is made up of whites, indigenous Africans, Coloreds and Indians. The black people form the majority of the population with about 30 millions people, the whites 5 million, and the Coloreds and Indians share 3 million. In South Africa class was determined by race, with black population at the bottom of the ladder. Indigenous Africans were forced to live in impoverished and segregated ethnic homelands under the apartheid regime.

I would like to start with an analysis of the effects before the repressive measures are taken by the state. For example, let's take the violent actions of the police, taken against black protesters. The research of Olivie and Olzak in the Witwatersrand-Vaal region in South Africa<sup>[4]</sup>, concludes that the violence of the police and repression have great effects in rates of protests and conflicts, but in opposite direction. The state sponsored the repression, including arrests and detentions, which increased the conflicts rates, but decreased the rates of the anti-apartheid protests. Olivie explains that peaceful protests seek lower cost of labor and resources for them to suppress, then needed for conflicts. Despite that, he notices that the state repression escalate racial violence as the repression rates are intensified.

According to the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, it is concluded that almost always the incidents are connected with action by the police. All the great protests that took place in Harlem, Vats, New York and Detroit are caused by routine arrests of the black population for minor offences by the white members of the police. But the police are not just provocation. Their duty is to maintain order and to insure public safety in the disturbing living conditions in the ghetto, they are involved in more common and more sharper conflicts with the population in the ghettos than the population in other areas. So even do the ghettos have a greater number of black population, the police comes to symbolize white power, white racism and white repression.

Mc Adams<sup>[5]</sup> claims that, the political climate of repression against the black population and the lost of the external financial support of the black organizations reduce the rebellion of the black population. Former research, also suggest that police violence often increase the racial tension, depending on the scope of the police actions, crowd reactions and racial composition of the bystanders, participants and observers. Gerhard Mare states that these conflicts appear to be a response to the uneven development in South Africa, which caused ethnic groups to mobilize to complete for resources along ethnic and racial lines<sup>[6]</sup>.

If we focus on one of these measures, we will realize that the police actions are more brutal on events who involve human rights protests, demonstrations against the apartheid, racial conflicts and attacks. For example, since 1960 South Africa is a state which is easy dominated. It is easy to notice that the violence against the black population by the police was

3 In South Africa, the Coloured known also as Bruinmense, Kleurlinge or Bruin Afrikaners are an ethnic group of mixed races who own Sub-Saharan African heritage, but it is not enough so they can be considered as black according to the law of South Africa.

4 Susan Olzak, Johan L.(1998), "Racial Conflict and Protest in South Africa and the United States".

5 Doug McAdam (1982), "Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970".

6 Gerhard Mare and Hamilton C. (1987) "An Appetite For Power: Buthelezi' Inkatha and South Africa".

noticed as extension of the African dominance and organ structure. The protests in the country are having anti-African or anti-white character, which means that the strong identification of the state power with political power in South Africa leads us to expect that the actions by the police in this country almost always have potential effects of racial mobilization.

Racism made it impossible for the indigenous Africans to enjoy the benefits of modernization in South Africa. The white rulers constantly discriminated against the Zulus, Xhosas and other black ethnic groups. The period between 1910 and 1947 exposed how economic racism consolidated the structures of white domination and black discrimination and exploitation. This was done through racist legislation against the black majority. These laws forced Africans to evacuate the major cities and move to remote settlements in an impoverished part of the country. In 1912, African elites rebelled by forming the African National Congress (ANC), which was meant to represent and defend black African rights. The black South Africans were deprived of their rights to own land through the enactment of the 1913 Natives Land Act. This legislation prevented blacks from producing food for themselves and from making money through agriculture. The government also regulated the job market, reserving skilled work for whites alone and denying black African workers the right to organize and form trade unions. Finally, the Pass Laws prevented blacks from moving freely between the homelands and the cities, thereby paving the ground for the introduction of apartheid.

Significant to the history of ethnic conflict in South Africa was the victory of the right-wing racist National Party (NP) in 1948 and the introduction of apartheid. The victory of the Afrikaner Nationalist Party consolidated white interests in the political and economic arena. The NP strengthened the discriminatory laws and championed the belief that Africans were inferior both biologically and culturally to whites and incapable of running their own affairs. The apartheid system served as a divide-and-rule strategy that limited black mobility and participation in socio-economic activities in the country, placing them at a structural disadvantage. Subsequent NP governments did not consider the basic needs of the African population when they created the homelands under the pretext of preserving national authority<sup>[7]</sup>. According to Mzala, the separate administration plan for the homelands was aimed at “retribalization” within the colonial framework of South Africa. It was an attempt to exclude the black majority from having a role in the administration of their own country<sup>[8]</sup>. The homelands or “Bantustans” were designed to distance the Africans from the fruits of economic development in the country and made them sources of cheap labor for white owned industries<sup>[9]</sup>. These Bantustans like KwaZulu-Natal, KwaNdebele, Bophuthatswana, and Lebowa were mainly characterized by poverty, overpopulation, underdevelopment and frustration<sup>[10]</sup>.

Institutionalized racism and apartheid took control of black people’s lives causing great hardships, poverty, despair and disease in the homelands. Because bad policy choices and denial of people’s basic needs are seeds of conflict, the government of South Africa witnessed as a result, organized strikes by members of the banned African Nationalist Congress (ANC), and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) with the support of the Union of Democratic Party (UDF). Violence also increased between 1976 and 1980 in the mostly black townships of Johannesburg and Soweto, where youth and school children were trying to make the townships ungovernable<sup>[11]</sup>. The brutal police repression and closure of schools forced many youths to flee the townships and join the militant wing of the banned ANC where they continued the liberation struggle. Severity of racial and ethnical boundaries is connected with the concrete economic and political boundaries within the states. Such folding boundaries become accepted as issues of historical, law and social priority. Recent history of South Africa claims that conflict often leads to braking down of these boundaries, especially when they are reinforced by the state. The defect of the solid economic and political hierarchies based on the racial or economic boundaries encourages hostility, conflicts and violence. In South Africa, after the mid 1970s, when the first modifications of the apartheid are implemented, the ethnical mobilization and violence are significantly increased. The civil protests are increased during the 1980s and 1990s. The racial segregation in housing and other sectors in society are legally mandated till 1990.

Research show that racial conflict means confrontation between members of two and more racial population: white and black Africans in South Africa, and white and African Americans in the United States of America. The racial protest is a collective action that has the public or some representatives of the Government as her auditorium, and tries to present

---

7 Leroy Vail, (1989) *The Creation Of Tribalism In Africa*, James Currey, London.

8 Mzala (1988) *Gatsha Buthelezi, Chief With A Double Agenda*. Zed Books Limited. London and New Jersey.

9 Ivans, Evans (1997) *Bureaucracy And Race. Native Administration In South Africa*. South African Institute of Racial Relations. Johannesburg.

10 Chanaiwa, David (1993) “Southern Africa Since 1945”, In , (eds), Ali Mazrui and Wondji, C., *General History Of Africa Since 1935, Vol. 8*, Heinemann. California. UNESCO.

11 Kane-Berman, John (1993) *Political Violence in South Africa*, South African Institute Of Race Relations, Johanseburg. Pages: 29-31.

complaints that are experienced by the racial group. The march for civil rights represents a prototype for these actions. Still, it is useful to have in mind that the location for civil rights protests is different in the both countries, based on different laws that are referring to racial and civil disobedience. For example, in South Africa the racial protests were often held at funerals, weddings, plays and annual celebration, because these were the only legal form of group meeting for black Africans till February 1990. Opposite to this, the civil protest for human rights of the white Americans were held at governmental offices in the United States of America.

### 3 RACIAL CONFLICT AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Due to the fact that India and Pakistan sent appeals to the General Assembly of the United Nations for the committed discrimination toward the Hindu and Asian population, the General Assembly adopts the following resolutions that are covering:

- South Africa to modify their policies;
- United Nations members to take regulatory actions against South Africa;
- Establishment of special committees who will explore the situation and recommend actions;
- Security Council to use economical sanctions or to consider the exclusion of South Africa from the United Nations; and
- Specialized agencies to convince South Africa to modify its policies.

In 1955, South Africa refused to participate in the session of the General Assembly and refused to participate in the committee meetings. In 1970, the Assembly has doubted the legitimacy of South Africa but due to technical reasons, delegates are allowed to participate in the session. But, on 12.11.1974, the General Assembly confirmed the decision of the President and exclude South Africa from participation on the 29-th session.

The Security Council is involved in this issue in 1960, after the Sharpeville massacre, in which 250 black protesters were hurt and 69 killed for protesting for the adopted laws in South Africa. On 01.04.1960, the Security Council adopted a resolution that claims that continuing racial policies of South Africa can threaten international peace and security.

In 1962, the Security Council asked the following actions from the members states:

- To terminate diplomatic relations with South Africa;
- To close the ports in South Africa;
- Prohibition of all import and export in South Africa; and
- Denial of landing aircrafts from South Africa.

### 4 CONCLUSION

The racial conflicts in South Africa represent one of the biggest issues in the United Nation history. African countries today face greater challenges to peace and stability than ever before. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa, including Sierra-Leone, Ivory Coast, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, are a volatile mix of insecurity, instability, corrupt political institutions and poverty. Alarmingly, most of these countries lack the political will to maintain previous peace agreements, and thus have fallen prey to continuous armed ethnic conflict<sup>[12]</sup>.

South Africa has concluded a difficult transition to democratic rule. The country bears the responsibility to steer the continent away from the repression of authoritarian government towards a path of social and economic development and good governance. The dual processes of transition and transformation need nothing less than a vibrant economy in which the basic needs of citizens are taken care of. They also require a state and society with a sense of shared destiny where racial and ethnic identities are harnessed positively as a uniting force rather than divisive factor or an impediment to nation building.

---

<sup>12</sup> Monty G. Marshall and Ted Gurr, (2003) *Peace and Conflict 2003: A Global Survey Of Armed Conflicts, Self Determination Movements and Democracy*.

In South Africa's transition process, Mandela's charisma helped the African national Congress (ANC) to pursue the path of negotiation, accommodation and confidence building for managing the ethnic diversity problem, though some South African whites still complain of dominant party favouritism, following ANC's second election victory of 1999. The South African people defied the pattern of their past and broke all the rules of social theory to forge a powerful spirit of unity from a shattered nation<sup>[13]</sup>.

In South Africa, after a difficult and courageous political negotiation between the country's various interest groups, the state has prevented further violence by developing multiple democratic approaches to create a foundation for peace and security. The architects of the new South African constitution crafted an impressive document aimed to heal the wounds of the past and establish a society based on social justice, fundamental human rights and rule of law. The constitution guarantees freedom of association, languages and religion and includes a bill of rights.

The government has also created affirmative action packages for disadvantaged groups, which emphasise "management of diversity". They are meant, among other things, to address the structural racism created by the apartheid state. The structure of the South African government was constitutionally changed to make way for a government of national unity. Power-sharing mechanisms were included in the constitution to prevent the ethnic or racial domination of any group. The composition of the new government confirms a trend towards accommodation and tolerance, which also helped to legitimise the government.

The constitution dismantled the homelands. This act signified the end of apartheid. As mentioned above, the conditions in the black reservations were inhuman. Poverty was endemic and social amenities and jobs were scarce. The neglect of the homelands and townships made the people vulnerable to ethnic entrepreneurs and warlords who were fighting for power and economic resources. Following the dismantling of the ethnic homelands, the constitution provided for the creation of nine provinces in place of the former four provinces that existed during apartheid. This decision aimed to distribute power between sub-national units. The provinces enjoy relative autonomy, thus helping to de-escalate conflict. The next step taken towards peaceful conflict management was the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) chaired by Arch-bishop Desmond Tutu, which helped to heal the wounds inflicted by the apartheid system. It also helped to inculcate a commitment to accountability and transparency into South African public life.

With the final step the ANC government took was meant to address the roots of economic inequalities. The ANC introduced an ambitious plan of action called the "Reconstruction and Development Programme" (RDP). The RDP was aimed at encouraging disadvantaged groups, especially blacks, to participate equally with others in business.

---

13 Waldmeir, M. Holman (1994) "A Powerful Spirit A Unity".

## REFERENCES

- [1] Monty G. Marshall, Ted Gurr and Deepla Khosla, "Peace and Conflict 2001: "A Global Survey of Armed Conflict, Self Determination Movements and Democracy", Centre for International Development and Conflict management, University of Maryland, 2001;
- [2] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South\\_Africa\\_under\\_apartheid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Africa_under_apartheid);
- [3] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coloureds>;
- [4] Susan Olzak, Johan L. Oliver, "Racial Conflict and Protest in South Africa and the United States", 1998;
- [5] McAdam Doug, "Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970", Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982;
- [6] Mare, Gerhard and Hamilton C. "An Appetite For Power: Buthelezi' Inkatha and South Africa", Indiana University Press, 1987;
- [7] Vail, Leroy, "The Creation Of Tribalism In Africa", James Currey, London, 1989;
- [8] Mzala, "Gatsha Buthelezi, Chief With A Double Agenda", Zed Books Limited, London and New Jersey, 1988;
- [9] Evans, Ivan "Bureaucracy And Race, Native Administration In South Africa", Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997;
- [10] Chanaiwa David "Southern Africa since 1945", General History Of Africa Since 1935, Vol. 8, UNESCO, 1993;
- [11] Kane-Berman, John "Political Violence in South Africa", South African Institute of Race Relations, Johanesburg, 1993;
- [12] Monty G. Marshall, Ted Gurr, "Peace and Conflict 2003: A Global Survey Of Armed Conflicts, Self Determination Movements and Democracy", Centre for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2003;
- [13] Waldmeir, and M. Holman "A Powerful Spirit. A Unity", Financial Times, London, 18 July, 1994:1, 1994.