

South Africa's 'Rainbow People', National Pride and Optimism: A Trend Study

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Abstract

Since the first democratic elections of 1994, South Africans are popularly known as the 'rainbow people'. The paper reports the acceptance of the rainbow as political symbol of unity among the diverse people of South Africa at three times: Immediately after the 1994 elections, two years later in 1996, and five years later in 1999 after the second general elections. The database for the study are responses to items placed with a syndicated national survey conducted countrywide. The public discourse on the rainbow is reviewed through personal interviews with a panel of 25 elites contacted in the run-up to the second general elections. The researchers revisit conclusions based on the earlier results (Møller, Dickow and Harris, 1999). The third round of research finds that the appeal of the rainbow as political symbol has waned but is still inclusive of all groups in society. Projections of national pride have shifted from the rainbow as symbol of unity and reconciliation to other icons of achievement such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme and prowess in sport. Support for the political symbolism of the rainbow is positively associated with happiness, life satisfaction and optimism. Lack of a focus of national pride is associated with pessimism. Results support the conclusion reached earlier that belief in the 'rainbow nation' ideal boosts optimism and promotes happiness during South Africa's transition to a stable democracy, thereby preventing alienation among the losers under the new political dispensation. Linkages between acceptance of the rainbow symbol, subjective well-being and optimism are discussed in the light of the socio-political changes which have taken place in South Africa since democracy.

Introduction

Before the turn of the century South Africans had voted in two open elections to affirm their fledgling democracy. Following the first open elections of April 1994, Nelson Mandela, who had spent 27 years in prison, became the country's first charismatic president of the post-apartheid era. President Mandela, who celebrated his 80th birthday in office, handed over to his deputy, Thabo Mbeki, after the second national elections of June 1999.

The major political agenda of the Mandela era between 1994 and 1999 was reconciliation. The rainbow symbol, shorthand for a nation seeking reconciliation and unity after decades of racial and political tensions, best captured the spirit which swept through the nation in the early years of South Africa's democracy. Of necessity, Mbeki's era must now be more concerned with delivery. His role is to ensure that South Africa's new democracy is based on solid economic foundations. In contrast to Mandela's speeches, his public oratories emphasise rather than downplay the still existing social divides in the country. His 'two nations' speech of 31 May 1998, delivered one year before he became president, stressed the distinctions between the quality of life of the formerly advantaged and oppressed and the need to transform society to redress injustices of the past (Møller, 1999).

Since 1994 South Africa has impressed by adopting strict fiscal discipline. However, economic policy remains a divisive issue between the ruling African National Congress and its alliance partners in labour who favour populist solutions to uplift the quality of life of the disadvantaged. Affirmative action policy which necessitates the reintroduction of racial indicators and quotas, has made South Africans more rather than less race-conscious in the new era. The work of the Human Rights Commission, a government appointed body with a mandate to investigate human rights violations, including racism, has had a similar effect.

Against this background, what is the lasting significance of the rainbow as a symbol of reconciliation and unity on the perceived quality of life of South Africans? Since the 1994 elections South Africans have proudly called themselves the 'rainbow people'. This paper revisits South Africans' perceptions of the rainbow symbol some five years later.

Research Update

Earlier research on perceptions of South Africa's rainbow nation conducted in 1996 by Møller, Dickow and Harris (1999) found that supporters of the political symbolism of the rainbow were happier and more often proud to be South Africans than opponents or nonbelievers. There were indications that rainbow supporters tended to be more optimistic. Results also suggested that rainbow symbolism had a stronger appeal to collectivists than individualists in that liberal South Africans were prominent among the group of sceptics. The present 1999 study updates and also extends the 1996 round of research by including standard measures of life satisfaction and optimism as well as happiness. It tests the association between support for the rainbow as political symbol and pride in the rainbow nation and present and future subjective well-being.

Rationale

The rationale for the study is based on considerations of South Africa's happiness deficit. People living in democratic societies, who generally enjoy a higher standard of living, tend to express higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction than people living in poorer countries and in circumstances of oppression. In South Africa under apartheid the majority of disenfranchised blacks expressed unhappiness while whites expressed contentment in happiness surveys. In the aftermath of the first democratic elections, levels of happiness and life satisfaction among formerly disenfranchised South Africans peaked, completely eliminating the happiness deficit of blacks (Møller, 1994; Møller and Hanf, 1995). The elation proved to be short-lived (Møller, 1989, 1999). Nevertheless, post-election euphoria – however fleeting – might be interpreted as an expression of pride as well as happiness, especially among first-time voters.

Of particular significance for this study is that the 14-country study undertaken by Cantril in the 1960s found higher positive correlations between national factors and happiness in societies which had recently undergone political upheavals (see Veenhoven, 1997). This finding suggests that under conditions of major political change, national agendas become fused with the personal. In short, national issues become personal ones. Arguing along these lines, it is proposed that national pride in post-apartheid South Africa might have a personal dimension akin to self-esteem. A surge of national pride caught first-time voters already in the run-up to the 1994 elections (Johnson and Schlemmer, 1996). It was observed that black South Africans were "walking tall". In the aftermath, white South Africans distinctly remember with pride that their new black president rooted for the team of mainly white players who would win the 1995 World Rugby Cup.

The basic premise for the study is that in democratic South Africa national pride is positively correlated with subjective well-being, particularly its affective dimension of happiness. Either national pride is fused with self-esteem or works through self-esteem to boost levels of happiness. Self-esteem, unlike attitudes to the nation, is regularly cited in the literature as a correlate of subjectivewell-being (Diener, 1994: p. 115).

While some might contend that national pride among first-time voters is an extension of personal pride, others might argue that national pride is displaced self-esteem. No matter which viewpoint is adopted, the anecdotal evidence is so strong that there can be no doubt that black South Africans perceived the "election miracle" as personal as well as collective triumph after years of oppression. The argument that the national is fused with the personal is particularly cogent when applied to a collectivist society. Fundamental to collectivism is that individuals are bound together in interdependent entities (Triandis, 1995). The individual and the group derive their meaning from coexistence with each other. People are expected to place the common good before their personal interests. In individualistic societies, by contrast, individuals are loosely connected and expected to be self-sufficient. African morality emphasises mutual respect and support as well as group cohesiveness. Important for this study is that the rainbow over South Africa is essentially a strong collectivist and inclusive symbol which defines the group as the entire nation in contrast to the racial groups defined by apartheid society.

The Paper

This paper inquires into perceptions of the rainbow as national symbol and subjective well-being based on several rounds of research. It is divided in four sections: *background*, *methods*, *results*, and *discussion*. The brief introduction to the civil religion of the ‘rainbow people’ provides the backdrop for the study. The methods section shows how the 1999 round of research builds on the earlier research. The results section focuses on trends observed in the evidence. Finally, the discussion weighs the evidence against the research propositions and explores interpretations in the light of socio-political developments since democracy.

I. Origins of the Civil Religion of the ‘Rainbow People’

A central argument in Dickow’s doctoral thesis (1996) is that successive South African governments have adopted a civil religion to legitimate their claim to serve the well-being of people. Dickow traces the roots of two distinct traditions of civil religions in South Africa: the Afrikaner civil religion which justified apartheid and the domination of one ethnic group over another and the civil religion of the struggle to end apartheid. The ‘rainbow nation’ is South Africa’s new civil religion according to Dickow (see 1996, 1997, 1999a,b; and the introduction in Møller, Dickow and Harris, 1999). In contrast to the exclusive civil religion of the apartheid era which justified the supremacy and domination of Afrikaners, the civil religion of the post-apartheid government is inclusive of all races.

Civil religions exist in many parts of the world. Dunbar Moodie, the premier analyst of Afrikaner civil religion, defines it simply as the “religious dimension of the state” (1975: p. 296). Civil religions lend a religious aura to attempts to justify the existence of the state and its legitimacy. The distinction between religion and politics is blurred in that religion is used to implement political goals. All forms of civil religion draw inspiration from the Old Testament, adapting its accounts to the situation of the country in question. There are striking parallels between the National Party’s and the African National Congress’s use of religious archetypes to legitimate the old and the new order in South Africa.

South African politics contains a strong religious dimension according to Dickow (1996). Precisely because there was no formal opposition, the churches played a critical role in the anti-apartheid movement where they filled a vacuum. When apartheid became official policy in 1948, leaders of churches protested against exclusion. By assuming what they saw as a prophetic role, church leaders identified themselves closely with the political demands of the African National Congress, founded in 1912 as a civil rights movement, and with the organisation itself. When the anti-apartheid political organisations were banned in 1988, the churches were the only institutions in the country free to act and with the infrastructure to do so.

The release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990 and the unbanning of political parties ushered in a new era in South African history. Church leaders, such as Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a prominent figure in the anti-apartheid movement, withdrew from politics. However, like many other leading clergymen and politicians, he saw no problem in using religious symbolism to mobilise people and to further the new politics of integration.

It was Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1995) who rediscovered the biblical symbol of peace, the rainbow, as a symbol of unity for South African people. He first used the rainbow symbol during the march of church leaders to Parliament in Cape Town in 1989, and again at ANC leader Chris Hani’s funeral in 1993. The rainbow symbol gained widespread popularity in 1994 when Archbishop Tutu led a thanksgiving service to celebrate the peaceful elections and announced to the crowd with the television cameras of the world trained on him: “*We are the rainbow people of God. We are free – all of us, black and white together!*”

The symbol of the rainbow is the Old Testament symbol of reconciliation which affirms God’s covenant with Noah after the flood. At the thanksgiving ceremony, Tutu spoke not of a covenant with a Chosen People, but of a covenant with all South Africans, irrespective of origin, religion or colour. Two days later, Nelson Mandela again referred to the symbol of the rainbow at his inauguration as President of South Africa on 10 May, 1994.

Research Hypothesis

The proposition guiding the 1999 survey for the South African Quality of Life Trends Project is as follows: Persons who subscribe to the civil religion of the rainbow people should feel more at ease or attuned to the new political dispensation and are therefore more likely to project pride in their nation than others. Underlying this proposition is the idea that in a collectivist society the “feel good” factor is closely akin to self-esteem. In line with tentative findings from the 1996 round of research (Møller et al., 1999), it is also hypothesised that supporters of the rainbow as civil religion will be more optimistic for the future than others.

II. Method

A number of items put to South Africans in successive nationwide surveys were used to indicate the changing significance of the rainbow symbol and its relationship to subjective well-being over time. Items were included in three MarkData surveys[1]. The first survey was conducted one month after the 27 April 1994 elections which brought the African National Congress into power, the second two years later in June 1996, and the third in October 1999, a few months after the second national elections. A description of the items which probed acceptance of the rainbow symbol and as a source of national pride follows.

The original rainbow item Dickow, an eyewitness to the thanksgiving service which gave birth to South Africa’s ‘rainbow nation’ in 1994, developed a special item to determine the level of acceptance of the new civil religion. The question designed by Dickow to probe the personal meaning of the rainbow symbol read:

A lot[2] has been said by religious and political leaders about the rainbow, symbol of peace, and about a new covenant with God as a sign for the future of South Africa. People differ in what they think about this. Which of the following opinions is closest to yours?

1. For me, it has no meaning at all.
2. For me, the covenant is a religious matter only and should not be used in politics.
3. I believe, that God has offered to all South Africans, black and white, a new covenant for a peaceful life in a common nation.

The third option, which refers to a new covenant offered to all South Africans, was taken as acceptance of the new civil religion. Respondents in this group were called the ‘political rainbow *supporters*’ for easy reference. Respondents who believed the covenant was a religious matter only (option two) were referred to as ‘political rainbow opponents’, and the remainder as ‘non-believers’ (option one).

The updated rainbow item In preparation for the 1999 update for the South African Quality of Life Trends Project, the authors interviewed a panel of opinion leaders[3] on the situation in their country. Twenty-five personal interviews were conducted with opinion leaders in three metropolitan areas: The first batch in Durban and Cape Town in February 1999, the second batch in Johannesburg and Pretoria around the time of the June 1999 national elections. The panel’s perception of social change since the 1994 elections and the rainbow symbol was used as the basis for formulating a slightly extended version of the original item on the rainbow.

The second question on the rainbow put to South Africans in 1999 was less personal than the original and invited projections of meaning. The question read:

The rainbow as symbol for South Africans was introduced in 1994. People see the symbol of the rainbow in different ways. Which one of the following viewpoints comes closest to yours?

1. The rainbow is a political symbol for nation building
2. The rainbow is a religious symbol and should not be used in politics
3. The rainbow as symbol of reconciliation and unity is an ideal for South Africans
4. The rainbow symbol has divided rather than united South Africans
5. The rainbow message is no longer relevant.

The original item on ‘sources of national pride’ Having established that the majority of South Africans were proud of their country[4], the 1996 MarkData survey probed sources of national pride in a closed-ended question with seven options: the Reconstruction and Development Programme; sporting achievements; the national flag/anthem; reconciliation and unity – the ‘rainbow nation’; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; the Constitution and the Bill of Rights; and world acceptance. Directly or indirectly all achievements could be construed as contributions to nation building. The pariah status attached to South African citizenship was reversed with the advent of democracy. Excluded from international sport during the apartheid era, South African teams returned to the international playing fields and scored a number of victories in their first year back in the world arena. The symbols of the new nation, the flag and national anthems, featured prominently at these sporting events. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) had been introduced when the new government came into power to deliver services to the previously disadvantaged. The Constitution, which includes a Bill of Rights, was adopted on 8 May 1996, a month before the 1996 survey went into the field, and was amended later in the year. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in the latter part of 1995 under the chairmanship of Archbishop Tutu to deal with investigations into gross human rights violations during the apartheid era. In 1996, only 6% of survey respondents could not identify with an achievement which inspired pride. The updated item on ‘sources of national pride’ The 1999 MarkData survey included an updated version of the original question on sources of national with further options. The item read:

Which one of the following has made you feel particularly proud of South Africa since 1994?:

The RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme);
macro-economic policy;
Gear (Growth, Employment and Redistribution);
sporting achievements like the World Cup etc.;
the South African flag/anthem; the Rainbow Nation – reconciliation and unity; TRC – the Truth and Reconciliation Commission;
Constitution and Bill of Rights;
world acceptance/world recognition;
the African Renaissance.

The answer categories were read out to respondents. A single residual category catered for persons who indicated that none of the options inspired pride as well as persons expressing uncertainty and giving no response. The new response categories referred to a strong economic policy which the panellists had identified as a positive development in South Africa since 1994, and the African Renaissance, still vaguely defined, which the researchers thought might outshine the rainbow or even be cast into the mould of a new civil religion during President Mbeki’s term of office.

Subjective Well-being

Other items included in the third round of research were satisfaction with life-as-a-whole, happiness, and optimism measured on fivepoint scales with an indeterminate mid-point. The corresponding five-point optimism item read: “How do you think things will be for people like yourself in five years’ time? Taking all things together will things be better, worse or about the same as today?”

III. Results

The section on results first reports on perceptions of the rainbow in response to the two rainbow items in the 1999 MarkData survey and the viewpoints of opinion leaders on the significance of the rainbow. It then reviews perceptions in relation to subjective well-being and optimism for the future.

TABLE I

Acceptance of the civil religion of the rainbow people by race group and political party

The rainbow:¹

Symbolises a new covenant for black and white South Africans (= 'supporter')

Should not be used in politics, the covenant is a religious matter only (= 'opponent')

Has no meaning for me (= 'non-believer')

	'Supporter'			'Opponent'			'Non-believer'		
	'94 ² %	'96 %	'99 %	'94 %	'96 %	'99 %	'94 %	'96 %	'99 %
<i>Average</i>	65	49	48	24	34	24	11	18	28
Black	67	48	49	20	31	24	12	21	27
Coloured	68	60	50	25	30	20	6	10	30
Indian	75	40	41	16	44	22	9	16	37
White	50	44	41	41	49	26	9	7	33
ANC ³	71	51	48	17	30	25	12	19	27
NNP	57	49	44	36	41	25	7	10	31
IFP	48	43	47	42	28	27	10	30	27
FF	40	46	36	57	51	33	3	4	31
DP	36	38	47	27	41	25	37	21	28
UDM	—	—	34	—	—	30	—	—	36

MarkData surveys June 1994, June 1996, October 1999.

Rows for each year may not add to 100% due to rounding.

¹See text for exact wording of item.

²1994 distributions taken from Dickow (1996: p. 263).

³ANC African National Congress (62.6%/66.4% of votes obtained in the 1994/1999 national elections; NNP New National Party (formerly NP National Party: 20.4%/6.9%); IFP Inkatha Freedom Party (10.5%/8.6%); FF Freedom Front (2.2%/0.8%); DP Democratic Party (1.7%/9.6%); UDM United Democratic Movement (-/3.4%) (SAIRR, 1999: p. 326). 1999 figures refer to multiple party affiliation.

Acceptance of the Rainbow Symbol

Table I shows popular acceptance of the rainbow symbol over time. In 1994, a majority of South Africans, 65%, were political rainbow 'supporters' who accepted the civil religion of the rainbow. By 1996, political rainbow supporters accounted for only 49%. Thereafter, the proportion of political supporters remained stable at 48% in 1999. While the number of political rainbow supporters declined steadily over time, the number of 'non-believers' increased from 11% in 1994 to 28% in 1999. The most dramatic change of perception appears to have occurred among Indians. In 1994 Indians were overwhelmingly 'believers' (75%), in 1996 mainly 'opponents' to the political interpretation of the rainbow (44%); in 1999 the proportion of non-believers

(37%) was almost equal to that of supporters. In the second round of research it was observed that the personal interpretation of the rainbow had shifted from the political to the religious sphere among substantial proportions of South Africans. In the third round, the most significant shift was to 'non-belief'.

In 1994, supporters of the three parties which originally formed the Government of National Unity (GNU), the African National Congress (ANC), the National Party (NP) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), were most likely to be rainbow supporters. In 1999, since the withdrawal of the NP from the GNU in 1996, the ANC still provides the greatest support for the rainbow, down from 71% in 1994 to 48% in 1999. Least support is forthcoming from the conservative Freedom Front (FF) and the new multiracial opposition party, the United Democratic Movement (UDM). The only party to have increased its support for the rainbow is the liberal Democratic Party (DP), formerly dominant among the rainbow sceptics, possibly due to the inclusion of former NP followers into its ranks.

Elites on the Rainbow Symbol In the 1999 survey of opinion leaders, panellists were asked what the rainbow meant to them. Some opinion leaders chose to speak about their personal views while others gave their perceptions of public opinion[5].

The rainbow as a tool for nation-building

The majority of panellists viewed the rainbow as an essential tool for nation building in the new democracy: "In a country like ours we need symbols that give hope." The rainbow celebrated "unity in diversity". It appealed to South Africans' strong sense of patriotism. Some panellists made reference to the religious origin of the concept and former Anglican Archbishop Tutu's[6] role in popularising the concept. To others, more important than its origins was the observation that South Africans had made the concept their own. South Africa's internationally revered president had promoted the rainbow ideal in the early days of democracy. Future generations of South Africans would have difficulties rejecting Nelson Mandela's legacy of reconciliation.

Some panellists associated togetherness with symbols such as the South African flag and sporting achievements rather than the rainbow nation. The 'feel-good' mood associated with the rainbow was closely linked to the "Mandela factor" and the World Rugby Cup victory of 1995. "Sport did a tremendous job of bringing the nation together. . . . We were on a high in 1994 and 1995. We felt so good about being one, we were prepared to overlook huge problems."

While most opinion leaders concurred that the rainbow concept was successful – even 'brilliant' – as a popular ideal, mainly political analysts and activists on the left viewed it as a flawed theoretical concept. The rainbow projected a multi-racial image rather than the non-racial ideal embodied in the South African constitution. On the political right, the implementation rather than the concept was considered flawed. "Many people get the idea it's a 'black' rainbow and an ANC ideology". Conservative opinion leaders tended to associate the rainbow concept with 'political correctness' and affirmative action measures. Liberals objected to the rainbow 'principle' being used as a performance indicator to measure if racial employment quotas had been attained in various institutional settings.

From election miracle to economic miracle

According to opinion leaders, the focus in South Africa in the post-Mandela era was on the material underpinning of democracy. "You can't stop at racial analysis", was the viewpoint of a labour spokesperson, "it's got to be eclipsed by more difficult challenges than trying to get people to identify with the country." A church leader maintained that South Africans had become disillusioned with the slow pace of delivery on election promises. A business leader agreed: "Now we want to work closely together to make the economic miracle."

The future of the rainbow as ideal There was general consensus among the elites that the rainbow's popular appeal had waned: "The rainbow is fading away"; "the rainbow is dull, it's lost its shine"; "it's died a slow death". However, even those panellists who saw the rainbow concept bereft of its former popularity, regarded the message as still relevant on the eve of the second general elections. The rainbow concept as ideal, vision or almost impossible "dream to strive for" appeared to be most acceptable to opinion leaders across the political spectrum. Panellists marvelled at the continued goodwill and lack of antagonism among black and

white which augured well for achieving the ideal. Panellists wanted to believe that, in time, South Africa would become a unified nation as symbolised in the rainbow. Given South Africa's history of deep racial divisions, progress was expected to be slow. It would take many years to realise the potential of people of all colours, cultures and races living in harmony.

Popular Views of the Rainbow Symbol in 1999

A variation of the original item on support for the rainbow incorporated some of the elite opinions. Respondents in the MarkData 1999 survey were asked to give their views on the significance of the rainbow as symbol for South Africans. Results are shown in Table II. The modal viewpoint (35%) was that the

TABLE II

Attitudes towards the rainbow symbol in 1999 by race group and political party

"... People see the symbol of the rainbow in different ways. Which comes closest to your viewpoint?"

- Symbolises the *ideal of reconciliation and unity* for South Africans
- *Political symbol* for nation building
- *Religious symbol* that should not be used in politics
- Rainbow message is *no longer relevant*
- Rainbow symbol has *divided* South Africans

	SA	B	C	I	W	ANC	NNP	IFP	FF	DP	UDM
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Ideal of unity & reconciliation	35	37	26	37	25	35	26	35	20	34	39
Political symbol	25	27	27	30	15	32	24	22	8	18	16
Religious symbol	17	17	13	6	19	18	16	15	26	15	28
No longer relevant	7	3	5	16	25	3	13	13	25	20	8
Divisive	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	8	13	4	5
Don't know, uncertain	13	12	24	6	12	9	17	7	8	10	5

See text for exact wording of item. Columns add to 100% or nearest.

SA South African total (n2219), B Black (n1658), C Coloured (n202), I Indian (n63), W White (n296). ANC African National Congress (n1750), NNP New National Party (n424), IFP Inkatha Freedom Party (n139), FF Freedom Front (n61), DP Democratic Party (n550), UDM United Democratic Movement (n133). Multiple mentions of political party affiliation possible.

rainbow served as ideal, a viewpoint shared by the elites. One quarter identified the rainbow as a political tool for nation building. Just under one fifth felt the rainbow was a religious symbol and were opposed to its use in politics – the viewpoint corresponding to that of ‘opponents’ of the rainbow according to the original

question. Only a small percentage indicated that the rainbow symbol was ‘no longer relevant’ (7%) or ‘divisive’(4%). However a slightly larger percentage remained undecided.

Indians, who were among the staunchest ‘supporters’ of the rainbow as political symbol in 1994, were most likely to endorse the rainbow’s political significance with 67%; whites the least (40%). The viewpoint that the rainbow message was no longer relevant was more common among white and Indian respondents. As might be expected, African National Congress followers with 67% were most likely to attribute political significance to the rainbow while the conservative Freedom Front was most likely to see the rainbow message as no longer relevant or even as a divisive element in society.

There was good correspondence between the patterns of responses to the original and later version of the rainbow item. Taken together the first two response categories to the later version, rainbow as ideal of reconciliation and tool for nation building, can be equated with support for the rainbow as political vision and tool. These viewpoints correspond broadly to the ‘supporter’ response to the original rainbow item. In response to the updated rainbow item, rainbow ‘supporters’ were most likely to describe the rainbow symbol as an ideal (48% of rainbow supporters) and as a tool for nation building (26%). Forty-one percent (the modal response category) of rainbow ‘opponents’ on religious grounds chose the corresponding response to the revised version of the question. ‘Nonbelievers’ accounted for half of the ‘uncertain’ and ‘don’t know’ responses to the revised version of the question. Noteworthy is that ‘non-believers’ were twice as willing to recognise the rainbow symbol as political tool (28%) and ideal (23%) than as irrelevant (14%) or divisive (4%).

Overall, 60% of respondents viewed the rainbow as a political vision and tool for nation building in response to the second rainbow item: 74% of ‘supporters’, 51% of ‘non-believers’ and 34% of ‘opponents’. Only 11% in total saw the rainbow as irrelevant or divisive: 28% of ‘non-believers’, 9% of ‘opponents’ and 7% of ‘supporters’.

The Rainbow Nation as a Source of National Pride over Time In 1996 the ‘rainbow nation – reconciliation and unity’ figured as the second most important source of national pride for South Africans after sporting achievements. After the second national elections in 1999 the rainbow ranks in third place after the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and sporting achievements (see Table III).

TABLE III
Sources of national pride in 1996 and 1999

	1996	1999
RDP: Reconstruction & Development Programme	12	30
Sporting achievements	24	19
Rainbow nation	17	11
TRC: Truth & Reconciliation Commission	12	10
Constitution, Bill of Rights	6	7
Flag, anthem	8	6
World acceptance/ recognition	13	6
Macro-economic policy: Gear	*	3
African Renaissance	*	2
None of above, don’t know	6	7
	100	100
N	2233	2219

*Not an option in 1996.

Table IV shows that the rainbow nation still inspired pride among all race groups in 1999 to a certain degree.

However sport and the RDP had overtaken the rainbow nation as a source of national pride. Supporters of all political parties included sporting and RDP achievements among their top ranking options. The RDP had become the most important source of pride for parties with a larger black and lower income following. Sport was the dominant source of pride for opposition parties particularly those with a mainly white and economically stronger following. While some Inkatha Freedom Party supporters still looked to the rainbow as inspiration in 1999, African National Congress and United Democratic Movement voters were more likely to give recognition to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Some six years after the world applauded South Africa's 'election miracle', world recognition was still important for parties supported mainly by white and Indian voters such as the Freedom Front, the Democratic Party and the New National Party.

TABLE IV

Three major sources of national pride in 1996 and 1999 by race and political party

	Rank 1	%	Rank 2	%	Rank 3	%
<i>1996</i>						
Black	Rainbow	19	TRC	16	Sport/RDP	15
Coloured	Sport	26	Rainbow	25	World accept	19
Indian	World accept	31	Rainbow	26	Sport	20
White	Sport	60	World accept	20	Rainbow	6
ANC	Rainbow	20	RDP	16	Sport	16
NP	Sport	47	World accept	22	RDP	11
IFP	Rainbow	22	TRC	17	World accept	14
FF	Sport	59	TRC	15	World accept	15
DP	Sport	41	World accept	25	Constitution	17
<i>1999¹</i>						
Black	RDP	36	Sport/TRC	12	Rainbow	11
Coloured	Sport	21	RDP	19	Rainbow	14
Indian	Sport	25	Rainbow	23	World accept	14
White	Sport	51	World accept	19	RDP/rainbow/ Constitution	4
ANC	RDP	38	Sport	16	TRC	13
NNP	Sport	36	RDP	16	World accept	14
IFP	RDP	23	Sport	17	Rainbow	16
FF	Sport	56	World accept	17	RDP	13
DP	Sport	40	World accept	17	RDP	14
UDM	RDP	35	Sport	20	TRC	10

Response categories paraphrased: see text and Table III for wording of item and response options.

See Table II for subsample size.

¹'None of above' category excluded.

In 1999, rainbow ‘supporters’, according to the original rainbow item, accounted for 63% of those for whom the rainbow nation was the most important source of pride with the remaining 37% split evenly between ‘opponents’ and ‘non-believers’.

Happiness, Life Satisfaction, Optimism and the Rainbow

The 1996 round of research for the South African Quality of Life Trends Project found evidence that rainbow ‘supporters’ were more likely than others to experience happiness and optimism. Table V shows that in 1999 on average 60% of South Africans state they are happy (‘very happy’ and ‘happy’), 53% are satisfied with life (‘very satisfied’ and ‘satisfied’) and optimistic (expect things will be ‘much better’ or ‘better’ in five year’s time). According to figures in Table V, rainbow ‘supporters’ score above average on happiness, life satisfaction and optimism while ‘non-believers’ score below average. Persons who regarded the rainbow symbol as a political tool for nation building were among the happiest, most satisfied and optimistic. On the other hand, respondents who regarded the rainbow symbol as divisive or irrelevant were among the most unhappy, dissatisfied and pessimistic.

TABLE V

Percentages happy, satisfied with life and optimistic among rainbow ‘supporters’ in 1999

	% of Total sample	Happy %	Satisfied %	Optimistic %
<i>Sample average</i>		60	53	53
Acceptance of the rainbow				
Rainbow ‘supporter’	48	64	57	57
Rainbow ‘opponent’	24	60	50	55
‘Non-believer’	28	54	49	45
	100			
Significance of the rainbow				
Reconciliation & unity	35	58	52	52
Political symbol	25	68	56	60
Religious symbol	17	66	51	56
Irrelevant	7	51	51	29
Divisive	4	46	40	44
Don’t know	13	54	58	50
	101			
Sources of national pride				
Rainbow	11	62	54	52
RDP	30	59	45	55
Sport	19	70	67	51
Cannot name source of pride	7	48	57	50

Optimism among groups ‘at risk’ In the 1996 study, the most striking contrast in levels of happiness among whites was between those for whom national pride signified sporting achievements on the one hand, and for those who associated national pride with the rainbow nation. Only 41% of whites who viewed sport as a major national achievement were happy compared to 93% of those who took pride in the “rainbow nation”. The minority of South Africans, mainly whites, who could not identify with a national achievement were among the most unhappy. Optimism among whites declined significantly during the 1990s (Harris, 1997). It was reasoned that whites, and particularly Afrikaners who regard themselves as the losers under the new dispensation, would be most at risk of pessimism. Belief in the rainbow nation ideal might foster optimism in that it counteracts feelings of exclusion under the new dispensation.

To test this idea with the 1999 data, we identified white and Afrikaans-speaking respondents among whites who were political rainbow ‘supporters’ according to the original version of the question. Table VI shows that rainbow ‘supporters’ in these categories are significantly happier, more satisfied and also more optimistic than others. The same constellation emerged when we applied an extended definition of rainbow supporter. For the extended definition, we included in addition to the rainbow ‘supporters’ according to the original question, respondents who perceived the rainbow as a political tool of nation building or as an ideal of reconciliation, and respondents for whom the rainbow nation was a source of national pride. There was considerable overlap between these categories as indicated earlier. Some 56% of white respondents (78% among black respondents) were classified as rainbow supporters according to the extended definition. We again found that among groups at risk, notably whites and Afrikaners in particular, persons who subscribed to the politics of the rainbow symbol were significantly more likely to express happiness, life satisfaction, and, importantly, optimism in the future.

TABLE VI

Percentages happy, satisfied with life and optimistic among rainbow ‘supporters’ in 1999: whites and Afrikaners

	N	Happy %	Satisfied %	Optimistic %
White rainbow ‘supporters’	218	81 ^a	86 ^b	43 ^b
<i>Subsample n / average</i>	<i>533</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>34</i>
White Afrikaner rainbow ‘supporters’	162	81 ^b	88 ^c	44 ^b
<i>Subsample n / average</i>	<i>384</i>	<i>74</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Extended definition:¹</i>				
White rainbow ‘supporters’	299	79 ^b	86 ^b	41 ^c
<i>Subsample n / average</i>	<i>539</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>33</i>
White Afrikaner rainbow ‘supporters’	206	79 ^a	86 ^b	41 ^c
<i>Subsample n / average</i>	<i>389</i>	<i>74</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>32</i>

¹See text for extended definition of ‘rainbow supporter’.

^{a,b,c}Statistically significant difference between ‘supporters’, ‘opponents’ and ‘non-believers’ and ‘supporters’ (extended definition) and ‘non-supporters’ according to Spearman’s Rho at the 0.05, 0.01, and 0.0001 level.

IV. Discussion and Conclusions

Firstly, let us consider whether the rainbow symbol, coined in 1994, continues to have personal or general significance for South Africans. The latest round of research in 1999 shows clearly that the rainbow as political symbol has lost its personal significance for a substantial proportion of citizens. However, one in two are still 'supporters' in the strict sense of the civil religion of the rainbow people. A much larger proportion, over three in four among blacks and over half among whites accept the rainbow as an important symbol for South African nation building and national pride.

In 1999, substantial majorities of blacks, coloureds and Indians still subscribe to the rainbow as an ideal concept or political symbol for nation building. Only whites, and supporters of political parties on the right, such as the Freedom Front, feel the rainbow symbol is no longer relevant or deny the inclusiveness of the rainbow. Democratic Party supporters who appeared to shy away from political rhetoric and symbolism in the 1996 study are now more prepared to accept the usefulness of the rainbow symbol for reconciliation across the social divides.

Secondly, the proposition that positive acceptance of the rainbow as political symbol would enhance subjective well-being and optimism even among groups most at risk of alienation is consistently supported in the latest round of research.

Thirdly, the fact that the rainbow as a political symbol appeals to almost one in two persons across the major racial and political divides in South African society in 1999 suggests that the civil religion remains inclusive to a large degree. Although individualists, in particular, shy away from patriotic sloganeering, our study suggests that not only collectivists are susceptible to the influence of symbols of national unity and harmony or at least admit its usefulness as a tool of nation building.

The trend study clearly shows a decline in support for the rainbow over time. A number of political analysts foresaw the eclipse of the rainbow as guiding principle for South Africa (see Schlemmer, 1997; Filatova, 1997), a viewpoint shared by many members of the panel interviewed in preparation for the 1999 survey. At issue is the new civil religion's perceived failure to live up to its promise of inclusiveness. To work effectively as a tool of nation building and social engineering, it is imperative that all groups in society feel they can subscribe to the rainbow symbol. However, there are signs in the 1999 study that some South Africans consider the inclusiveness of the rainbow as a sham. References to the 'blackening' of the rainbow in the elite interviews hinted at emergent feelings of exclusion. The increase in 'non-believers' in the national survey may be an indication that many South Africans have lost their faith in the inclusiveness of the new civil religion. Encouraging nevertheless is that only a small percentage of respondents considered the rainbow as 'divisive' and rainbow 'supporters' are still widely distributed among all political parties and race groups. The finding that the Reconstruction and Development Programme and sport have overtaken the rainbow as sources of national pride in 1999 deserves further comment. Also of significance is the fact that blacks pride themselves in the RDP while white, Indian and coloured South Africans project pride onto sport prowess, a reflection of the gap in racial perceptions.

There are several plausible interpretations for the displacement of the rainbow by the RDP. One such interpretation is that South Africans are supportive of the ANC government's attempts to speed up delivery of infrastructure and services. After a slow start the election promise of one million houses before the turn of the century was almost met. Electricity and clean water were brought to thousands of households between 1994 and 1999. A variation on this interpretation might be that the majority of South Africans feel that their country needs to move on from symbolic words to deeds, that is from reconciliation, the hallmark of the Mandela era, to strengthening the material foundations of their democracy in the Mbeki era.

The RDP option alludes to transformation as the dominant goal for South African society. A variation on this interpretation with negative overtones is that transformation as a vision for society has superseded the ideal of the rainbow.

In short, the negative interpretation of the RDP finding is that the Mbeki era signals the rejection of the founding myth of the rainbow, a viewpoint put forward by David Christianson (1999). Christianson ascribes a similar function to founding myths or legends as Dickow does to civil religions. Founding myths, which give a selective presentation of historical events, explain why a particular type of government and a particular set of institutional arrangements are the 'best' way of achieving the basic conditions of order. The function of the legend is to vindicate the present order. Successful founding legends constrain the range of options open to

society. They establish premises so overwhelming that most members of society accept them as part of the natural order of things. The healthy legend is useful because it allows citizens to feel more secure in their national identity, giving individuals the confidence to carry on the desirable activities that make up any society. According to Christianson, in stable societies, diametrically opposed policy positions will often appeal to the same deep-seated legend of national origin.

South Africa's founding legend began as a healthy one: that of a 'miracle' of negotiation and reconciliation amid the threat of civil war, and of a 'rainbow nation' informed by Mandela's spirit of magnanimity. Significantly, the eclipse of the miracle nation was signalled by Mandela at an ANC conference in December 1997 where he launched a vicious attack on those who sought to separate national reconciliation from transformation[7]. From that moment onward, the transformation founding legend eclipsed the reconciliation legend in ANC public discourse. Christianson argues that although the two impulses, one healthy, the other malign, can still be discerned in South African public life, Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki, is much more closely associated with the latter. Mbeki's imagery of 'two nations' rich and poor and white and black, invokes the colonial past and weaves the bitter legacy of separateness into the founding legend. It also "humiliates and thus amplifies the despondency of many of South Africa's most productive individuals" (Christianson, 1999: p. 23).

The RDP option competes with sport as a source of national pride for South Africans. Sport is the elective choice of the opposition parties and better-off South Africans. An intriguing interpretation, alluded to by one of our panellists, is that sport as symbol of unity has taken over from the rainbow. The rainbow symbol is a superb feat of social engineering which inspired a whole nation according to Dickow's historical account. Similarly, Steenveld and Strelitz (1998) convincingly argue that sport is the arena in which South Africans were weaned onto the concept of the rainbow nation. They trace the chain of events which saw the shift in the signification of rugby, an Afrikaner-dominated sport, culminating in the 1995 Rugby World Cup series hosted by South Africa. Reportedly the political highlight of 1995 according to leading political commentators, was when South Africa defeated Australia, and Nelson Mandela, wearing South African captain François Pienaar's number six jersey, lauded the Springboks on their victory. The Springboks were no longer the team of Afrikanerdom, but the team of the new 'rainbow nation' – signalled by the participation of a lone black player who marked the transformation. For South Africans, this was the year of being accepted as members of the world sport community (as an aside, 'world acceptance' still features as an important source of national pride in our 1999 round of research). In his opening speech President Nelson Mandela invoked the rainbow nation – thus using the rugby match as political platform: "Your presence in South African confirms the unity in diversity and the humanity in healthy contact that our young democracy has come to symbolise. On behalf of our rainbow nation I welcome you all" (Steenveld and Strelitz, 1998: p. 620). The speech was seen as Mandela giving his blessing to an occasion that would formerly have symbolised white nationalism (Steenveld and Strelitz, 1998).

Returning to the focus of this paper, the link between subjective well-being and the belief in the rainbow as civil religion or founding myth, it is important to note that only support for the political symbol of the rainbow correlates significantly with happiness, life satisfaction and optimism. The source of national pride appears to have no impact on feelings of well-being. However, lack of national pride, as indicated in not being able to name one's source of national pride, is significantly associated with depressed well-being.

Conclusion

Finally, our study suggests that the new inclusive civil religion or at least its principle symbol, the rainbow, may have served its time and purpose well. It appears that sport and the populist-supported Reconstruction and Development Programme have increasingly become the main focus for feelings of national pride. The dimension of social equality projected onto the rainbow requires that the disadvantaged groups must catch up; the RDP and compensation to victims who testified before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on human rights abuses promise to fulfil the material needs of an unequal society better than symbolic gestures of goodwill. Nevertheless, the study suggests that the rainbow continues to serve as societal ideal and guiding principle[8]. As the elites in the study pointed out, it will take many generations to realise the potential of the rainbow nation. Meanwhile, it appears that South Africans from all walks of life who subscribe to the idea of the rainbow feel more contented and optimistic in the waiting.

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Notes

[1] The 1999 update for the South African Quality of Life Trends Project was commissioned to MarkData, Johannesburg. The October 1999 syndicated study used a multiple stage cluster probability sample design to select 2219 South African residents of 16 years and older in metropolitan, urban and rural areas countrywide. The fieldwork was carried out between 23 September and 8 October 1999. Personal interviews were conducted by trained interviewers in the respondents' homes in the language of their choice. Provision was made for substitution if the respondent was not available and for quality controls. All items for this study placed in the syndicated survey were closed and respondents chose one option. Results presented are rounded percentages weighted to population size by MarkData.

[2] The item used in the earlier survey added a time reference: "These weeks a lot has been said . . ." (emphasis added).

[3] The panel included persons from all race groups and representatives from across the political and institutional spectrum including education, health, the media, the church, national/provincial and local government, politics, labour, commercial agriculture, mining, business, small business development and training, safety and security, research, and non-governmental organisations. Some panellists drew on their experience of serving in different institutions.

[4] The majority of South Africans expressed national pride in response to a 1996 MarkData survey conducted nationwide: 65% stated they were 'very often' or 'often' proud to be South African (Møller et al., 1999: p. 261). In a Markinor survey conducted nationwide a year earlier, 85% stated they were 'very proud' to be South African and a further 14% 'quite proud' (Møller et al., 1999: p. 259). In 1999 it was assumed that the majority of South Africans would endorse national pride and the question was omitted for cost reasons.

[5] A more detailed account of responses to the elite survey is given in Møller and Dickow (2001).

[6] In response to the first author's query on the origins of the symbol, Archbishop Tutu claims in a letter addressed to Helga Dickow: "I was not influenced by Jesse Jackson but by biblical concept . . . Also the fact that the rainbow seemed to be an apt image for diversity and I used it for the first time after the 13 September 1989 March in Cape Town."

[7] According to Christianson (1999: p. 22), rumour has it that Mandela's speech was drafted by Mbeki.

[8] The ode to the rainbow composed by a young white women in free response to a national letter-writing competition, reprinted in Dickow (1999b), is a poignant reminder of the need among contemporary South African youth for inclusive symbols to guide race relations in the new era.

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