

# On Being South African: Identity, Religion and Culture<sup>1</sup>

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Until recently we spoke of the “new South Africa” with a certain relish. We imagined that we had turned our backs on our colonial and apartheid past. While there was always sufficient prejudice and racism and religious bigotry around to cause us to question this assumption, we hoped that these outbursts were hangovers from the past that would in time wither away.

The recent xenophobic attacks have changed this perception. Newspapers remind us that we have a long history of hating others. Building on a World Values Survey on International Attitudes to Immigration, the Southern African Migration Project (Samp) has found that South Africans held the harshest views on foreigners among 29 nations surveyed before 2002. A new as yet unpublished Samp survey, in turn, shows that our xenophobia is getting worse, suggesting that one-third of South Africans want all foreigners to be kicked out of the country. 9% of respondents said they would use violence to do so.<sup>2</sup>

The much lauded South African Constitution of which we are so proud is couched in the language of inclusivity and acceptance of one another. We are called to “respect” and to “honour” one another in a spirit of healing and *ubuntu*, and the Freedom Charter that predates the 1996 constitution by 41 years reminds us that South Africa belongs to all who live in it.

The South African debate on identity, otherness and xenophobia needs to be located in our constitutional commitment to transformation. It not enough to be kind to a Mozambican or tolerant of other religions. More is required. We need to reach beyond the platitudes we so often mouth about nation-building, patriotism and a rainbow nation. We must also avoid the often slick and simple explanations as to the cause of xenophobia. There is almost certainly no single cause of xenophobia. We are probably dealing with a bouquet of causes or, to change the metaphor, a set of

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<sup>2</sup> A Special Report on Xenophobia, “No one hates foreigners like we do,” *Sunday Time*, 25 May, 2008.

atmospheric forces that make for a perfect or near-perfect storm. If so, the challenge we face is all the more daunting.

In addressing this challenge on a night when we honour Beyers Naudé, a man of deep religious faith, allow me to dwell for a moment on the spiritual meaning of transformation that lies at the heart of the world's great religions. In the realm of religion and belief, transformation entails change from partiality and self-centeredness to completeness and other-centeredness or inclusivity. In her recent book, *Laying Ghosts to Rest: Dilemmas of the Transformation in South Africa*, Mamphela Ramphele suggests transformation implies a "metamorphosis" as radical as witnessed in the life cycles of a butterfly from an egg hidden in a larva to a flying insect.<sup>3</sup> Spiritual transformation is about opening oneself to a reality that reaches beyond who we are. In the words of the Hebrew Bible, it involves Abraham and Sarah going out into the unknown, not knowing where they were going. The New Testament defines this unknown as something "that eye hath not seen nor ear heard."

Lest I be accused of abusing the poetry of the Bible, I bring you back to South African reality through an intervention by novelist Zakes Mda into the spirited debate engaged in South Africans a few years back on the topic "Who is an African?". Amidst the fury of a debate that focussed essentially on whether whites could be so presumptuous as to claim to be Africans, Mda explained that "African identity" is after all a rather recent phenomenon. Arabs at the turn of the Common Era used the word *Afriquia* for the northern part of what is today the African continent. The Romans, in turn, captured Carthage in 146 CE and soon extended their dominance from parts of modern Libya to Mauritania. They referred to the region as their African proconsular province. And yet, writes Mda, "Until about 100 years ago the inhabitants of the continent did not generally refer to themselves as Africans ... They recognized and celebrated various identities that were based on ethnicity, clan, family, gender and class. They at the same time recognised their human identity as their core identity. That is why they called themselves *Abantu* or *Khoikhoi* and other names that designated and validated their humanity in the various languages of the continent." Africa, suggests Mda, is "an identity-in-the-making".<sup>4</sup> It recognises the plurality of

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<sup>3</sup> Mamphela Ramphele, *Laying Ghost to Rest: Dilemmas of the Transformation in South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2008, 13.

<sup>4</sup> At a symposium on identity organised by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Cape Town, October 2003.

identities that make for a common humanity, although this propensity like so many other cultural values is often forgotten. If recovered this sense of African inclusivity could make a significant anthropological contribution to the global debate on coexistence and identity. In brief, none of us quite know where we are going or for that matter who we really are. The work of Wilmot James and others on the Genome Project, on the other hand, reminds us that if not in the end then certainly in the beginning we were all more or less the same. Difference is indeed but skin deep. The rest is environmental and social engineering.

South Africa is, of course, in some sense a nation of immigrants with the Khoikhoi being the original natives of the land. Other black settlers joined them in becoming natives, although in some instances helped to annihilate them. Others came later: Bangladeshis, Indonesians, Pakistanis, and others who apartheid masters designated Asian. Indians came as indentured labourers and as traders. Whites came. They too are of multiple origins: Dutch, French, German, English, Scottish and Irish. They assimilated one with the other but mostly chose not to be Africans. Greeks, Portuguese, Italians and others opted to stay in their own enclaves. Apartheid did the rest, designating and entrenching difference along four distinct colour lines: black, white, coloured and Asian. So who indeed is an African? When does a settler become a native? Are Africans and more particularly South Africans all those who choose to be such by intent and behaviour? Does African identity have something to do with colour? What about culture and history? Xenophobia has thrown the debate wide open.

All this by way of background. My concern in this presentation is to:

- Stress the place and importance of identity – whether defined by culture, religion, colour or class, recognising its positive and negative identities.
- Raise the issue of political pluralism by identifying two common options for living together and adding another.
- Identify the immediate challenges facing South Africa,

### **Identity and Belonging**

W. E. B. du Bois was correct in defining the problem of the twentieth century as the problem of the colour-line. The problem of the twenty-first century may well be ethnic separation – a social dynamic that involves more than observable characteristics

such as colour and appearances. It includes memory and history, language and culture, worldviews, ideologies, religions, and related self-images. An analysis of African political conflict shows that these differences also invariably include strong dimensions of intrusive economic privilege. Class and identity are intertwined.

A common enemy often generates a measure of unity in a splintered opposition. In many African states including South Africa this has been the case. The natives were united in opposing colonialists and the agents of apartheid. In brief, it is easier to show pre-independence unity than post independence solidarity, which frequently gives way to latent ethnic, class, and ideological divisions. Félix Houphouët-Boigny observed: "We have inherited from our former masters not nations but states, states that have within them extremely fragile links between ethnic groups."<sup>5</sup> A sturdy brand of social cement is required to unite post colonial states, within which ethnic differences often become more dominant than before independence. There is, for example, an urgent need to deal with ethnicity in states ranging from Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC in the African Great Lakes region to countries of the Greater Horn, West Africa and the southern African region. These ethnic conflicts remind us that for peace and development to coexist, not least on the African continent, there is a need for a form of national unity within which difference is both recognised and celebrated. To resort to our valid but neglected South Africanism, Africa needs to make "unity in diversity" a reality.

This said, it needs also to be recognised that the overwhelming majority of notable conflicts beyond the African continent, not least in Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia, are also between communities within failed or failing national states rather than between national states. It is at the same time important to recognise that ethnic conflicts are almost invariably intertwined with some form of material deprivation and/or political exclusion. It is essentially when individuals and groups experience a sense of marginalisation from the body politic and its material benefits that they draw on identity concerns to drive and legitimate their political and material agendas.

The intriguing question is that if alienation is at least partially grounded in economic imbalances, why do dissident groups resort to using cultural and religious language, rituals and practices to give expression to their alienation? Perhaps it is that

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (London: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2005), 154.

marginalisation and exclusion is often so deep that it acquires a sense of spiritual or metaphysical isolation that cuts to the very depths of who we are. Historic and enduring, the alienation impacts on body and soul with implications for social identity, individual purpose, and hope itself. It is a cry from and to the very ground of being itself. It is an appeal to the most essential sources of life – the ancestors, the spirits, the soil, tradition, and the Gods.

The briefest survey of African conflicts echoes this organic, metaphysical or spiritual cry. It is present in the Hutu–Tutsi conflict in Rwanda and Burundi. The source of Mayi Mayi deprivation and exclusion in the Kivu provinces in the eastern part of the Congo is largely socio-economic, and yet the Mayi Mayi draw on cultural and traditional religious forces, magic, ancestor veneration, and traditional forms of spirituality to give expression to their exclusion. The Casamance people, alienated by the dominant Senegalese culture and social economy, draw on Diola culture to justify their struggle for political and economic independence. Material essentials such as land, rice, and rain are spoken of almost in the same breath as ancestors, spirits, and a supreme being. The origins of the Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda emerged out of the ethnic-based Holy Spirit Movement under Alice Lakwena, while being grounded in political and economic exclusion.

To such African examples can be added the religious and ethnic identity concerns of the Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland, the Serbs, Muslims and Croates in the Balkans, the Kurds in Iran and Iraq, the Siekhs in Northern India and Kashmir, Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Basques in Spain, Papua and Aceh in Indonesia and the concerns of Tibetans. Consider too the sense of exclusion of Pakistanis in Britain, Hispanics in the USA, Aborigines in Australia, Maoris in New Zealand, the Inuit in Canada and the French in Quebec.

Back to South Africa. Twelve years after Nelson Mandela delivered his inaugural presidential address entitled "Many Cultures One Nation" there is an indication that the oneness we experienced in 1994 is being challenged by a growing sense of particularism. The Khoi-San celebrate their origins, there is a growing pride among those who trace their identity to the arrival of sixteenth century slaves, Afrikaners claim their place as a tribe of Africa, South African Indians affirm their cultural origins, and increasingly Muslim women are seen in public in black veils.

International instruments on group and minority rights seen as early as in the 1954 recommendations of the UN sub-committee on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minority Rights that signalled an increasing awareness by the international community of the place of ethnicity, religion and culture in national and regional peace efforts. This position is amplified in UN Development Programme's 2004 Human Development Report that calls for "multicultural policies" that recognise differences, diversity and cultural freedoms so that "all people can choose to speak their language, practice their religion and participate in shaping their culture so that people can choose to be who they are." This underlines the need to promote different cultural, religious and related persuasions in the nation-building process -- especially those who have the capacity to undermine the process -- without allowing anyone one sector to jeopardise the emergence of an inclusive and just social order.

The challenge of diverse identities that often manifests itself in tribal or ethnic chauvinism provides a serious challenge to African and South Africa nation-building initiatives. Martin Luther King's famous dictum that we need either to learn to live together or die together is a reality that Africa and the world would do well to consider. Today some South Africans kill Mozambicans, Zimbabweans and Somalis. And tomorrow? Who then kills who? When does the ethnic purity of a 100% Zulu-boy, a rural Xhosa, a *suiwer* Afrikaner, or a diehard English racist spill-over into violence? The only alternative is for politicians, and human rights communities to affirm the place and importance of identity – whether defined by culture, religion, colour or class while recognising the right of others to be different. Perhaps we can only do so if we are secure enough in our identity. (Oom Bey, as we affectionately called Beyers Naudé, could perhaps embrace others at the level he did because of his rootedness in his own Afrikaner identity. He embraced *die eie* [me and mine] without assuming it to be more important than *die ander* [you and yours]).

### **Political Pluralism**

In culturally and ethnically heterogeneous nations the challenge of political pluralism is at the forefront of nation-building. Political leaders who seek to merge all individuality, all corporate differences and the energies of all national groups into one common homogeneous enterprise, threaten the very fabric of democratic participation. Those who expel ethnic, cultural and other misfits run the risk of igniting a political fire that has the capacity to consume both them and their own. The question is how to create and establish a process by which different groups can

culturally co-exist in contributing to a whole that is inclusive, tolerant, open and greater than its component parts.

I suggest three options for reaching beyond monolithic forms of statism, national chauvinism and cultural domination. As indicated two are common place, the third is perhaps a little less so:

### **Liberalism**

The dominant model of nation-building in the Western World, despite protest to the contrary, continues to be that of liberalism, which essentially argues that under its mantle there is room for all to participate in the body politic on the basis of the affirmation of individual human rights. Neville Alexander, however, argues that “liberalism is a greater danger in the long run to the struggle for the oppressed than fascism.”<sup>6</sup> He does so reminding us that not all liberals are white. It is also clear that contemporary notions of liberalism are no longer always liberal!

In brief, liberals play down the political importance of issues of language, religion, culture and other “thick” sources of belonging such as memory, ethnicity, race, class and gender, suggesting that where individual rights are in place contentious issues such as race, gender and class – those very things that some would argue constitute the essential ingredients of what it means to be human – can be kept out of the political mix. The problem is that those who cling to culture, religion, identity and race, sometimes in the absence of economic, intellectual and language resources with which to compete with the liberal elite, are disempowered and excluded from what has aptly been called the “naked the public square.” It is this exclusion in the name of a liberal notion of there being “room for all” that often gives rise to ethnic, racial, cultural or religious forms of chauvinism, by way of reaction.

Differently stated, the opponents of liberalism argue that what is alleged to be a non-partisan culture-free liberal state is in reality thick with cultural and related overtones. It is, of course, marvellously easy to confuse *our* particular culture and tradition with what we see as universal human nature. We persuade ourselves that our culture is God’s culture, universally given for the benefit of the entire human race, whereas it takes those who do not share our presuppositions to verify how inclusive our culture

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<sup>6</sup> Neville Alexander, “Black Consciousness: A Reactionary Tendency,” N Barney Pitso, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson, eds., *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), 238-52.

really is. This is why we need to listen most attentively to those who occupy the margins of the public square. They tend to see the fault-lines of the public square more clearly than those who are most comfortably at home within it.

It is this sense of exclusion in the name of liberalism that is seen by many as little more than surface-level transformation that results in multiculturalism being seen as a credible alternative to those forms of liberalism that play down cultural difference as a basis for co-existence.

### **Multiculturalism**

Building a society in which different cultures and ethnic groups live side by side, rather than exploring the possibilities of engaging one another, clearly has its own set of problems. Politics is about power and where this is developed around one form cultural or ethnic identity in opposition to alternative identities, the process lends itself to nationalistic or group narcissism. Indeed we would do well to remember that apartheid was built on multicultural difference and the promotion of group identity.

Multicultural politics also fails to address the ambiguities of identity. No particular group, whether Afrikaners, Khoi-San or Griqua are homogeneous. They include the wealthy, the poor, intellectuals, men, women, workers and management. These different groupings, whether workers, management, women or youth often have more in common across cultural and ethnic lines than they have with others within their own particular group – calling into question any simple sense of cultural bonding.

A sense of multiculturalism that fails to address the need to engage other cultures on an equal footing as a basis for integrating ideas through contestation and co-operation ultimately fails to contribute towards overcoming the separation and potential hostility between ethnic, cultural and religious groups. Multiculturalism seeks to counter liberalism's playing down of difference with an affirmation of diversity that can become a romantic and uncritical celebration of all and any form of difference and diversity to the point where the centre simply cannot hold. Multiculturalism too often fails to adequately explore trajectories beyond separatism, resulting in the perpetuation of what Jody Kollapen calls "racial ghettos" that inhabit our minds and behaviour.



## **Cultural Openness**

Culture, Max Weber reminded us, is more than a light coat that rests on our shoulders to be discarded at will.<sup>7</sup> It is story, memory, symbol, language and place within which we live, move and have our being.

Ironically it is when we try to protect and defend our culture that it is most vulnerable. When we allow it to be, finding itself in relation to other cultures, it comes into its own. The Afrikaans language is stronger today than it ever was under the chauvinistic days of protectionism and imposition.

We are back to seeking a formula for national unity that recognises and celebrates diversity. Identity whether grounded in race, nationality, religion or class is ultimately built around culture – culture in the simple sense of who we are and what we instinctively do. We are all born into our culture, it is there waiting for us and no one finds it particularly easy to change his or her culture. Most of us are culturally a bit reactionary. Culture is at the same time always in flux. Before blowing the trumpet of cultural particularism, we need to note that the word “culture” comes from the Latin word *cultura*. This is a word captured in the notion of agriculture or farming which involves the complex process in which what is given in nature is intentionally interfered with in an attempt to create a better product.

I am suggesting the cultural openness and change may be the only viable alternative to cultural wars, competing notions of who is more African than another, flashing race cards, the struggle for survival and fierce competition over who has the right to live where. There is a need for organised and facilitated encounters between people of different identities, within which we can begin to understand our own prejudices, attitudes and behaviour as well as gain an appreciation of the identities of others. We need to move beyond our racially and culturally and religiously imposed ghettos.

Suffice it to say, South Africa is at a crossroads. The poison of xenophobia and blood soaked divisionism will either escalate or we will need to embrace an inclusive identity as Africans and South Africans that can lead us into a future beyond the

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<sup>7</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* ( New York: Scribner's 1976),

rigidities of identity and culture that threatens to destroy what we once called the South African miracle.

### **Challenges**

There is no simple formula for us as a nation to move forward. Allow me to suggest however that there are some ingredients to the process which we simply cannot ignore. I do so on the basis of a conversation I had with Govan Mbeki eighteen months before he died in August 2001. Reflecting on the South African transition at the time he suggested that a *twofold, inter-related development* was required for the progress we had made since our political transition in 1994 to be taken forward. He spoke of the need for a stronger sense of “having and belonging” to develop in the country. He reminded me that for political reconciliation to be sustainable the economy needed to be restructured in such a way that the poor and socially excluded would begin to share in the material benefits of the nation’s wealth. He went on, however, to say that unless a measure of civic trust, respect and reconciliation took place between the different sectors of South African society, economic restructuring was unlikely to happen. He argued that unless the different sectors of society felt “at home” in South Africa would not only be reluctant to work for the common good, but could also cause considerable trouble.

Recognising that economic transformation (having) and reconciliation (belonging) need to go hand in hand, I offer three comments: An obvious word about having, a comment on belonging and a thought on identity:

#### **Having**

The possibility of a left-wing revolution in the short to medium term future in South Africa is probably somewhat remote. More likely is the possibility of South Africa becoming what Neville Alexander so aptly describes as “an ordinary country” driven by “normal, bourgeois, democratic polity” with a new set of beneficiaries being added to, if not replacing, some from the old. Bracketing out the question of which section of past (i.e. white) benefactors of apartheid continue to benefit from the present, what is clear is that a huge section of those who were victims of apartheid continue to be materially excluded from the present dispensation. This situation of the country’s poor has in recent months been compounded substantially by an increasingly hostile international economic situation, rocketing fuel prices and a radical rise in food prices. Add to this the HIV-AIDS pandemic and the magnetic pull of South African cities for men and women from rural areas as well as other African countries and the

scene is set for what Alexander cautiously refers to as escalating “movements of desperation.”<sup>8</sup> To state the obvious, this can only impact with increasing negativity on the political stability and economic growth that is needed if we have any chance of addressing the needs of the poor.

It is this that makes the need for poverty relief, both in terms of immediate relief through improvement in service delivery, the elimination of corruption and the provision of improved social support for the nation’s poor so absolutely necessary. Addressing xenophobia should not be merely reducing poverty. Not all poor people hate others. Indeed they are as a rule more tolerant and caring than most rich people. The poor need, however, to be assisted to regain their human dignity if the climate within which xenophobic and other forms of violence can be promoted is to be countered. Welfare and social relief is at the same time no more than a temporary and partial solution to economic exclusion. This is why, for social, political and ethical reasons, we need to ensure both economic growth *and* the improved lot of the poor. We cannot have the one at the expense of the other. But for this to happen the captains of industry and owners of financial resources will need to settle for a lesser reward to ensure that the poor get a little more.

### **Belonging**

If economic inclusivity is the material ingredient required to promote political reconciliation, the transcending of ethnic divisions is the social or subjective side of the process.

The fact South Africa has refused to allow its long history of tribal, colonial and apartheid conflict to reinvent itself since our democratic transition is something to be proud of. There have been some close shaves: the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging’s invasion of the CODESA talks, the Battle of Bophuthatswana, the threatened non-participation of the Inkatha Freedom Party in the 1994 elections and the tolerance of the present-day Orania enclave all speak of ethnic intolerance. We dare not deviate from tolerance or reignite the suspicions, fears, grudges and past conflicts that in many instances lie just below the surface of our peaceful coexistence. Nation-building, inclusivity and unequivocal belonging by all South Africa’s people is a priority if we are going to overcome the cautious but possible conflict between

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<sup>8</sup> Neville Alexander, TITLE, 7-8.

different groups in South Africa – whether Venda, Shangaan, Tswana, Afrikaner, Muslim, Christian, Hindu or Jew.

We need at the same time to recognise that we have an inherent, organic relationship and interdependency with other African states. Our national borders, created by colonial masters and defended by post-colonial African rulers are fragile, porous and have been transcended by generations of familial journeys. We should not take the political rhetoric and provocation of politicians too seriously. The frequent playing of the race card by political leaders and others politicians does at same time nothing to build the nation. The threat by some whites and others to “cut and run”, ethnic rivalry and the flexing of tribal muscles in a similar manner does nothing to promote national trust and belonging.

In brief the reaffirmation of the inclusivity for which many South Africans fought and some died needs to be reaffirmed and our leaders have a special responsibility to ensure that this happens. The unequivocal censure of all forms of xenophobia needs, in turn, to be countered with all the resources of the state which includes both the strong arm of the law as well as the nurture and teaching of all within our borders.

The bell has tolled. We have been warned. The fire has been lit. We dare not allow it to flare into a conflict that could see tribe against tribe, race against race, maybe religion against religion. It is also not enough to extinguish the present fire. We need to work on the underlying factors that constitute the kindling of future fires – without waiting for the kind of mayhem and world headlines that it took to awake us from our slumber this time around.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) took us a long way towards engaging the nation in issues pertaining to what it defined as gross violations of human rights perpetrated by political actors, the security establishment and the liberation movements. Limited by its parliamentary mandate, the TRC focussed its work on such crimes as murder, abduction and torture. It did not give sufficient attention to crimes of social and economic injustice or such deliberate destructive acts by the state as forced removals, bantu education, the destructive of family and community life, segregation, racism and the underlying causes that gave rise to the murder, torture and others forms of crime that it did investigate. It is here that we need to focus our national conversation, if we are to understand the roots of our social conflict and transcend the divisions that continue to drive us apart in this

country. It is within the realm of this historic memory of abuse, privilege and conflict – deep within the soul of this nation -- that transformation and healing still waits to take place.

This deep, metamorphic transformation demands the birth of an identity that can only emerge as we face and wrestle with our past. It requires the acknowledgement of privilege and a commitment to reconciliation by white South Africans and others who have benefitted at the expense of others. The black majority needs at the same time to continue to demand the restoration of their material and human dignity. As this historic encounter continues to play itself out in this new age, we as black and white South Africans need to reaffirm and celebrate the sacrifice of our mothers and fathers who insisted that South Africa belongs to all live within it. This involves a commitment by black and white South Africans to a new identity within which we acknowledge the diversity of cultures, religions and ethnic roots that have made us who we are.

### **Identity**

So much has been written and said about identity. We are repeatedly told that people have through the ages gone to war to defend their identity; that identity is a social construct; and that the journey to who we can become is as yet incomplete. I return to the notion of transcendence and Mamphela Ramphele's metaphor of a larva and a butterfly. It is only as we open ourselves to the possible of adventure and change that we discover the unknown possibilities that dwell within us. The problem is that we instinctively cling to who we have become through decades of entrenched separate identities. We sometimes believe that there a God-given purpose bequeathed to our forbears that it is our responsibility to preserve. We vigorously defend cultures that are moribund in fear and reactionary forms of religion that all too often fail to hear a call to a new future. We fail to respond to the God who is beyond any particular culture, more than the human utterances found in any particular religion and greater than what the finest theological or philosophical treatise on things ultimate can offer. Martin Prozesky suggests that democratic inclusivity and cultural pluralism involves "the right of every woman, man or child on this planet to be as fully fulfilled a creator of the spiritual means of production as all others."<sup>9</sup> In words of St Bernard of Clairvaux: "Everyone has to drink from his or her own wells." Beneath these different

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Prozesky, "Religious liberty in a secular state: Some challenges for South Africa. A paper read at the Unesco / WCC consultation on "The role of religion and religious institutions in dismantling apartheid." Geneva, November 1991.

wells there is surely a sub-terranean stream that no one religion is complete enough to capture.

I am suggesting that the incomplete human and South African journey is as spiritually open-ended as it is politically, socially, culturally and ethnically open-ended. One cannot ultimately be separated from the other. Transformation is necessarily holistic. Back to the poetry with which I began: The journey of transformation involves going out into the unknown, not knowing where we are going in pursuit of “that which eye hath not seen nor ear heard.” We need to recover the dream that saw Nelson Mandela take us into what we believed would be “another country”. We have since those heady days discovered that there is a lot of hard work still to be done in throwing off the shackles of the past and prejudices of the present before hope can become a reality.

We do so recognising the pathos and truth within the tribute to Nelson Mandela by Seamus Healy. He reminds us that while

History says, Don't hope  
On this side of the grave ...

But then, once in a lifetime  
The longed for tidal wave  
Of justice can rise up  
And hope and history rhyme.

Yet, most of us, not least the poor of Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Somalia and other parts of Africa who have come to live among us, will tonight settle for less than such romance. My point is simple. We need individual and communal healing and liberation as well as profound structural transformation if we are going to prosper as a nation and a people of Africa.

### **An Unconcluding Postscript**

In dealing with the mundane things of political reality we need to keep alive the dream that enabled us to rise above apartheid in order that we might rise again, this time to transcend a new (and yet old) set of challenges that threaten to engulf.

A word on leadership in xenophobic times: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the great nineteenth century German philosopher Hegel argues that the great people of history are always necessarily one step ahead of their contemporaries, but never more than one step. One step ahead in order to lead. Never more than one step, otherwise they are not understood and therefore unable to lead.<sup>10</sup> By these and other standards Oom Bey was a great South African and a great person. An Afrikaner of the Afrikaners, Christiaan Frederick Beyers Naudé, named in honour of the rebel Boer general drowned in the Vaal River trying to evade arrest for his role in the 1914 rebellion. Once a member of the Afrikaner Broederbond, a NG dominee, and Afrikaner rebel, he challenged the entrenched myths of the *volk*. This gave him a capacity to give content and shape to the fabric of South African democracy at its best -- plural and inclusive.

I close with a poem written by another great person and former General Secretary of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, who was killed in an aeroplane crash over Africa in September 1967. These are words that capture the Beyers Naudé who I grew to love and respect:

I am being driven forward  
Into an unknown land  
The pass grows steeper,  
The air grows colder and sharper,

A wind from my unknown goal  
Stirs the strings  
Of expectation

Still the question:  
Shall I ever get there?  
There were life resounds,  
A clear pure note  
In the silence.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>GWF Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 3.

<sup>11</sup>Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), 31.