

Grip of Apartheid still holds tight



Some of the major pillars of apartheid were repealed this month by the South African government.

The Population Registration Act, enacted in 1950, classified every citizen by race at birth. It dictated where a person could live, have a meal, go to church, have a baby and attend school. It also restricted marriage and sex across racial lines and limited voting rights. People within the same family were often classified under different race categories, resulting in grief.

The Group Areas Act and the Land Acts of 1813 and 1936 were also repealed. These laws reserved 87% of South African land for whites.

Newspaper and television commentators have called this the end of apartheid and some world leaders appear ready to remove sanctions; but as two African-born York students note, the consequences of apartheid run deep and the underpinnings of racism have hardly been addressed by the elimination of the laws.

By Wilson Matidie

Apartheid is an institutionalized system of racism and discrimination. It was designed by the white South African minority government to rule over the black majority. It is still in place.

Dr Hendrik Verwoed, father of apartheid, introduced and strengthened the system to divide, rule and conquer the black majority which today totals 28 million. He initiated the homeland system of self-government through which South Africans are classified and grouped according to ethnicity and language.

The system developed into a fragmentation of the tribal homelands of Kwa-Zulu, presently led by Gatsha Buthelezi, Bophutha-Tswana by Lucas Mangope, and others. These puppet self-governing independent homelands occupied less than 13% of available land, while 87% is controlled by white South Africa. Systematic forced removal has rendered many families landless. Education, medical care and social amenities operate on the basis of color. Black people do not have the vote apart from within the homeland system which white South Africa still controls economically, politically and otherwise.

Black South Africans are still forced to study under the system of Bantu Education. This is an inferior type of education which does not allow blacks to prepare for high skilled jobs.

Bantu Education and the influx control law forces blacks into cer-

tain jobs and to work at certain places for particular periods. The influx control is like the Canadian visa permit, where a person is given permission to study at one place for a year. The permit may or may not be renewed arbitrarily. Influx Control creates migrant labourers from the homelands and renders black South Africans non-citizens in the country of their birth.

South African whites have power, affluence and domination over the black majority who live under poverty, landlessness, votelessness, illiteracy, unemployment and total harassment, arrest and possible death.

There is a new tide of reforms sweeping the country. Precipitated by the struggle for freedom waged by various political organizations such as the African National Congress of South Africa, the Pan Africanist Congress, and various labour organizations, President F.W. deKlerk released Nelson Mandela and repealed a number of apartheid laws. One of them, the Population Registration Act identifies people by the colour of their skin.

DeKlerk has given the same treatment to all the laws that he has repealed. He simply announces that laws must go without physically making them non-operational. While he says they are dead, they have to be rendered non-operational by the new constitution which may come into effect whenever deKlerk deems fit. He drags his feet while scores of people die.

There are two opposing political camps in South Africa: Those who are for democratic change, equality and peace, and those for the continuance of apartheid rule. Those interested in change constitute the whole democratic liberation movement led by Nelson Mandela. Those who favour apartheid rule are led by F.W. deKlerk.

apartheid violence

Many black South Africans are losing their lives daily because of what is internationally known as black on black violence. We know better, it is apartheid violence. It has existed since the inception of apartheid rule and colonization of our country.

The powers that be have always set the oppressed people of South Africa against each other. The white minority oppressive state machinery, the police and army have been able to enforce the rule of apartheid law, and also recruit vigilantes from the misdirected, weak and unemployed elements to do their dirty job for them.

The so-called black on black violence is a product of apartheid. It was in place during Mandela's incarceration. It is apartheid violence. It manifested itself at Sharpeville in 1961, in Soweto on June 1976, and continues to this day. The Canadian media describes

this political violence as faction fighting between Xhosa and Zulu, or between the ANC and Inkatha. They fail to mention other ethnic or political groupings of which there are many.

The brunt of the fighting is carried out by Zulus. In Natal where most of the concentrated fighting started, there is only one percent non-Zulu speaking blacks. Soweto, where the violence has escalated is Zulu dominated. Consequently, Gatsha Buthelezi does not have support of all the Zulu speaking population. He does not have overall leadership of all the Zulu clans. His political power is based on tribal grounds designed by the South African regime.

Similarly, we also know that killings in the Natal area started long before Nelson Mandela's release. Before the unbanning of political organizations. Before the ANC leadership was allowed to return from exile, while some of their followers are locked-out, not allowed to return. deKlerk makes lofty announcements of repealing apartheid and doing nothing to remove or scrap the system.

This is to hoodwink the international community into believing that the government cannot move fast enough because of "disunity" among blacks. Meanwhile, deKlerk is globe-trotting, seeing that sanctions are lifted against

the racist state, without delivering the goods. He is trying to reverse the gains scored by the democratic movement and entrench apartheid rule. To do this, deKlerk is ensuring the oppressed carry the blame.

The repeal of apartheid laws has come too late and with too little. The actual practice of racism and discrimination has not been removed at all.

This has caused a lot of frustration among blacks who expected a lot with the release of Nelson Mandela and deKlerk's promise of ending apartheid. Instead anxiety, frustration, and high expectations have created opportunism among the divided oppressed people, especially those who are hoping to exercise some kind of rulership when apartheid goes.

DeKlerk has been able to manipulate the boiling situation of discontent among people who do not have the vote, live in abject poverty and squalor, and are not allowed adequate and rewarding employment.

Apartheid rule, if deKlerk were serious, could be scrapped in one day. And it is only the end of apartheid, that can bring about an end to apartheid violence.

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History is a form of degradation for blacks living in South Africa

By Yvonne Ver-Jose

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time
future,
And time future contained in time
past
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.*

T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton'

For the past 28 years we have been crying "Free Mandela! Free Mandela!" Today, looking at the shadow behind us and the shadow ahead of us and hearing the echo of our voices which we had thought had become memory . . .

That morning which Oprah Winfrey said she had spent glued to her screen eating popcorn and watching Mandela wave, and Winnie wave with him, and the crowd and the wave of promise sweep through the nation . . . announcing in chromatic images that IT happened, after 28 years of isolation on an island—and sitting at the Orange Snail with the T.V. hanging overhead, I grasped reality in a mouthful of hot beef patty—I too had, however briefly, dominated time, watched 'history' being made.

So, then, I have Mandela's release on video to show my dinner guests—the man, the moment, the event. Like having a piece of the wall, time enclosed in the palm of your hand.

In South Africa, 'event' after 'event' accumulates on the debris of history. Apartheid is present to those in the West as peaks or shocks of experience and each moment made to suggest that the past is history, the present is 'fresh,' 'new' and

'improved'—comforting:

*No more segregation in pools.
No more segregation in schools.
No more segregation on park
benches.
No more segregation in lavatories.
We can now breathe the same air.*

But why do I hear the echo of the voice I thought had become memory: "Free Mandela! Free Mandela!"?

While speaking at York University in 1989, Caribbean poet and playwright Derek Walcott said, "empires claim time . . . They feel that they are produced by history, and therefore can dominate it. History is only an aspect of the kind territory, one of the territories they dominate."

The South African settler imagination has sought to dominate history in South Africa, the 'Great Trek' becoming ingrained as an event of regenerative and exilic influence. By walking across the land, the Afrikaner believed to have appropriated the land, dominated both time and space, through event. But the importance of the 'Great Trek' was gained by suppressing the significance the *Imfecane*—the great Bantu movement, many years earlier — an even more momentous and pivotal history for the indigenous Africans.

In her Convocation address at York University, 11 June 1991, Dr. Janet Halliwell invoked Wilfred Laurier who had said that the twentieth century belonged to Canada. Having only had mixed success in the twentieth century Canada was urged by Halliwell to tighten its

grasp on the twenty-first.

In her conscience for Canada, time became a territory to be dominated. "Century" sounded colossal—a euphoric sense of the forever unwinding perpetual present; in other words, timelessness.

For the dispossessed in South Africa, history must somehow feel bleached out. Events orchestrated by the apartheid government induced a sense of history folding rather than unfolding. Time is bondage, and history degradation.

South African novelist Sipho Sepamla, following the violence of the June 16, 1976 uprisings, describes the South African reality as a 'ride on the whirlwind;' Ezekie Mphahlele in *Down Second Avenue* writes of the impossibility of narrative in South Africa, calling it instead 'writing in white heat.' The impossibility of developing a structure of experience means a lack of comprehension.

The release of Mandela points to mythical significance, but lingers mainly as an isolated event. Nigerian poet Niyi Osundare, trying to reduce event to the realm of personal experience asks Mandela, "How does the earth feel under your unshod feet?"

Time, memory, and event, as experienced by the South African imagination, bleaches out linearity or history. When shall Mandela be free?

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