TRIBALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA COMPROMISES DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM, DEVELOPMENT AND THE CHARACTER OF THE STATE

Anis Mahomed Karodia (PhD)
Professor, Faculty Member and Senior Researcher, Regent Business School, Durban, South Africa
Paresh Soni
Researcher, Institutional Research, the Management College of Southern Africa (MANCOSA), Durban, South Africa

ABSTRACT
This paper attempts to discuss tribalism in South Africa’s democracy as ‘a ‘monster that, compromises democracy and the constitution of the country. The scourge of tribalism has serious racist implications and, therefore has to be dealt with decisively. From this perspective, it has to be fully understood that the majority of the voters will be youth in the coming election, scheduled for the 7th of May, 2014. This will be either an opportunity or a threat. The emerging tribalism must therefore not be allowed to pollute the youth because, South Africa’s youth is a new generation that, can consolidate the new found democracy and place the country into a trajectory of development, growth and acceptance both internally and externally. The researchers are aware that a paper of this nature can cause controversy, but posits that different sets of view must be allowed to surface, in order to allow the freed of speech. The paper is important from the perspective that South Africa is made up of different race groups and their rights have to be protected by means of the rule of law and the constitution of the country, as envisaged by the constitution and the Freedom Charter as was promulgated by the ruling party the African National Congress. The paper, in no way pretends to capture all aspects of the subtle nuances attached to this controversial subject, but outlines the importance of dealing with this issue.

Key Words: Tribalism, Racism, Monster, Inequality, Democracy, Development, Constitution, Ethnicity

INTRODUCTION
The people of South Africa and, particularly the youth of the country must reflect on the history and the death of apartheid. Many of the youth did not live under the savage and brutal system of apartheid, and therefore, the issue of tribalism becomes important from this perspective and more so as to what these issues mean to the youth and the future of the country. South Africa now has the constitutional right to equality and human dignity, though the levels of inequality are still unacceptable, and too often the living conditions and service provision do not reflect this respect of human dignity. It allows the bigots, the politicians, the tribalists to fuel sentiment on the basis of tribalism and racism against minority populations and foreigners that have settled in the country, post 1994 and therefore fuelling the anger of xenophobia. This is the historic nature of South Africa’s development. In those days many of these rights were not enshrined in South African law, as basic human rights. South Africa is a signatory of the Declaration of Human Rights, and, it was this support of human rights that made it possible to mobilize international
support to end apartheid. South Africans knew that they were at the receiving end of a brutal system and therefore, it is imperative that such a system is never allowed to surface again in any other forms such as racism and tribalism.

“The resilience of ethnicity as both politics and reality is one of the few apparent apartheid continuities since independence. Ethnic connections still challenge other relationships, fomenting arguments of internal secession or external irredentism, despite of people in general wanting to be part of the broader geographic polity” (Karodia, 2008: 32). Karodia, (2008), further adds that “ethnic fissures remain powerful, particularly in a period of economic crisis, when resources are scarcer than ever, unemployment beyond control, morale at its lowest ebb and competition in terms of survival at its highest.” There is no doubt at all, that, this is the current reality in democratic South Africa because of a rise of African Nationalism within parts of the ruling party. Thus the intellectual as well as the political context of ethnicity in the former homelands of South Africa, under apartheid as an example, may have been distinct from that in other parts of the ‘developing world’ and Africa, as a whole. In particular, notwithstanding similar attempts elsewhere, the synthesis of ethnic and class factors had gone furthest in the erstwhile Bophuthatswana homeland, somewhat ironically so, given the homelands dubious independences and their least – developed regional status. The reality is the all embracing fact that the former homelands of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei, including other self – governing states were incorporated into the new democratic South Africa, post 1994. One can therefore, not exclude ethnic antagonisms rising in these former areas, in the future, if the democratic government fails the people in respect of service delivery and the development dynamic.

Once ethnicity becomes entangled with the politics of production and distribution into primary political and economic determinants, it moves from the concept of misguided nationalism into the argument and justification of nations. Schatzberg (1981: 462) points out: “Africanist social scientists have long known that ethnic groups are not immutable and that social class identity, composition and boundaries may also vary according to the political, social, economic and spatial contexts of the moment. Fluidity in class relations, ambiguity in class boundaries, and inconsistency in class membership must be taken as fundamental starting points, if we are to understand the role that class plays in Africa.” Ethnicity and class are not social problems per se, when considered in struggle. Ethnicity is only characterized as a ‘problem’ by the bourgeoisie when it ceases to be functional. In terms of providing support and, instead becomes dysfunctional in that, it undermines the political order. The political economy of South Africa, according to Karodia (2008: 35) is characterized by high levels of inequality and, therefore, does not wish to draw the attention of the poor to their condition, as opposed to those that accrue privilege due to political patronage.

The dialectic of class and ethnicity as both latent and manifest social forces will, with time most certainly disappear. Coercive containment of the tensions, in terms of economic decline and social decay, would be readily mobilized or organized except in coercive ways. In addition to the impact of parallel or informal relations on class formations, they must also transform gender relations.

The Legal Reform Law text (1977: 28) indicates that “Power is not exercised for its own sake but for achieving objectives, the method of practicing the power which is defined by the constitution, is itself influenced by the economic, social, cultural and political reality of the country over which power is exercised. Owing to the importance that these foundations enjoy, they have to be stressed and declared in the constitutional document. Yet, the social, economic and political principles included, may not be part data but an objective or aim to be realized.”
Therefore, in this meaning the ‘constitution’ shall also be a guide of action for the political leadership and a programme for a future policy the political leadership intends to realize through exercising power. Tyrannies and dictatorships resort to violence when their authority is placed in jeopardy. This is precisely, what is emerging in South Africa, with increasing police brutality, the lack of accountability, and the erosion of constitutional democracy. Although violence is always instrumental, requiring armies, police, weapons and networks of informers, it has to be justified and legitimized by the ends it pursues.

It is obvious according to (Routledge, 2014: 32) that “the focus is on Nelson Mandela and even on F.W de Klerk, and the events between 1990 and 1994, but the struggle for democracy and the new constitution took place over more than the 48 years of National Party rule, or 100 years of the African National Congress’s formation, as the vanguard of freedom and revolution.” It was a struggle that was waged since the arrival of the first colonial settlers 350 years ago. The democratic government has an important role to play in this regard, but at the same time the fundamental role of civil society cannot be overlooked or ignored in holding the government accountable, in overcoming any form of injustice not only of the past, but present day abuses of uncalled racist rhetoric and echoes of tribalism that, have the real opportunities to surface, and very seriously compromise our country’s new found democracy. It is therefore, important to remind ourselves of Uganda and Rwanda and, therefore, our individual and collective action and realization and actions must guide the nation, in order not to succumb to any new forms of racism, tribalism and xenophobia. Increasingly, it will be the youth of South Africa, who will determine the future and, therefore, under no circumstances must the youth be polluted and brainwashed into any forms of racialism, tribalism and xenophobia. This is either an opportunity or threat. ”Most of the world expected the story of South Africa to end in a bloodbath and two enemies (white and black) had publicly stated that they would not negotiate began talking to each other. The Death of Apartheid is a resource not only for South Africans interested in our past, but is a sad and trying story for the present, because our future as a country and people must be filled with hope and the recognition that peace and tranquility must prevail.

Pather (2014: 32) states that “It’s all to do with euphemisms in which people resort to politically correct language to convey something unpleasant, rude, offensive or even tribal and racist. Euphemisms about race have long been a sensitive issue, so much so that from the 1950’s, people began looking for substitutes for the word ‘race’ just to be more politically correct. They talked in terms of stocks, clusters, distinctive populations and genogroups.” The issue is why go so far? Our current history is replete with racial euphemisms that go back to the days of apartheid, when the k word (Kaffer), the c word (coloured / coolie) and the b word (black bastard) became politically unfashionable in that era, people who were not white found themselves being referred to variously as non – whites. Twenty years on we remain a frightening and strange society.

TACKLING TRIBALISM
According to Jovial Rantao (2014: 32) “former President Thabo Mbeki has raised a hornets’ nest. Speaking recently at the University of South Africa (Unisa) raised the often avoided and uncomfortable topic, for some, of tribalism and its dangers. He warned that, if left unattended, tribalism had the potential to tear the ANC apart, destroy the Freedom Project and even reverse some of the hard won, gained, and earned freedom of the past two decades of South African democracy.” He further adds that “much attention must be paid to Mbeki’s statements, because he is a former president and is a political elder, and lastly as a UN envoy on Sudan, seen how tribalism can ravage a nation, destroying everything in its wake like a tornado or a tsunami.”
While the focus of Mbeki’s attention was the ANC, it would be dangerous to dismiss tribalism as a problem that the governing party must face and deal with alone. It is a problem; a huge problem South Africans in the both the public and private sectors, stress the private sector, be they rich or poor must deal with. Educated South Africans holding powerful positions in big business and elsewhere must be honest and admit that, deliberately or otherwise, their appointments in the institutions that they head have been slanted in favour of people from the same language group, same geographical origin or same tribe. The private sector, for example, is littered with examples of bosses who have created tribal conclaves, executive suites, boardrooms and key strategic positions that resemble little Limpopo, little Eastern Cape, and little KwaZulu – Natal. Tribalism is an issue, is not knew. It was there during the presidency of Nelson Mandela and Mbeki. It will be there long after President Zuma. In addition Jovial Rantao adds that “various ministers and the composition of their departments, questions were asked about the dominance of people from the Eastern cape on Mbeki’ cabinet and, in top positions in the government and its public enterprises. Behind his back, people referred to his government as the “Xhosa Nostra.” Social networks are awash with jokes and assertions that Zuma’s cabinet and the appointment of senior officials in the government and parastatals is weighted strongly in favour of people from KwaZulu – Natal. Like corruption, tribalism is a pathology that afflicts not only the public sector. It is also not a problem that is unique to black South Africans. In corporate South Africa, there are also tendencies where, if the boss is an Indian South African, a black South Africa, a coloured South Africa, an Afrikaans – speaking South African, or an English speaking – South African, they surround themselves with people from these population groups. The usual excuse and explanation is that, those in positions of leadership want to surround themselves with people that they trust and are comfortable with. While Mbeki was referring to his political home, we would be well advised to not only heed his warning, but work to consciously eradicate the scourge from the South African midst. We do not have to look too far to see the danger posed by tribalism. The genocides in Rwanda, Kosovo and Sudan, to mention only the tip of the iceberg is but a few and, stand as monuments of the horrors that tribalism can visit on a nation. Like racism, it’s not a comfortable topic for discussion. South Africans, generally pretend that, it does not exist. That we are the perfect nation, one without flaws. That is our fault and a mirage, a dream. We need to be honest about this obstacle because the dream will be deferred. The constitution must be a living document, and we must promote its values in everyday life.

THE COMPROMISING OF SOUTH AFRICAN DEMOCRACY

Mayekiso (2014: 33) states that “as South Africa, celebrates 20 years of democracy, ethnicity and tribalism in the national political discourse seem to be burrowing deeper into our psyche instead of disappearing. It seems to suggest that, the scourge of ethnicity is more visible in the current political structure now as the ANC marks 102 years of its existence. True to his intellectual character, Mbeki has put the vexing issue that is not clearly understood and contextualized, which has the potential to tear nations asunder. Ethnicity, along with religion and racism, can be the most destructive social construct, susceptible as it is to manipulation. It could render South Africa ungovernable and our democracy unworkable, if not addressed decisively. Mayekiso (2014) further adds that “slavery, colonialism and apartheid, as ideological concepts of group domination, thrived as they were firmly anchored. Against, this brief background Mbeki’s view of ethnicity must be treated with the gravitas it deserves. The ANC founders believed tribalism and ethnicity enabled colonialists to subjugate Africans because of the fractured rather
than collective response. Mayekiso (2013) rightly poses the following rider “if Mbeki is justified in lamenting ethnicity in South African politics and therefore the conduct in office has deviated from congress traditions and founding principles, could the liberation revolutionaries and the people of South Africa retrace the steps, in order to isolate the blot and enhance the political ethos, mores and culture.”

The above rider requires much thought because by ignoring the rider posed, has, in the past, led to the annihilation of communities in ethnic pogroms and genocides. Rwanda’s Tutsi’s are but one example of the calculated extermination of a community by the Hutu ethnic group. Almost, a million people were murdered and slaughtered. In Germany ethnic prejudice led to a systemic genocide in which millions of Jews and others perished in concentration camps and gas chambers, simply because of their heritage. South Africa had its fare share of ethnic crises at the dawn of democracy, in the early 1900’s as violent pogroms were unleashed on the country’s economic hub, Gauteng. Inkatha (Political Party) supporters raided Johannesburg townships, killing residents and, in particular Xhosa – speaking people. The violence was perpetrated, aided and abetted by the apartheid intelligence and security apparatus, which continued and created instability, fear and chaos, leaving a political vacuum, the apartheid regime could fill. Similar scenarios were played out in 1948 / 1949 under the Nationalist Party, during the potato rights. Indian South Africans were massacred, women raped and children murdered. South Africa, it appears has not learnt from past history and the devastating consequences, such scenarios leave behind. In this regard, Mayekiso states that “an intellectual exchange about ethnicity and religion is critical because people are seeking group identity, as globalization overpowers the nation state. Therefore, an interrogation of tribalism is needed urgently so that the nation can intervene effectively to ensure that society and the country does not disintegrate. Understanding Mbeki’s political trajectory is central to the debate on the subject.”

History and political experience affirm negative aspects of racism, ethnicity and religion, which are weapons in the toolkit of political elites, at their disposal to divide societies and perpetuate socio – economic and political power grabs. By the same token, multinational geopolitical and economic interests, by means of collusion with the local elites, has a major role in fomenting tribal animosity, mistrust and son, in order to create an environment of fear, conformity and total chaos, in which the elites and politicians can plunder financial and natural resources. In this regard, a number of analysts point out (2014) that “in the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is rich in rare mineral resources, is an example, of a failed state, and has been unstable since the assassination of its first President Patrice Lumumba in 1963 by the colonialists that, used ethnicity and tribalisim to get rid of him (Mayekiso, 2014). In the midst of continuous chaos, tribalism and ethnic fissures, the country’s resources seem to get looted and sent across the river for export to unknown destinations. The new South Sudan, home to vast oil reserves, recently came out of an intractable political war of independence from Khartoum, and found it suddenly unable to hold it together as a result of Dinka – Nuer tribal conflict, which forms part of a general trend towards ethnic cleansing. There are numerous examples off failed states in Africa where land is controlled by competing interests with international links, feeding on the demise of law and order. In Nigeria the religious strife between Christians and Muslims has escalated amidst the looting and pillaging of natural resources but well organized criminal gangs. Overall, the crisis of ethnicity in post – independence Africa reminds one of the imperial – colonialists who met in Berlin under Otto von Bismarck to carve up Africa to avoid war among European authorities over natural and human resources. South Africans and Africans in general have to decolonize their minds through engagement and empowerment, but, this requires a
structured dialogue on the relevance of colonial borders, which have been the bane of socio-economic and political freedom as crises have plagued Africa, since liberation. Racism, ethnicity and religion are matters of belonging and of existence for ordinary people. It is the elites who amplify the aspects of difference to create instability for personal and political gain. Mayekiso (2014) aptly points out that “a constant vigil is required to ensure the gains of South African democracy, are not reversed.

CONCLUSION
It has to be noted and acknowledged that authority is not exercised for itself or in itself by man for the sake of man. Thus this exercise of authority must be carried out with the peoples’ consent and, only then can it be legitimacy of authority. This will determine the kind or nature of the political system and, its acceptability by citizens. In other words the way of exercising authority in the society that is South Africa, the state and government must not allow ethnicity, tribalism and racist nationalism to raise its head, in a fragile and developing democratic, South Africa.

BIBLIOGRAPHY