

South Africa's Deepseated Economic and Social Crisis

Dissection: "South Africa Is An Angry And Frustrated Nation" And On The Brink

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These are not the best of times in South Africa. It seems clear that there is fear and loathing everywhere as the press is packed with fresh allegations of corruption, and a restive mood spreads even as the country prepares to host the economic Summit of the BRICS countries it is part of—Brazil, Russia, India, and China which is facing a growth in joblessness and economic/political malaise.

Nelson Mandela's wife, Graca Machel, the brilliant Mozambican leader who married the man everyone here calls by his clan name Madiba, is speaking out even as her husband Nelson Mandela no longer can.

She calls South Africa an "angry nation... on the brink of 'something very dangerous'". She was speaking at a memorial for a Mozambican cab driver whose killing by the police was caught on a cellphone camera and went viral. The police deny they were brutal, despite the video, which further outrages a country that seems to be increasingly turning on the politicians they see as plundering its resources.

Machel minced no words, saying South Africa is a society 'bleeding and breathing pain' and warned against 'deeper trouble from the past that has not been addressed.'

That "deeper trouble" evoked the compromise negotiated settlement that won political power for the ANC through elections in the early 90's, but kept economic power in the hands of a mostly white elite dominated by big business, the "mining energy complex." Economist Sampie Terrablanche tells that story of an imposed neoliberalism lobbied for by multinationals, international financial institutions and foreign governments like the U.S. and U.K. in his book, "Lost in Transformation."

There are many critical voices. Steve Biko's one-time close comrade, Mamphela Ramphele, a doctor turned banker, poverty expert and businesswoman, has launched a new political party Agang (Sesotho for "build") to challenge the ANC. While her base lacks the ANC's deep roots in the black community, her analysis resonates with many,

Her statement aimed to "rekindle The South African Dream" writing "the country of our dreams has unfortunately faded...The dream has faded for many living in poverty and destitution."

It was a lyrical all to memory and militancy asking, "Do you remember our patience and quiet dignity as we waited in long queues to cast our very first votes as citizens of a free

South Africa? Do you remember how you choked with emotion and had goose bumps as you made your very first cross on the ballot? Do you remember the tears of joy and relief when we watched our first President, Rolihlahla Mandela, being honoured with a fly-past by the air-force that was to have its first democratically elected commander in chief?Do you remember the dream we embraced to build ours into a great society - a prosperous constitutional democracy united in its diversity?"



Mangosuthu Buthelezi

She lashed out a corruption but the media gave her new initiative little chance of succeeding, Other parties, upset that she didn't embrace them remained distant, even as it prompted other leaders like Mangosuthu Buthelezi to launch another broadside at the ANC.

"Last week's State of the Nation address (by President Jacob Zuma) has left us in no doubt that the time has come to remove from power a leadership not fit to govern. The time has come to close the door on this first Republic under the ANC, and to close it firmly on all the inefficiencies, deficiencies and problems the ANC has brought with it. This is no longer the party of the 1912 visionaries; the party of DrPixleykalsakaSeme, Inkosi Albert Luthuli and Nelson Mandela. This ANC is corrupt. It is failing South Africa."

What Buthelezi and the ANC's other critics seem to forget is that the former government, the all white apartheid regime. was as corrupt, even if they were perhaps more discreet about it and controlled the media so there could be no exposes.

Also, whenever you have someone taking money, someone else is giving it, like the foreign arms companies that used payoffs to win business in South Africa.

This doesn't make any of it right but shows there is a deeper context implicating more than ANC officials.

It is not just the black community that is hurt by or involved in these practices. Indians and whites are also compromised.

In a country shocked by a current domestic rape and child abuse crisis, the one story that made all the headlines was the case of disabled celebrity Runner/Olympian, Oscar Pistorius, shooting and killing his model girlfriend. Both were white.

As Eurasia Review noted, “The Pistorius case cannot ... be treated in isolation of a complex culture, which makes its eventual outcome a defining moment for South Africa. Whether that moment shifts the socio-political terrain is another matter altogether

Between 2011 to 2012, two important centres in Cape Town, which have historically responded to diverse forms of gender based violence were all struggling for survival.”

The Pistorius family has now defended the arsenal of guns found in his home and no doubt in other homes. Violence is endemic in a culture of poverty and insecurity.

Eurasia Review adds, “Alongside this struggle for survival, two other important political events occurred on South Africa’s landscape. The first was the public murder of miners in Marikana who dared protest in order to demand for an acceptable living wage and the second was the constant revival and disappearance of the Traditional Courts Bill...”The bill is considered a reversal of the rights of women by making traditional chiefs powerful overlords who are not subject to democratic checks or balances.”

And so if you scratch the surface of almost any issue, you find currents of dissent and disagreement, as well as angry denunciations of whoever is thought responsible. The depth of this estrangement from government and disgust with the direction the country has taken is not fully reported in the media.

The sense of comradeship, unity and feelings of social cohesion—the “we,” not the “I”—that unified South Africans in the struggle for years seems to be disappearing as inequality deepens, and people scramble to survive economically as individuals in an economy that is not growing fast enough to promote economic growth, and is still largely controlled by white-owned multi-nationals and banks.

The sense of traditional solidarity, class cohesion and community is under strain by a blatant Darwinism with even the poor embracing that core Capitalist value: “look out for number one” as government services —what they call “delivery” promises — falter and fail.

The other day I sat with two South African women, one named Confidence, the other the widow of a deceased commander of the Underground MK army that fought for the country’s liberation. Both were frustrated by the slow pace of change, and are in need of medical care they can’t afford. Both were working but their salaries did not really cover their costs. Once more political, both seem to be spending more time in Church these days praying for divine intervention.

In his autobiography, Long Walk To Freedom, now on its way into becoming a major motion picture, Nelson Mandela warned that after you have climbed your final mountains, there will be others to climb, South Africa still has some climbing to do.

*News Dissector **Danny Schechter** has made many films and TV programs about South Africa. He is currently working on the Making and Meaning of Long Walk To Freedom, Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org*

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