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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE IN NATION BUILDING IN SOUTH AFRICA

Prof. Sesh Paruk, PhD¹, Prof. Chris Adendorff, PhD²

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Business School, Port Elizabeth

(SOUTH AFRICA)

¹ sparuk@parliament.gov.za , ² cadendorff@nmmu.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The intent of the paper is to propose platforms that exist for the social sciences and academic sector to play a more prominent role in shaping developing countries, and by extrapolation, South Africa's role in leading global change. It includes a brief background of the journey to emerging as a democratic society and a psycho-socio-political summary of critical periods in South Africa's history that are likely to have informed many of South Africa's current collective societal responses to national challenges. To link the historical component and current context to possible future global scenarios, part of the paper outlines the six key driving forces that were predicted to shape the South African landscape against the backdrop of global trends when the democratic dispensation was in its formative years. The paper concludes with a proposal of the practical platforms that are available for social scientists and the broad academic sector to engage more actively in influencing the course of national transformation for the next three decades.

Keywords: Social Science; nation building; change; transformation; paradigm shifts; leadership; scenario planning; collaboration; academic activism

1. INTRODUCTION

"The world has changed, the world is changing, and the world needs to change a lot more. Are humans changing for the better? Are humans making wise choices? Are humans crafting the new world order humans imagined (South African Scenarios 2025: The future we chose, PCAS, 2008)?" Activists in all spheres of life, across disciplines and at all points in human history have accepted the fundamental premise that change emerges from revolutionary and evolutionary shifts. Several schools of thought offer varying reasons as to why people (individuals, groupings and society in general) often experience transition with differing degrees of difficulty. Such difficulty often manifests as "resistance" which has implications for agents of change. The trend that crosses disciplinary research points to is the fact that radical social transformation may not always be perceptible in the here and now, but is instead a continuous and complex process.

1.1 Key assumptions that underpin this paper

- Change is continuous, involving both revolutionary and evolutionary components.
- Social scientists and the broad academic sector have a key role in influencing change initiatives linked to "nation building".
- Proactive, coordinated nation building programs will enhance South Africa's potential to achieve its global influencing role.
- Achievement of this global influencing role will enhance existing global processes aimed at entrenching humanitarianism and collaboration as key principles that underpin policy frameworks; developmental practices and programs of all nations (developed and emerging nations).

2. BACKGROUND

A brief background to provide a context to how the attainment of a democratic society has been attained in the Republic of South Africa. Included are a brief psycho-socio-political summary of critical periods in South Africa's history and a few of the strategic tipping points that informed societal responses. In essence, it examines the history of some of South Africa's important collective national choices. The rationale for this background as a point of departure is so that social scientists and academics understand more deeply the factors that may be present within the "South African collective unconscious". With such increased consciousness, social scientists and multi disciplinary groupings may then be organised and re-positioned to function more assertively as agents of change. In so doing, the pace of change may be accelerated by identifying and harnessing positive and resilient energies within South Africa's national landscape and strengthening existing nation building initiatives.

2.1 To highlight a few key periods that shaped the current South African democratic dispensation

- **1899-1902** was the period in which the then Nationalist strategy was based on economic domination and control of natural resources.
- The period **1902-1909** is notable in the distinct paternalistic; authoritative approach of the State, with a great emphasis on control in all its forms.
- **1903** was a notable juncture and now moved beyond economic domination, but saw the introduction of "race based identity" as a divisive political; sociological and psychological tool. A contrasting liberalism also started developing amongst various sectors (nationally and internationally). South African history for the next decade was based on this combination of economic domination and mild segregation.
- **1919 -1939** saw the rise of military force as part of the then Nationalist strategy to maintain control.
- **1949-1960: Is referred to as the Age of the "The Social engineers."**(The Making of a Nation – Joyce (2007)) and is aptly named so it ushered in an era of codified; detailed programs and initiatives that entrenched segregation into the South African collective conscious. A coherent and all pervading powerful system of institutionalized apartheid built on a bedrock of legislation was unleashed and South Africa will take many years to recover fully from this total onslaught.
- **1978 – 1989** saw then Prime Minister PW Botha encountering what has been described as an "ungovernable state" and the main objective was now to prevent mass action or civil war.

The period 1989 -1994 has been loosely referred to as "The road to freedom": nineteen leading groups came together leading to "The Declaration of intent" whose aim was to create a post apartheid South Africa. CODESA and the Truth and reconciliation commission emerged. This commission was premised on the idea that verbalizing and acknowledging the brutalities of the apartheid era would provide the "broad based national healing" the South African needed so desperately. Perhaps the biggest success of the TRC was linked more to it setting a global precedent on how divided nations could reconcile. Whether predicted or not, it inadvertently lead to a groundswell of further conscientisation by civil society and lofty expectations of South Africa's "free society" would be like and how much things would change.

Some of these unrealistic expectations are currently presenting themselves in the form of civil unrest and a different form of negativity from the pre-1994 period. As such, it poses a simultaneous threat and opportunity to all sectors in South African society, hence the appeal to the academic community to intervene more assertively, but with humility. In summarising some of the negative impact following a national history of segregation and militancy, it is useful to outline how the pre-democracy model of government and State machinery intentionally perpetuated an abnormal society, with the residual effects still being very active, but unmanaged within the current national psyche.

South African society has inherited a fundamental belief system based on lopsided power relations. Within this belief system is an intricately woven acceptance of subjugation and ingrained intolerance of diversity and differentness. The previous indoctrination of all parts of South African society with theories of race, gender and religious supremacy remains visible in many sectors along with accompanying prejudices, discriminatory behaviours and the tendency to stereotype individuals and groups. As a social scientist, it remains clear that past use of brute force to "control" civil society continues to lock many adult South Africans and organisations in a prolonged parent-child dynamic, with a tendency to assume that leading and managing entail relegating employees to the role of

passive receivers of instructions and a fierce reaction to the slightest hint of critical thought or different paradigms. Many South Africans still grapple with a deep rooted fear of differentness and continue to wrestle with ways to form a positive identity and sense of self worth. With some of these current challenges in mind, the next part of this paper shifts attention to a futuristic perspective by outlining some of the key driving forces that scenario planners have postulated will shape South Africa, and the worlds' future.

The key driving forces that are highlighted are derived from the work done by a multi disciplinary team of experts who were brought together post during the transition to democracy in order to design scenarios of how the future of South Africa could unfold. In designing possible scenarios, they first needed to identify the key driving forces that could influence the country's development and this work culminated in a very useful document from which is cited some of the learning that can assist us in moving forward (excerpts from KEY DRIVING FORCES THAT WILL INFLUENCE TOMORROW: SA SCENARIOS 2025: THE FUTURE WE CHOSE; Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Services, PCAS, 2008).

2.2 The first key driving force is linked to shifts in global economic power

"The rapid industrialisation and growth of China and India, and their burgeoning demand for resources and markets, was predicted to change the world in profound ways: Towards 2025, given current trends, China's is expected to be about the same as the USA's (the USA's GDP is currently more than double the GDP of China and India combined). The BRIC countries were predicted to grow vastly with respect to their economy and the Middle Eastern oil capacity would also be a key shaper of the global economic landscape. The ability to trade with others would become more important to any country's ability to grow than ever before. Africa's economic clout would also grow significantly but a critical question was raised: how much of this growth would be driven and enjoyed by South Africa?"

2.3 The 2nd key driving force was linked to shifts in global political power

Shifts in international power relationships would reflect shifting economic power. The USA's military budget was predicted to still be larger than the next 15 largest economies and the US would still have the most formidable armed force in the world. Increased multilateralism would also lead to an expansion of early intervention mechanisms and rapid deployment of peace keepers. Although the number of armed conflicts was predicted to decrease, access to resources could disturb this trend. Power blocs in East and West Africa would also influence continental discourse. The growing shortage and deterioration in quality of other critical resources, particularly soil, air and water, are also highly likely to become key global issues.

2.4 The 3rd Key driving force is linked to resources

The world is already experiencing a growing energy gap, particularly oil, and the slow development of alternative fuel sources is a problem. Towards 2025, nuclear, hydrogen, solar and wind will be the predominant emerging energy sources. Higher costs of food production become more entrenched, and international tourism and mobility are likely to be negatively affected.

2.5 The 4th key driving force is South Africa's economic growth

The critical questions raised by the team of scenario planners were linked to the pace of economic growth, how competitive and productive we become. South Africa's ability to create decent and sustainable jobs at a rate greater than the growth of the labour force will be increasingly important. The effect of persistent long-term structural unemployment on South African society will demand intervention and Government and private sector responses need to be well thought through.

2.6 The 5th key driving force is linked to Governance

The ability, competency, efficiency, honesty and legitimacy of Government will be increasingly important. The extent to which South Africa are able to promote national competitiveness, innovation, productivity and social inclusion will be critical along with South Africa's response key issues of health, education, crime and corruption.

Related to this are matters pertaining to electoral politics and dynamics within the largest political alliances: the tone of political discourse, the conduct of leadership and centripetal and centrifugal trends tugging at the ruling party. The challenge for leadership will be their ability to engender a greater sense of purpose and unity.”

2.7 The 6th key driving force relates to social fabric

This key driving force should be an important area of focus for social scientists as it encompasses South Africa's ability to fashion a sense of nationhood and human solidarity. Much of it is linked to how effectively South Africans build skills and harness youth into the mainstream economy. It includes increasing citizens' average levels of wellness, and creating a sense of security and belonging. Much of it involves South Africa's ability to invoke a sense of pride and aspiration by articulating an engaging national narrative and by standing for the highest good. Many of the dynamics that impact on social cohesion depend on value systems within society. South Africa's forging is the domain of educational, religious, community, arts and culture and other sectors. How these socialising forces are harnessed for maximum national benefit will be of strategic importance.

Underpinning the influence of these 6 key driving forces on South Africa will be the impact of technology. Towards 2025, billions of people will have access to increased communication and knowledge networks. This will lead to dynamic new ways of working, living and building relationships. Technology is also being used to strengthen democracy and openness. Armed with a psycho-socio-political historical context and long term predictions regarding key forces that will define and shape South Africa as a Nation, social scientists and the academic sector are well positioned to use appropriate paradigms, constructs and concepts from various disciplines, particularly the social sciences, to influence national planning programs and policies in general .

3. FOCUS AREAS THAT SOCIAL SCIENTISTS AND ACADEMICS NEED TO ENGAGE MORE ROBUSTLY ON IN ORDER TO ENGAGE MORE ACTIVELY IN NATION BUILDING PROGRAMS

A few strategic entry points are proposed through which social scientists and academics may engage more actively in current and future National efforts to strengthen South African societal reconstruction and renewal. The intent is to stimulate the necessary dialogue within and across disciplines so that a common platform be formed to translate theory and model construction into tangible, practical programs and initiatives.

3.1 FOCUS AREA 1: DEEPENING THE UNDERSTANDING OF POWER RELATIONS THAT EXIST WITHIN SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY

Social scientists can play a more active role in deepening the understanding of the true power relations that exist within SA society. A multi disciplinary approach to deepening South Africa's understanding of the ramifications of the divide and conquer strategy that all South Africans were subjected to will assist South Africans understanding of the residual effects of such long term segregation and the extent to which such intra and inter group dynamics have permeated many aspects of life for the South African civilian. With a deeper understanding of the issues cited, systemic interventions may be designed and operationalised so that the process of societal renewal and reconstruction may be accelerated.

An example of how this can be facilitated is: A multi disciplinary team of experts should be engaged to analyse the after effects of the social engineering of the past decades with a view to developing the appropriate national interventions to design and implement a pragmatic strategy for strengthening intragroup (within group) and intergroup relations. Fortunately, there would already be a strong basis upon which to build such behavioural models and then implement them, as several disciplines spanning the humanities, political and social sciences, scenario planning, etc already have concepts, constructs and models that may be modified to assist the national strategic trajectory South Africa has embarked on. In fact the dynamics we experience currently as a nation in the making were not unanticipated by founding leaders of the liberation movements: Chief Luthuli, a significant role player in broader liberation process of South Africa predicted with astounding precision, the societal forces that would come into play post liberation, for example, ethnic divides; orchestrated inter-racial conflict, possible divides within liberation movements themselves and between “academic’ and “non-academic” sectors. It would be irresponsible for sectors that possess the necessary skills to thus not engage more actively in strengthening society.

3.2 FOCUS AREA 2: STRENGTHENING OF INHERENT CAPACITIES WITHIN SOUTH AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY WITH A VIEW TO SHIFTING NATIONAL DIRECTIONALITY TOWARDS A MORE OPTIMISTIC FUTURISTIC ONE

**“The future of the de-colonised world, the third world,
must start over a new history of man”
(Frantz Fanon, (1963) The Wretched of the Earth)**

In order to move forward as a collective at a National level, social scientists and academic should play a more proactive role in the following areas: Reframing the current and past psycho-socio-political landscape in a manner that emphasises personal and group attributes possessed by the majority of civil society including resilience, perseverance and selflessness. One existing social science lever is application of some of the constructs from positive psychology to the current context. Positive psychology allows for a paradigm shift to take place so that perceived hopelessness and pessimism is turned around with a view to re-crafting a positive mindset. There are several examples where such applications could be operationalised, for example: the study conducted by du Plessis and Barkhuizen (2011) was based on positive organizational behaviour and the positive impact it has on reconciliation. This form of application of academic models would be invaluable to South Africa considering the challenges faced as an emerging democracy.

At the core of positive psychology is the drive to move people to rethink the fundamental nature of how South Africans live, work, and conceptualise human existence. A Study at Yale University of Management found that moods influence how effectively people work. The study confirmed that upbeat moods boost cooperation, fairness & business performance whilst prolonged distress can diminish the brain's ability to process information and respond effectively and thereby sabotaging intended positive results.

To quote Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) and Gillham and Seligman, (1999), “building strength is the most potent weapon in the arsenal of therapy. The aim of Positive Psychology is to catalyze a change in psychology from a preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building the best qualities in life. To redress the previous imbalance, South Africans must bring the building of strength to the forefront in the treatment and prevention of pathology – at individual and group levels”.

Applications would thus focus on individual and group levels, for example: At an individual level, the focus would be on strengthening positive individual traits such as humans capacity for love, learning, courage, interpersonal skill, perseverance, forgiveness, creativity, future-mindedness, talent, and wisdom. At a group level the focus would be on strengthening civic virtue and institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship. This involves building and strengthening group traits like responsibility, ability to nurture, altruism, tolerance, acceptance and a strong work ethic (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Gillham and Seligman, 1999).

Thomas Jefferson (1774) wrote in the Declaration of Independence that the human pursuit was about “.....Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. This is an interesting perspective for us as South Africans. Pursuit of happiness in this context does not refer to trivial pleasure seeking, but to the fundamental condition of people's lives and their capacity for change and improvement. By capturing his vision in the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson and others entrenched specific values into the American collective psyche. As an emerging nation there is learning that we could gain from such transformational initiatives as our own Constitution enshrines global, continental and national principles that need to be translated into appropriate programs, which result in observable societal attitudinal, cognitive and behavioural shifts.

**“Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is.
Treat a man as he can and should be and he will
become as he can and should be” Goethe**

Luthens (2002) as a further example contends that too much emphasis is placed on ‘what went wrong’ and not so much on ‘what went right’. Luthens (2002) further stated that a negative approach has an effect on the development, learning as well as the proactive strategic change and alterations which are pivotal for success. The relevance to our current national developmental trajectory of such paradigm shifts is clear and it is fortunate that

several colleagues across disciplines have already explored and applied these concepts and constructs, which allows collaborative efforts going forward to be inclusive and draw on the strengths of a variety of disciplines. Luthens, Avey, Avolio, Norman & Combs (2006) have produced conceptual models that may provide a further springboard for how different disciplines may be integrated to collaborate on specific programs (see Figure 1 below)

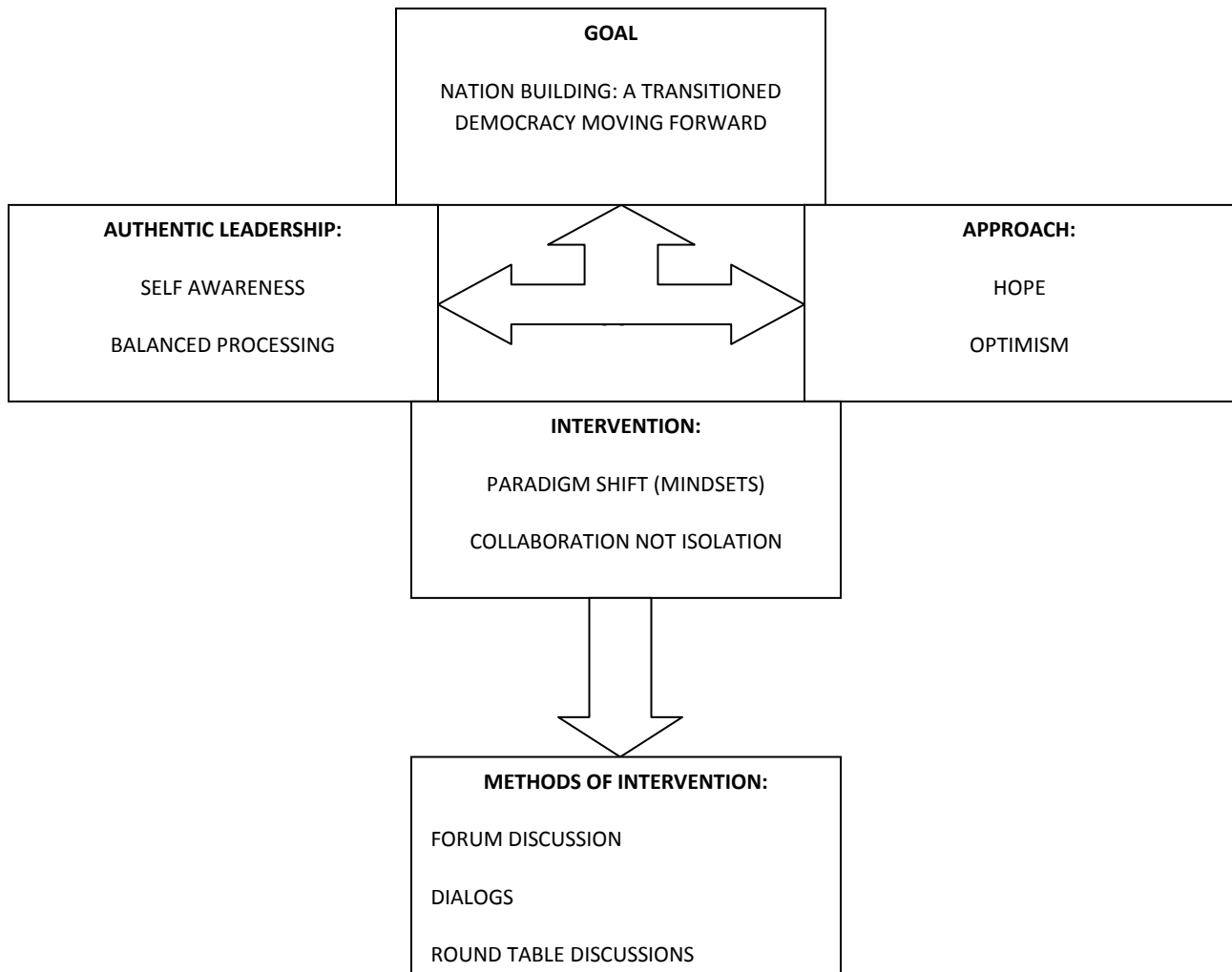


Fig. 1. Integration of Approaches

Source: Luthens., et al; 2006, du Plessis, 2011; Bagley,2010 & Mack 2005.

3.3 FOCUS AREA 3: ENHANCING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

Whilst there are as many definitions of leadership as there are leaders, the widely accepted view of the role of leadership in learning/developing contexts centres on leaders encompassing the role of designers, stewards and mentors. This suggests an inherent responsibility of leaders to assist people around them to continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify position, and improve shared mental models – that is Leaders are accountable for the quality and threshold of learning of those around them (Senge, 1999). Similarly, leaders need to possess the ability to create bridges between the “intelligentsia” and the mass populace who remain significantly disadvantaged without access to fundamental resources.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper was intended to catalyse thought and organised movement amongst social scientists and academic sectors to assert themselves and engage actively in this juncture of the process of our country's emergence. Three broad focus areas have been proposed which could serve as entry points for people to make contributions. The inherent appeal is the need to assist in the process of transforming South Africa's national consciousness toward the highest good of all. Two favourite quotations are appropriate to conclude this paper:

- Fanon- "Humans only become what people are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of mankind" (p15. The Wretched of the Earth).
- Decolonization involves the veritable creation of new men. It influences people and modifies them fundamentally – it introduces new rhythm and new humanity.

My grandfather once told me that there were two kinds of people: those who do the work and those who take the credit. He told me to be in the first group.

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