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What colour is the South African rainbow?: The ANC's racial transformation

Irina Filatova

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

What colour is the South African rainbow? The ANC's racial transformation

Irina Filatova (bio)

Over two decades ago, after De Klerk's famous speech of 2 February 1990, announcing the formal end of apartheid, journalists started to speak of the 'South African miracle' – the almost unthinkable possibility of a peaceful transition to a democratic future in a united society. Not every black South African was happy about the fact that, after long and difficult negotiations, the new national anthem featured 'Die Stem' together with 'Nkosi Sikelela Afrika', that several representatives of the National Party became ministers in the government of national unity and that, having become president, Nelson Mandela did not show any willingness to revenge himself upon old enemies. Not every white South African was happy about the new constitutional arrangements in the wake of the negotiated settlement. But the expectations of the black majority were so high, and the feeling of relief among their white compatriots so overwhelming, that petty grudges did not matter. For a few years the country lived in a state of euphoria, and Bishop Desmond Tutu proclaimed that South Africa had already become a 'rainbow nation'.

Alas the term did not last: it is only with irony that 'the rainbow nation' is mentioned today. The miracle has not yet happened: a high proportion of both blacks and whites are disillusioned and disappointed. The national reconciliation that seemed almost a reality at the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, when former torturers asked their victims for forgiveness and cried together with them in front of the TV cameras, still evades South Africans, and South African society is still divided by law, emotions, economy, ethnicity and policy. So, what has gone wrong? Why is it that the 'rainbow nation' obstinately does not want to form? There are **[End Page 23]** many reasons for this, but one has to begin with the ideology and policy of the ruling party.

Ideology

The ANC has been conceptualising South Africa's ethno-racial¹ relations from its inception in 1912, and they remain the focus of the party's ideology to the present day. This is not surprising in the context of the

nature of the ANC as an African nationalist organisation and of the history of a country whose state structures were based on race discrimination for centuries and on apartheid's racial engineering for more than four decades. The ANC's approach to ethno-racial issues in South Africa significantly changed over time – the process that has been sufficiently covered in the academic literature.²

There is, however, one aspect of the ANC's ideological baggage which continues to define its policy on race today that deserves to be mentioned here: a contradiction between two approaches to the race issue as defined in the ANC's two policy documents and thus between its two images of South Africa's society and its future. One document is the *Freedom Charter* which has been the party's programme since its adoption in 1955 and which asserted that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white' (Karis and Carter 1977: 205). The other is *Strategy and Tactics of the ANC*, adopted by the party's conference in Morogoro in 1969. This second document which repeated the main points of the 1962 Programme of the South African Communist Party (South African Communist Party 1963), stated that the main contents of the struggle in South Africa was the 'national liberation' of the biggest and worst exploited group of South Africa's population – the African people (African National Congress 1970).

The authors of the *Freedom Charter* saw South Africa as one society, though deeply unequal and divided by race and class. For them the struggle was for political and social equality. The authors of the *Strategy and Tactics* assumed that South Africa was a colony, albeit of a special type, because it was situated on the same territory as its colonial power. For them, the ANC's struggle was a national revolution – the 'national democratic revolution' (NDR), as it was called, following the Soviet lead.³ Equality and 'internationalism' were to come later, at the second stage of...

Reflection

What colour is the South African rainbow? The ANC's racial transformation

Irina Filatova

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