

Why Race and Identity will continue to create conflict

Helen Zille's article on February 6th, "White and black victims are in denial" was indeed a brave and difficult subject to engage. Most people in leadership prefer to circumvent the issue of race and identity. "We are all human. That's why it's better together", is a good start to resolve our differences. However, in my opinion, the historical complexities, particularly of this city and its people lay much deeper than words and phrases; it is buried in the psychological make-up of communities. This historical psychosis is also deliberately passed on between generations.

Another difficulty with this type of debate is the fact that one has to write in general but use personal or specific examples otherwise a thesis would be required to justify the opinions advocated.

Although I acknowledge Helen Zille for her tenacity I have heard similar utterances from her predecessor Ebrahim Rasool. He was undone by his own political colleagues in his attempt to develop his interpretation of non-racialism, the "Home for All" program. Millions was spent on rebranding the Provincial Government, a process that is now being reversed and redone at the cost of further millions. I am also aware that Helen has experienced resistance from within her own party with regards to her vision of non-racialism. This resistance comes in diverse forms and can often be disguised as freedom of expression. For the sake of stability in this province, I pray to God she maintains the upper hand in her party.

On a similar note, I would like to understand how Helen suggests we progress as a society in the context of the following historical narrative:

In "The Chain Gang" written by David Bloomberg there are numerous examples of how the Colonialist viewed the colonised. Consider the comments made by Lieutenant-Colonel Amery, His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies "In the long run, civilization could only endure if it was based on the existence of a white population firmly rooted in African soil, united with itself and conscious of the greatness of its task and its destiny". These comments were made at a Mayoral dinner in 1926 paid for by ratepayers of Cape Town.

Similarly, Jews have for centuries believed that they are "the chosen people", courtesy of the Torah and Bible. Consequently, if the Jews are the chosen people, the whites are responsible for civilization and Africans are indigenous and therefore the inheritors of this land, what is the role of the brown people of Cape Town?

For example, let's study the history of the Muslims who were brought to the Cape as political exiles from the Indo/Malay archipelago because they resisted Dutch colonialism. At the Cape, the Dutch - read Afrikaner- decided to reduce the exiles to slavery as there was a shortage of local labour. After 150 years of slavery, in 1806, to secure religious freedom, the Muslims agreed to help the Afrikaner fight the British at the Battle of Blaauwberg. After surrendering, the Afrikaner moved north and the Muslims were subjected to British Colonialism. In 1846 for the privilege of building a mosque, Cape Muslims helped the British to victory at the Battle of the Axe. Another 100 years later, unhappy with British abuse, Muslims helped the Afrikaner return to power by supporting the National Party. As a reward, Muslim like other brown people were removed from the voter's role and introduced to Apartheid. In the 1980's Muslims along with others joined and supported the ANC for a democratic dispensation. As a consequence Muslims like other brown people are being subjected to black economic empowerment and affirmative action where they always come short.

In conclusion, does Helen believe that the descendants of slave owners consider their children equal to the children of their former slaves? Also, what attitude should brown people adopt if any, towards blacks and whites, who consider themselves as victims?

Perhaps Helen Zille in her capacity as Premier should establish a useful non-political mechanism with which to address this historical antagonism as the TRC was clearly insufficient in responding to the depth of our experience.

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