

*Abstract*

“Rainbowism” or the new form of nationalism inspired by Mandela’s “Rainbow Nation vision” emphasizes unity, equality, and non-racialism, and has become the dominant myth and metaphor by which South Africa is recognized in the post-apartheid era. Through an application of a theoretical framework that emphasizes the mythological and imaginative aspects of constructive nationalism and an analysis of Rainbowism’s rise to mythical dominance and evolution in the South African imaginary over the span of the past three decades of democracy using ANC “Rainbowist” discourses in both explicit and inexplicit ways, this thesis argues that Rainbowism arose as a counter myth in response to the apartheid myth at a moment when South Africa was faced with the daunting task of reconstructing and reimagining itself.

The Rainbow Nation Vision:  
(Re)constructing & (Re)imagining South Africanness

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**Introduction**

“The end of apartheid was supposed to be a beginning.

Judith Sikade envisioned escaping the townships, where the government had forced black people to live. She aimed to find work in Cape Town, trading her shack for a home with modern conveniences.

More than two decades later, Ms. Sikade, 69, lives on the garbage-strewn dirt of Crossroads township, where thousands of black families have used splintered boards and metal sheets to construct airless hovels for lack of anywhere else to live.

“I’ve gone from a shack to a shack,” Ms. Sikade says. “I’m fighting for everything I have. You still are living in apartheid.”

(Goodman 2017)



“The end of apartheid was supposed to be a beginning” (Goodman 2017). “The beginning” that Ms. Sikade is referring to in the introductory quote was the long-anticipated beginning that was promised to black South Africans with the election of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994, and has been repetitively promised ever since. “The beginning” was marketed as the birth of the “Rainbow Nation”, made to symbolize the unification and equality of all ‘colours’ of South Africans. Prior to 1994, the apartheid system had dominated and strictly controlled the South African reality and imaginary by presenting the nation as belonging to whites only, and constructing it as such. The dominant myth of the apartheid era, or the apartheid myth, was one

predicated on and legitimized by primordially-conceived notions of white supremacy and national (racial) purity. The manifestations of the apartheid myth were deeply-rooted and widespread in the fragmentation and racialization of economic sectors, geographic areas, and social cleavages. As such, by 1994, the mythology of difference was deeply ingrained in the South African imagination, making unification extremely difficult to imagine or construct. Mandela's "Rainbow Nation vision" served to directly address the obstacle and difficulties of unification and post-apartheid nation-building by emphasizing the unity and equality of all South Africans despite racial identity. Over time, the Rainbow Nation has become synonymous with South Africa in the post-apartheid era, and has become so ingrained in the South African imaginary that it inspired a new form of nationalism: Rainbowism, that shares and emulates the same values of unity, equality, and non-racialism (Gqola, 2001: 99).

The metaphor was originally envisioned by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, but was then adopted by ANC party members from 1994 until present (Baines 1998). The ANC has been the governing political party of South Africa for its entire existence as an independent democracy, and over the past three decades several black politicians have taken to the podium in attempts to (re)define South Africanness and (re)construct the nation in a way that was inclusive and representative of all who inhabited it through the evocation of the Rainbow Nation vision. This 'vision' was repetitively constructed, legitimized, and performed through national and international media and discourses such as those analyzed in this paper.

However, despite the continuous reproduction of the Rainbow Nation vision, many South Africans remain in their situations of pre-independence government-sponsored poverty. As Ms. Sikade so poignantly said, "you are still living in apartheid" in acknowledging the social, economic, and geographic realities of black South Africans today. With this context in mind, this

thesis critically analyzes the discursive imagination and construction of “the beginning” by examining Rainbowism’s rise to mythical dominance and evolution in the South African imaginary over the span of the past three decades of democracy using key ANC discourses that reproduce Mandela’s “Rainbow Nation vision” or evoke Rainbowist ideals in both explicit and implicit ways. In applying a theoretical framework that emphasizes the mythological and imaginative aspects of constructive nationalism, I argue Rainbowism arose as a counter myth in response to the apartheid myth by emphasizing non-racialism rather than racism, and racial equality rather than white supremacy at a moment when South Africa was faced with the task of reconstructing and reimagining itself both symbolically, legislatively, economically and geographically.

In order to make these claims, I had to first develop a theoretical framework that supported my analysis of ‘the nation’ as an imagined, mythical product. In the first section of this thesis, I examine theories of nationalism universally and then specifically in the post-colonial African context in order to develop a robust understanding of the tasks facing Rainbowism in the post-colonial nation-building context. Andersonian definitions of ‘the nation’ as an imagined, political community are coupled with the theories of Reid (2011) and Slade (2015) detailing the rising and falling of national mythologies as central to the nation-building process in order to develop my theoretical framework. Using Slade and Reid’s theories, I am able to critique primordialism as a dominant myth preceding and replaced by Rainbowism that manifested itself in the apartheid system.

In the following section, I give historical context with regards to the apartheid myth and detail the ways primordialism manifested itself in the South African imaginary and reality based on the mythology of difference. By overviewing the dominant myth countered by Rainbowism, I

understand how and why South Africa needed to reimagine itself in a more inclusive way than the limits of primordialism allowed in the post-1994 era.

After an overview of my methods of analysis in the methodology section, I critically analyze seven key speeches given by ANC party members over a span of three decades. Taking into account the history and legacy of the apartheid myth as well as applying the theoretical framework, I examine the evolution of Rainbowism as it rose and replaced primordialism, faded out, encountered criticisms, and is now potentially subject to replacement by rising counter mythologies.

To conclude, I argue that Rainbowism was appropriate and needed for the new democracy, however South Africa is in need of a mythology and imaginary that allows it to actively reconcile differences and disparities that continue to affect the lives of millions of black South Africans, such as Ms. Sikade.

### **Constructive Nationalism: Theoretical Framework**

The “nation” can be understood as a form of identity, just as religion, tribe, race, or ethnicity (Dawisha 2002: 3). However, beyond seeing the nation as a form of identity, scholars have long engaged in vigorous debate over the specifics of the nation, its constituents, and its role. While the details of nationalism are widely contested, the main phenomenon that scholars try to understand through conceptualizing nationalism is what makes a ‘nation’ congruent with a state to form the modern ‘nation-state’. Defining concepts like “nationalism”, the “nation, and

“nation-building” is not a simple or straightforward task as many disciplines and paradigms within those disciplines and even scholars within each paradigm offer different and at times competing definitions of the same concept.

The common denominator of ‘the nation’ has been defined and understood in diverse ways over time, however most relevant to my analysis is Benedict Anderson’s assertion that nations are “imagined political communities” (Anderson 1983). “Imagined” here does not mean untrue, nor is it used to posit nations as a fallacy. Anderson addresses this by asserting that, “[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (1983: 6). By “imagined”, Anderson argues that, “members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them; yet, in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1983; Henrikson 2016: 38). In other words, the nation comes forth from the imaginations of those sharing a specific geographic space; if enough people in a community consider or imagine themselves to be a nation, then a nation they become (Dawisha 2002: 4). Anderson’s definition is central to the anthropological studies of nationalism that inform my thesis, and it is by this definition that other key concepts concerning ‘the nation’ are developed.

Constructivism suggests that ‘the nation’ is distinct from ‘the state’, and while there is a robust body of literature debating and defining these concepts, what is most important to understand for the purposes of this thesis is that constructive nationalism understands ‘the nation’ to be made congruent with ‘the state’ based on psychology of belonging, rather than biology (Dawisha 2002: 5; Isaacs-Martin 2012; Larmer & Lecocq 2018: 895). In other words, it is not by virtue of one’s biological race or ethnicity that one is considered a ‘national’, or a citizen of a nation, but by their “sentiment of collectivity” (Isaacs-Martin 2012) or their “sense of

belonging” (Riggan 2016). The psychological process of imagining oneself as part of ‘the nation’ is a process of negotiating one’s sense of belonging takes on a subjective and malleable quality, and is easily manipulated by power politics when it comes to forging national identity or nationalism (Dawisha 2002; Isaacs-Martin 2012).

The purpose of this process of ‘nation-building’ or ‘nation-imagination’ is, as stated, to create a nation, but also to produce a collective national identity that is embodied in nationalism (Henrikson 2016; Isaacs-Martin 2012; Larmer & Lecocq 2018; Riggan 2018; Wesemüller 2014). The goal of establishing one national identity is to encourage diverse and disparate identities to identify with the nation, and in doing so, identify with one another (Henrikson 2016: 39; Isaacs-Martin 2012: 172; Larmer & Lecocq 2018: 895). Perhaps most important to understanding ‘nationalism’ or ‘national identity’ is the process by which it occurs, or ‘nation-building’. This constructivist definition emphasizes the ways in which nations are constructed through a “complex labyrinth of social interactions” (Dawisha 2002: 5). ‘Nation-building’, from the constructivist perspective, is an imaginative process by which the nation emerges from imagining “the image of communion” between other nationals (Anderson 1983 quoted in Henrikson 2016: 38); in other words, the nation is socially constructed and culturally produced through imagining specific national narratives (Riggan 2018, Wesemüller 2014) or adopting specific myths (Dawisha 2002; Evans 2010; Gqola 2001, 2004; Reid 2011; Slade 2015). These narratives and myths can be circulated and realised in many different ways, from creative literature or performance (Myambo 2010, Slade 2015), mainstream media (Gqola 2004), story-telling (Gqola 2001), or state-sponsored rhetoric.

Reid (2011) and Slade (2015) focus on how the creation and adoption of national myths contributed to the imaginative nation-building process in post-apartheid South Africa. Both

scholars focused on how Rainbowism, as a national myth, affects the ways South Africa is represented in South African cinema. Reid argues that myths are “integral part of human culture; they help members of a group to articulate the beliefs they share” (Reid 2011: 55). The sense of collectivity fostered by myths- national, cultural, or otherwise- influence the ways that people see themselves in regards to others and is integral to the nation-building process (Reid 2011: 55). Based on Slade and Reid’s myth theories, myths are a central part of the nation-building process, and nations are inherently mythical. In this regard, the theories of Slade, Reid, and Anderson compliment each other by all emphasizing the ways in which nations come forth from a mythical, imaginative process driven by power. In the same sense that “imagined” does not mean untrue in constructivism, “myth” is not synonymous with fallacy (Slade 2015). Rather it emphasizes the ways in which national identity is a product of a constructivist, imaginative, social process.

To this point, the “dominant myth” (aka “myth”) is a mode of speech practiced from a “particular position of social and/or political power, which function to justify or naturalise an ideological message (Reid 2011: 3). The process of “naturalization” refers to how a mythical representation or myth encourages support and belief in the myth by positing it as “appropriate, natural and the way things ought to be” (Reid 2011: 3). As such, the dominant myth functions as a “tool for maintaining the status quo” (Slade 2015: 9), and operates “in service to that dominant sector to justify the structures that maintain their position of privilege, power, or domination (Reid, 2011: 25-26; Slade 2015: 8). When it comes to nation-building, then, many nations are constructed based on a ‘national [dominant] myth’ that serves the powerful, not the majority.

In opposition to or criticism of the dominant myth is the “counter myth”, which seeks to denaturalize and replace the myth that the powerful naturalized and constructed to keep them in

power (Reid 2011: 4; Slade 2015: 8). According to Reid, the counter myth attempts to “supplant the dominant myth discourse with an alternative meaning and one which is decidedly different to that of the dominant myth” (2011: 3). In other words, the counter myth is borne out of dissatisfaction or disagreement with the dominant myth of a time. Reid and Slade argue that the counter myth is catalysed and brought into existence due to a feeling of “collective (though not universal) social discord among a certain group within a certain social environment towards a certain more dominant mythic discourse” (Slade 2015: 9; Reid 2011: 29). Based on this theory, identity and national identity are constantly subject to change with the rise and fall of myths and the constant evolution of society. Similarly, Anderson recognizes that “cultural codes and speech become consciousness, but this identity is always subject to change, permanently transacting and redefining itself” (Wesemüller 2014: 26).

Combining the theories of Anderson, Slade, and Reid, I developed a framework for analysis of nationalism and nation-building. However, it is imperative to understand that there are some special considerations for nationalism and nation-building in the post-colonial context, which urged me to develop this constructivist framework more to better suit the South African context.

#### *Nationalism in the African Post-Colonial Context*

Larmer and Lecocq (2018) situate the origin of nationalism in the African context in the anti-colonial liberation movements of the presently independent African nation-states (900). Citing the constructivist perspective, Larmer and Lecocq argue that nationalisms in the post-colonial African context can be seen as actively anti-colonial themselves because they allow the previously colonized populations to (re)imagine a nation as a political community that they belong to and that belongs to them (2018: 900). Specifically, because colonial domination often

included the subjugation of local African populations, often rendering them second-class citizens, inferior, or subhuman, allowing and encouraging the previously subjugated populations to reimagine the nation as theirs and themselves as nationals is an incredibly symbolic act that directly rejects the colonial labels and impositions.

Another way that post-colonial nationalism can be considered anti-colonial in nature is because of the emphasis on national unity and collectivity in spaces where ethnic groups were historically pitted against one another or categorized hierarchically. Scholars note the, more often than not and certainly in the case of South Africa, the goal of post-colonial nation-building is to forge a sense of national unity that supersedes other differences (Dorman 2015: 190; Isaacs-Martin 2012: 170). By imagining a sense of identity that supersedes difference and emphasizes unity, newly independent African states were directly refuting the ideology that was placed upon them during the colonial period. This is in line with Slade and Reid's theories in that nationalism evolves with the adoption and rejection and replacement of myth; by understanding post-colonial nationalism as anti-colonial nationalism- a counter myth to the previous forms of colonialism, Larmer and Lecocq, Reid, and Slade are all operating under the Andersonian assumption that nations are indeed subjective, ever-evolving, social, and imagined entities.

While forging a sense of national unity is one that has proven to be difficult in any nation-state due to their inherent diversity and heterogeneity, these difficulties are exacerbated and politicized in the post-colonial context as a result of their colonial histories. For one, during the colonial era in Africa, states were often arbitrarily mapped across the continent's diverse ethnolinguistic groups by people who seldom had knowledge of the existing community systems (Bhandari & Mueller 2019: 298). With some exceptions, African state borders have changed relatively little since that time, leaving a diverse patchwork of identities to share 'a nation'. This

was further problematized during the colonial period because colonial powers posited some identity groups as more legitimate or ‘natural’ than others (Riggan 2016: 3). Second, because the white settlers or oppressors now constitute a portion of the population of South Africa, the previous oppressors as well as the previously oppressed are encouraged to find commonness and unity in one another by virtue of their occupation of the same state or nation-space. It is unsurprising and obvious that this continues to cause issues in post-colonies today, even more so in South Africa because the colonial period lasted until 1994, making it part of the lived memory of many South Africans. This illuminates a third obstacle for post-colonial nation-building: liberation from colonial oppressors is characterized by the legislative acknowledgement of equality and unity despite racial, ethnic, or linguistic identity, however the legislative acknowledgement and reform does not guarantee or equate to social acknowledgement and reform. Simply put, just because equality and unity are declared legislatively, does not guarantee equality in reality, nor a tangible, unified national identity. In reference to South Africa, a nation where ‘organic’ [white] nationalism was purported for so long and legitimized through [apartheid] legislation, the simple declaration of “one South Africa for all” means little when it comes to constructing or imagining a nation (Isaacs-Martin 2012: 177).

Colonial domination is absolutely essential to acknowledge when it comes to studying nationalism in a post-colony. To acknowledge colonial domination is to acknowledge the logic underpinning it: primordialism. Primordialism is an older, European template for the nation-state that hinges upon the idea of ‘the nation’ as an ancient, natural, homogenous phenomenon. It is undoubtedly an incredibly problematic paradigm that is seldom considered legitimate by theorists today, but is nonetheless one that must be understood in order to understand nationalism today.

### *Critiquing the primordialist myth*

‘Primordial’ is Latin for "the first order", existing at or from the beginning (Wesemüller 2014: 20). As the name suggests, primordial nationalism or primordialism posits nations as ancient, natural phenomena that are inextricably bound to the ethnic or racial identities of human beings (Dawisha 2002: 3; Isaacs-Martin 2012: 170). Contrary to constructivism, primordialism postulates that nations are real, not imagined entities, and therefore immutable and unable to be altered through social construction or manipulation (Dawisha 2002: 3-4; Isaacs-Martin 2012: 170, 177). The primordialist perspective purports that the immutable foundation for the nation is ethnic/racial identity; Max Weber, writing from the primordialist perspective, argued that “ the idea of a nation is apt to include notions of common descent and of an essential though frequently indefinite homogeneity. The nation has these notions in common with the ethnic community” (cited in Dawisha 2002: 4). Because ethnicity equates identity to the primordialist, the identity of a nation is thus characterized by the ethnicity of the dominant (powerful) ethnic group. This parallels with Slade and Reid’s theory of the dominant myth existing in service to the powerful in society; the primordialist myth served to uphold and legitimize systems of white domination by citing nations as ethnically/racially homogenous.

However, by emphasizing a shared history and common destiny, primordialist ethnic nationalism purports to unite a distinct group of ‘nationals’ but in reality, works as a tool of exclusion based on primordially-conceived notions of racial superiority and belonging (Wesemüller 2014: 12). This model of racial exclusion legitimized by primordialism has in turn been applied to and legitimized instances of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and segregation

throughout history, among them colonization of the African continent, ghettoization in Nazi Germany, Jim Crow-era in the United States, and apartheid South Africa (Riggan 2018: 6).

While it may be obvious why primordialism is problematic, there are several key ways in which primordialist nationalism has posed specific obstacles for South Africa. First, as stated, primordialism is a European theory, and while it has long been established that nation-states are inherently diverse and heterogeneous, whether African or European, African states are diverse in ways European states are not due to the history of colonial mapping across the continent (Dorman 2019: 8; Larmer & Lecocq 2018: 895). This fact threatens primordialist claims to nationhood by virtue of homogeneity because, as argued by Bhandari & Mueller (2019), Dorman (2015, 2019), Larmer & Lecocq (2018), and Riggan (2016, 2018), any claims to national homogeneity are false.

Second, primordialism is not historically accurate; the primordialist perspective argues that nations are natural and ancient, however the idea of a “nation” is of recent invention, originating in Europe in the industrial era (Wesemüller 2014: 24). This is especially true for South Africa, whose state was born into sovereign independence [for whites] in 1934, less than 100 years ago. This violates the primordialist claim that nations themselves are primordial, and thereby exposing the *construction* of the nation-state as a recent phenomenon (Wesemüller 2014: 24).

Lastly, primordialism lends itself to nativism and national purity, laying the groundwork for ethnic cleansing, racial segregation, and genocide throughout African history. What is particularly interesting about South Africa’s case is that the *white minority*, descendant from settler colonialism, felt entitled to the land inhabited by the *black/indigenous majority*. Apartheid

logic, however, laid claim to South Africa as a white nation based on notions of national purity and white supremacy legitimized by primordialism (Wesemüller 2014: 11).

### **Constructing & Deconstructing the Apartheid Myth: Historical Context**

Apartheid literally means ‘apartness’ in Afrikaans, and it was the value of apartness, or “separate development” as the National Party (NP) called it, that upheld the myth of white supremacy in apartheid South Africa. The apartheid engineers aspired to “separately develop” the populations by first separating them and then developing them very differently. In other words, the goal was to systematically remove the black population from ‘the nation’ both symbolically, legally, economically, and geographically. Primordialism, or more specifically “primordially-conceived ethnic differences” served as the justification for the “separate development” system by which the upward mobility of the white population was secured and promoted through the violent segregation of economic, geographic, and social sectors and the disenfranchisement of the non-white majority (Baines 1998; Evans 2010: 309; Slade 2015; Turner 2019). The governing logic was that there was something distinct, both physically and culturally defining, about *whiteness* that equated *South Africanness* (Baines 1998; Bornman 2013: 4; Dawisha 2002: 4; Slade 2015: 8).

While “apartheid” was formally instated from 1948-1994 under the NP rule, the ideological myth of white supremacy and primordial entitlement were operating in the South African imaginary long before and was considered the “natural order of things” (Slade 2015: 8). Dutch traders had been settling the Cape since the 1650s and were eventually joined by British settlers in the 1820s following Britain’s acquisition of the Cape territory after the Napoleonic Wars (Treiman 2005: 3). By the late 1800s, the gold and diamond mining sectors were booming

in South Africa, but there was insufficient cheap labor to meet the demand. Mining companies began paying a small number of white mine workers high wages and a very large number of black mine workers very low wages and then kept their supply of cheap labor high by instituting a hut tax (Treiman 2005: 3). This is one of the earliest instances of black disenfranchisement, until 1924 when the ‘Civilized Labour Policy’ arrived and formally established wage differentials based on race and restricted certain categories of employment to Whites (Treiman 2005: 3). As illustrated by these policies, apartheid nationalism and white supremacy were in place long before the NP took control in 1948.

These policies were not only forming vast income inequality and racially stratified poverty in South Africa, but they were also beginning to form a racialized geographic patchwork of white urban areas, informal settlements on the outskirts for black migrant workers, and impoverished rural areas mostly made up of black households. The first townships emerged in the early 1900s in the form of slums either within the city or on its outskirts (Lester et al. 2009: 13). For the time being, the government allowed those ‘locations’ to develop and expand because they were supplying cheap labor to the mines and other industries, however, unsurprisingly, their black inhabitants were excluded from all rights privileged to white citizens (Lester et al. 2009: 13). By 1913, the presence of black informal settlements was no longer tolerated within white urban areas, and the Black Land Act was passed as the first official segregation of geography by law (Lester et al. 2009: 15). This Act made it so that black Africans were prohibited by law from owning or renting land outside land specifically designated for them (Lester et al. 2009: 15). These reserves were made up 7.6% of the total geographical area of South Africa, and it was intended to house ~75% of the population (Lester et al. 2009: 15). This unsurprisingly formed densely overpopulated land with arid soil and no room for subsistence farming anyways. This

forced even more black laborers to resort to migrating to white areas to work for extremely low wages.

By 1923, the labor market depended more and more on the cheap labor supplied by urban townships so the formation and maintenance of township areas was formalized under the 1923 Native Urban Areas Act (Lester et al. 2009). This marked the beginning of a dark period of forced removals and relocations by which Africans living in white areas that were formerly allowed but not welcomed were forcefully and violently uprooted and cast into the townships (Lester et al. 2009: 32). This gave local authorities the power to demarcate and establish African locations on the outskirts of white urban and industrial areas, and to determine access to, and the funding of, these areas (SAHOa). This made it so that the infrastructure of Black reserves was enormously underfunded when compared to white infrastructure. Not only was the quality of infrastructure disproportionate, but Black infrastructure was historically overburdened due to the high population and low quality of the infrastructure. Infrastructure here refers to all of the basic facilities required for the operation of a society: healthcare, education, sanitation, roads, post offices, public transportation, libraries, etc. The 1927 Native Administration Act made it so that the government could remove people without prior notice of removal (Lester et al. 2009: 25). By 1994, over 3.5 million Black South Africans were forcibly and violently removed from their homes and relocated to the homelands (Apartheid Museum).

The arrival of NP power in 1948 was accompanied by more formalized segregationist policies intended to secure the upward mobility of the white population at the expense of the black population. Because township areas were considered and intended to be temporary by the government, focus shifted from the townships to developing the homelands in the 1960s- rural areas intended to be the formal 'homeland' of the black populations (Lester et al. 2009: 43).

Because Africans were considered ‘temporary sojourners’ in white urban areas, their citizenship as “South African” was formally revoked and replaced by citizenship to their designated “homeland” (Lester et al. 2009: 34).

The “separate development” system was introduced first by the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 and then expanded upon by the Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 (SAHOa). The 1951 Bantu Authorities Act was responsible for introducing the ethnic “homelands” in which Black South Africans were segregated according to their race and ethnicity from the white and urban areas (SAHOa). Because ethnic primordialism advocates for rigid racial classification as the basis for nationhood, the white minority could effectively claim that their separate development techniques were for the good and preservation of the “Bantu”, meanwhile justifying the various privileges that white community had bestowed upon themselves on account of their "whiteness" (Slade 2015: 8). The homelands were granted independent status by the central South African government so that their Black inhabitants would lose their citizenship as South Africans and therefore all political rights (SAHOa). The Self-Government Act of 1959 created first eight and then ten Bantu Homelands or “Bantustans” (SAHOa). By this time, all Black South Africans were designated citizens as one of the ten Bantustans and consequently stripped of their South African citizenship and identity.

The term “Bantu” refers to numerous African languages and peoples. It comes from “Abantu”, the Zulu word for people, Zulu being one of the major ethnic groups of South Africa. Bantu refers to Nguni, Sotho-Tswana, Venda, and Tsonga speakers. It is important to recognize that while many Bantu languages are mutually intelligible and share grammatical structures, Bantu people are far from a homogenous group (SAHOa). “The Bantu” extend beyond the constructed borders of South Africa and sprawl across continental Africa. There are more than

100 million “Bantu” in Africa, speaking over 700 languages and dialects (SAHOb). By collapsing millions of South African people groups, rich in diversity both cultural, linguistic, and ethnic, in *one* category, the apartheid engineers were erasing difference in a very intentional way. In legislation, “Bantu”, “Native”, and “African” became synonyms for “Black” in a dehumanizing way; they emphasized the ‘primitiveness’ and ‘inferiority’ of Black people, and today Bantu is used only in reference to the language groups (SAHOb).

Townships (or locations) and homelands (or Bantustans) differ in several key ways. For one, as mentioned, townships were intended to be a temporary dwelling for labor migrants whereas homelands were intended for permanent residence and development under the “separate development” system. Second, townships are urban slums whereas homelands were rural reserves. Both were densely overcrowded, overpopulated, underfunded, and undersupported, and both were demographically black and poor. Townships were segregated physically, socially and economically from urban areas and wealthy white residents, and became poorer and more isolated as restrictions increased (Lester et al. 2009: 13). There was a very specific blueprint for apartheid cities characterized by segregationist policies, for example, “the site [township] should be an adequate distance from the white town”, “it should adjoin an existing African Township so as to decrease the number of areas for Africans”, and “it should be separated from the white area by a buffer where industries exist or are being planned” (Lester et al. 2009: 41). The NP government designed townships to be so inhospitable that the black populations would see the impoverished rural homelands as a more favorable option.

By contrast, homelands were established as self-governing states with the intention of removing black populations from white South Africa entirely. The 1950 Population Registration Act stipulated that all South Africans should be categorized according to their membership of a

determined population group— Black/African, Coloured, Indian/Asian or White (Bornman 2013: 2-3). Identities were reduced to their racialized, ethnic constituents rather than as a holistic national identity. According to this Act, Indians fell under the “Coloured” category, although the Indian and Coloured categories are normally considered distinct (SAHOa). Membership to a given category was determined based on appearance, social acceptance, and descent. For example, the criteria for white classification according to the Act was one whose parents were both white as well as habits, speech, education, deportment and demeanour that were all decidedly “white” (SAHOa). Black classification was determined by an individual’s membership to an African tribe, and Coloured classification was someone “neither white nor black” (SAHOa). This Act also reaffirmed the 1866 policy that instituted the infamous “dompas” or “stupid pass” requirement for Blacks by which Blacks were required to carry a passport in order to access white areas. A hierarchy was formed from this categorization with whites at the top, Africans at the bottom, and everyone else in between. These four racial categories are still used in South Africa today for demographic information collection, however since the abolition of the apartheid system many “Coloureds” resist the label “Coloured” and instead identify as Black with their allies in the apartheid struggle (Bornman 2013: 3).

Several policies were enacted from 1960-1975 to encourage homeland settlement and squeeze black populations (Coloured, African, and Indian/Asian) out of urban areas and further and further away from white South Africa. Among other implications, these policies relocated industries closer to the homelands to increase earning capacity in rural areas, african women were denied access to family housing opportunities in urban areas, ‘non-productive’ Africans (elderly, sick, handicapped) were relocated to homelands, african labor quotas were restricted in urban factories, etc (Lester et al. 2009: 43-44).

The late 1970s and through the 1980s were marked by resistance hopes for liberation. New legislation that increased segregation stopped being proposed and passed, however existing laws remained. In the latter years of apartheid, black communities received representation in councils with the 1977 Community Councils Act and 1982 Black Local Authorities Act, and were authorized to lease property in the townships for 99 years with the 1978 Blacks Urban Areas Amendment Act (Lester et al. 2009: 48). By 1993, the Local Government Transition Act granted rights back to urban black communities by allowing for the restructuring of township governments (Lester et al. 2009: 48).

With the fall of apartheid in 1994, black populations were once again bestowed with South Africa citizenship and their movements- residential or otherwise- were no longer restricted. Some of the wealthier households began to move to more urban areas, however for the vast majority of the black population, reality was not as liberating as it felt. Many found themselves far from employment opportunities, with little to no schooling, and little supportive infrastructure. The per capita income for Black citizens was one tenth that of white citizens, 36% of Black households were informal shacks compared with 0% of white households, and 18% of Black households had internal piped water and 37% had electricity compared with 100% of white households (Nattrass & Seekings 2001: 45-46). Poverty was the reality for the majority of individuals, and racially segregated urban areas or ‘apartheid cities’ were the reality for many cities (Lester et al. 2009: 53).

After years and generations of one’s identity and social, economic, and geographic potential limited by apartheid racial classifications based on *difference*, the apartheid myth had, in many ways, succeeded to do what it intended. As Slade and Reid emphasized, the dominant myth eventually gives way to a counter myth. It is against this backdrop that Rainbowism

emerged in response to South Africa's need for nation-building in more than just the legislative sense. The deeply-rooted differences overemphasized under apartheid made nation-building post-1994 all the more difficult as 'South Africa' lacked a commonly accepted national identity and sense of nationhood (Bornman 2013: 2; Gqola 2001: 96; Isaacs-Martin 2012: 170; Slade 2015: 11). South Africa needed nation-building in order to forge a national identity that superseded ethnic, cultural, racial, and linguistic identities (Baines 1998; Bornman 2013: 6; Gqola 2001: 96; Slade 2015: 11). In other words, South Africa needed to reimagine itself in a more inclusive way than the limits of primordialism allowed, which prompted the response of Rainbowism (Slade 2015: 11).

### **Methodology**

In applying a theoretical framework that emphasizes the mythological and imaginative aspects of constructive nationalism, I critically examine Rainbowism as a counter myth that arose in response to the apartheid myth at a moment when South Africa was faced with the task of reconstructing and reimagining itself. According to Reid and Slade, not only does the counter myth disrupt the dominant myth of a society, but it also encourages the "social collective to function as a coherent whole" (Reid 2011: 332; Slade 2015: 11). The construction of a "coherent whole" in South Africa was considered by many theorists to be essential to the success and stability of the nation-state (Isaacs-Martin 2012), however challenging it was considering the racialized fragments the post-apartheid nation inherited from the primordialist myth.

As such, "Rainbow nationalism" or Rainbowism arguably had to first reject the dominant apartheid myth, then counter it by de-emphasizing the role of race/ethnicity in imagining nationhood, and lastly forge a new national identity predicated on non-racial unity and equality

(Slade 2015: 12; Turner 2019: 84). Consistent with theory, Rainbowism sought to “denaturalise the types of representations that are found in dominant myth discourse”, in this case, denaturalize the idea of nationhood being linked with primordialism and race, “and replace them with an alternate view of the world”, in this case, with the idea that all South Africans are equal regardless of identity, racial, ethnic, or otherwise (Reid, 2011: 4; Slade 2015: 9). In this sense, Rainbowism aspired to be the ‘glue’ that would bind the fragments of South Africa into one cohesive, deracialized whole. In order to do this, however, the ANC had to fundamentally change the qualifiers of ‘nationhood’ from a primordial one predicated on shared ‘blood’, culture and language (as was the case under white nationalism) to one that could accommodate a diverse body of cultures, races and languages (Evans 2010: 309; Gqola 2001: 103; Turner 2019: 87). The Rainbow identity allows its subscribers to “transcend the social identities of race, language and culture, particularly in a multicultural, multilinguistic and multiracial environment” and “relate in a collective manner with other citizens who do not share social identities such as race”, making it the perfect fit for countering the apartheid myth (Isaacs-Martin 2012: 171).

The significance of the Rainbow Nation is twofold. On the one hand, a primary source of inspiration for the Rainbow metaphor was undoubtedly the racial diversity within South Africa. South Africa is a uniquely diverse nation with hundreds of ethnic distinctions and, because the postapartheid era would be the first instance of which *all* South Africans: Black, Coloured, Indian, and White, would theoretically be acknowledged alongside each other, the population can be caricatured as a Rainbow Nation of people. The Rainbow Nation myth is considered to be most suitable for the needs of that time because it imagined one embracing myth of unity and equality, but still alluded to difference (Evans 2010: 309; Myambo 2010: 94; Slade 2015: 11; Turner 2019: 85). On the other hand, it is impossible to ignore that Tutu’s “Rainbow Vision” is

of Biblical origin; to Tutu, the “new” South Africa was the calm after the storm of apartheid, a covenant of equality. In Genesis, God wiped the face of His Earth from sin but spared Noah and his family by keeping them in an ark. After over a year in the ark, God set a rainbow in the sky as a covenant between Him and the Earth that He would never send floods again. The Rainbow was a symbol of peace after months of rain and many lives lost.

When it comes to nation-building from a constructivist perspective, the construction of the imaginary community reaches the mind of the people through discourse, especially in those that emphasize a national identity or culture (Henrikson 2016: 38). The reason for this is tied to the effects and abilities of language as a construction tool; discursive construction consists of the use of language to produce the meaning of an object or concept (Henrikson 2016: 39), in this case, the ‘nation’, specifically, the ‘new South Africa’ as the ‘Rainbow Nation’. As such, national identity is discursively produced, reproduced, transformed, and performed through and by language and the discursive process (Henrikson 2016: 38). Therefore, an analysis of post-apartheid ANC discourses is a logical indicator of how South Africa went about reimagining and reconstructing itself through the Rainbow myth after the fall of the apartheid myth.

The chosen speech acts are as follows: Mandela’s 1994 Inaugural Address at Cape Town, and at Pretoria, Mbeki’s 1996 “I Am an African” address, Mbeki’s 1998 “Two Nations” speech, Mbeki’s 1999 Inaugural Address, Zuma’s 2009 Inaugural Address, and Ramaphosa’s 2018 Inaugural Address. These speeches were chosen because they are among the most famous discourses given by ANC members. By focusing exclusively on ANC discourses, I am able to focus on the ways that post-apartheid national identity was constructed by the same actors who deconstructed the apartheid myth. The simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of

national mythology was an intentional process that is best illustrated by looking specifically at those who did both.

The acts were produced over a span of two decades, allowing for an analysis of not only each individual act, but of the evolution of the body of Rainbowist discourses over time. In order to cater to the analysis of this evolution, the following data analysis section will be organized chronologically and each speech (except both of Mandela's 1994 inaugural addresses) will be organized separately. My method of analysis consisted of critical discourse analysis, allowing me to assess each speech act as part of a complex web of social interactions. This meshes well with constructivist theory in emphasizing the ways in which discourse itself discursively imagines and constructs identity, and the ways in which that process is inherently social (Isaacs & Polese 2015: 372).

### **The Evolution of the Rainbow Imagi(Nation) in ANC Discourse: Data Analysis**

The election of the ANC as the first non-racial, democratic government in 1994 allowed 'the nation' to finally include all South Africans. By allowing *all* to redefine, reconstruct, and reimagine their identities, South Africa attempted to 'renew' itself. One of the main functions of the Rainbow image is to emphasize unity or collectivity through the image of many colors united under one bow. There are several ways the emphasis on unity manifests itself in Rainbowist discourses including imagining South Africa as characterized by (i) unity in oneness, such as saying 'one nation', (ii) unity in commonness, emphasizing a 'common destiny or common land' or 'common identity' as South Africans, or (iii) unity in difference, characterized by acknowledging South Africa's diversity, but only secondary to unity.

### **1994: (Re)constructing the Nation**

While it was Archbishop Desmond Tutu, not Mandela, who coined the term “Rainbow Nation” for South Africa, Mandela’s endorsement of the “Rainbow Nation vision” in his 1994 State of the Nation Addresses (SoNA) transformed Rainbowism from a religious symbol into a globally-recognized socio-political map of the South African political imaginary (Turner 2019: 87).

With Mandela’s win for the ANC in 1994, the “Rainbow Nation” project intended to (re)define South Africanness and (re)construct the nation in a way that was inclusive and representative of all who inhabited it. As such, it was Mandela’s rhetorical role to “perform the nation in a way that makes her appear to herself united yet diverse” (Turner 2019: 87). The ‘united but diverse’ appearance is perfectly embodied in the Rainbow Nation metaphor, as the colors of the bow are separate, different, but united, equal. In reconstructing South Africa as the “Rainbow Nation”, Mandela and the ANC rejected the violent and oppressive primordial ethnic nationalism of the past and redefined “South Africanness” as non-racial or, at the most, euphemistically racial.

1994 marked South Africa’s dignified re-entry into the international community, calling for a celebratory rebranding of the ‘nation’ in the new President’s inauguration. Mandela, who, by 1994 was already a globally celebrated and loved dignitary, was naturally tasked with reintroducing South Africa to both its own people (many of whom were newly recognized as South Africans) and to the international community. In his inaugural SoNAs, Mandela introduced his plan for nation-building in the form of the “Rainbow Nation vision”, first on May 9, 1994 in Cape Town, then on May 10, 1994 in Pretoria.

Mandela's inaugural SoNAs were different both in terms of audience and delivery, but similar with regards to message. The main message behind Mandela's SoNAs was traditional for inaugural addresses, he first recognized the importance of the election victory, turned to the past, and then focused on (re)building the future (Williams 2008: 33). The Cape Town address was delivered to an "exhausted yet invigorated" crowd of black South Africans who had been waiting a lifetime for that very moment (Williams 2008: 32). He opens with the following triumph: "Today we are entering a *new* era for our country and its people. Today *we* celebrate not the victory of a party, but *a victory for all* the people of South Africa" [emphasis added] (Mandela 1994a). By structuring his speech in a now, then, and later format emphasized the "overall rhetorical priority" of the occasion and forefronts the importance of progression for the nation from apartheid to democracy in a *unified fashion* (Williams 2008: 35). In emphasizing unity, oneness, and newness regardless of and in spite of racial identity, the "new era" Mandela was referring to was the indirect unveiling of the Rainbow Nation.

Constructing the Rainbow Nation initially consisted of two major patterns: (re)bestowing South African citizenship to the black majority and emphasizing the oneness or unity of the "new" South Africa. If and when race is mentioned, it is generally to condense the (past) racial partitions into the (future) vision of unity: "The South Africa *we* have struggled for, in which *all* our people, be they African, Colored, Indian or White, regard themselves as *citizens of one nation* is at hand" [emphasis added] (1994a). Two things point to the oneness that Mandela models through this particular discourse: (i) use of the first person plural "we" and first person plural possessive "our" and (ii) the condensation of "all" into "one". While the majority of his Cape Town audience was Black South African, Mandela did not specify whose struggle it was. By making the struggle one of the vague "we", Mandela is establishing a grounds to which any

and all South Africans [“all our people”] may lay claim. In other words, Mandela did not say “The South Africa we [Black South Africans] have struggled [at the hands of the White National Party in order to finally become part of]”, but rather he made the struggle for the “one nation” one of *all* South Africans, regardless of race. In doing so, he condensed “all”- African, Coloured, Indian and White, into “one”. These four racial classifications, descendants from apartheid’s Population Registration Act, had never before been condensed into “one”, especially “one nation”. Because the majority of the audience was historically considered non-citizens, the fact that Mandela was acknowledging *all* as *citizens* was symbolic.

By contrast, the Pretoria address was delivered to an “elated group of international dignitaries”, local politicians, and “even more anticipating citizens” (Williams 2008: 32). If the Cape Town address catered more to South Africans as fellow citizens of Mandela, then the Pretoria address catered more to the international community by unveiling the “new” South Africa in a more formal, outward-facing manner (Williams 2008). This is evidenced by his use of first person pronouns. In the Cape Town address, Mandela speaks *to* his fellow citizens, whereas at Pretoria he speaks *for* South Africa, with over half of his sentences beginning with “we” (Williams 2008: 37). The Rainbowist message of the Pretoria address was the same as Cape Town’s: to introduce the “new” South Africa as the Rainbow Nation, however the delivery was different. While at Cape Town Mandela referenced the four racial categories from the apartheid era bound together as “one”, at Pretoria he further collapses race difference into black and white: “We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity - *a rainbow nation* at peace with itself and the world” [emphasis added] (1994b).

This careful description was significant for several reasons. Within the historical context, Mandela's South Africa in 1994 served somewhat as the nation's debut back into the international political realm; as Mandela triumphed, "humanity has taken us [South Africa] back into its bosom" (1994b). For decades, the international community condemned South Africa for its atrocious acts against humanity under the apartheid system. For decades, South Africa was at war with itself as violence, protests, and unrest wracked the nation under the apartheid system. For decades, the vast majority of Mandela's audience that day and the vast majority of South Africans everywhere had not been considered part of 'the nation' due to the apartheid laws that stripped non-white populations of their identity as South African nationals. For Mandela to declare that the nation was not only at peace with itself, but also with the world, was a monumental declaration, and one that was not taken lightly.

### **1996: Who is an African? (Re)defining (South) Africanness**

By 1996, South Africa was still in the very early stages of redefining itself, asking and answering what exactly being "African" or "South African" means was at the forefront of the (re)imagination and (re)defining of "South Africa (Wesemüller 2014: 77). Then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki attempted to answer these important questions in a way that refuted the past negative connotations associated with "Africanness" and encouraged the adoption of a non-racial definition. On May 8, 1996, for the occasion of the adoption of the first democratic, 'non-racial' Constitution of South Africa, Mbeki gave a speech on the subject of Africanness that came to be known as his "I am an African" speech (Sheckels 2009: 320).

After decades of "African" being synonymous with blackness and inferiority under apartheid's racial hierarchy, posing the question of what it means to be 'African' and answering

it proudly was an important discussion. By declaring “I am an African”, Mbeki was contributing to the discussion of (re)defining (South) Africanness and national identity. Mbeki’s “I am an African” speech is widely regarded as successful in bolstering unification because it encouraged all South Africans, regardless of ethnic or racial identity, to identify with *all* other South Africans and Africans more broadly. Throughout his speech, Mbeki defined “African” and more specifically “South African” through identifying himself in the first person singular “I” and a vague “we” in the first person plural with diverse populations throughout South African history.

By codifying (South) “Africanness” as a shared, non-racial identity and history by which all inhabiting South Africa may identify and thereby relate to one another, Mbeki was imagining South Africa in a Rainbowist way (Mboti 2013: 451). He began,

I owe my being to the Khoi and the San...

I am formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home on our native land...  
In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slaves who came from the East...

I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led...

In order to properly understand the weight of these claims, it is necessary to look to the violent histories of each of these groups to which Mbeki claims identity. Mbeki himself is ethnically Xhosa and identifies as Black South African. It is also important to know that the audience of his “I am an African” speech was likewise majority Black African (Sheckels 2009: 326). By claiming his identity as African and then attributing his “Africanness” to these various identities, Mbeki is attempting to redefine what it means to be (South) African as “all-embracing, transcendent” and post-racial (Sheckels 2009: 326). The Khoi and the San, the indigenous people groups of Southern Africa, as well as the Malay are most closely related to the Coloured population, who did not support the ANC or the abolition of the apartheid system (Sheckels 2009: 326). By attributing his identity as African and the very blood in his veins to a group who

directly opposed everything Mbeki fought for, he was making a gesture of forgiveness and reconciliation. Perhaps more surprising was when he claimed stock in not only those who did not oppose or maybe even supported the apartheid system but in those who engineered the apartheid system: the white Afrikaaners. The migrants who left Europe were the Boers and the British, who came to the Cape and systematically dispossessed the Khoisan populations of their native lands, exploited and enslaved the black African population, and eventually imagined and executed apartheid (Sheckels 2009: 326). Mbeki not only identified himself with these people, but he embraced them in saying, “Whatever their own actions, they remain still, part of me” (1996). Mbeki embraced them despite their tensions in order to unite them into the “all-embracing transcendent South African group” that he imagined (Sheckels 2009: 326).

Lastly Mbeki included the warriors of both his own ethnic group as well as of other ethnic groups, some of which historically waged wars against one another. He broadened the definition of “African” even further to include all of the peoples of Africa- from Liberia to Somalia, from Sudan to Burundi and to Algeria. Essentially, “African” came to describe much more than it originally did at the time of the Population Registration Act of 1950 by which African narrowly identified “Bantu” groups. In line with the ANC’s vision of a post-racial South Africa, this example illuminates how Rainbowist discourses may construct unity through oneness, and is a message reproduced by ANC leaders over time through Rainbowist discourses of their own (Mandela 1994b, Mbeki 1996).

Another important way in which Mbeki (re)constructs (South) Africanness is by attributing his identity to nature and the common land shared by all inhabiting South Africa. Like Mandela in his 1994 Pretoria address, in identifying as South African by virtue of living in South Africa, Mbeki is directly challenging and undermining the primordialist entitlement of white

nationalists to the common land. He famously said: “I am an African. I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land” (Mbeki 1996). Here Mbeki proudly stated that he owes his being (identity) to the land of South Africa- not to his race, not to the ‘Homelands’ or the townships where Black South Africans like himself were previously banished.

Drawing upon a common territory and imagining a shared history, Mbeki explicitly rejected the previous definition of “Africanness” in favor of a non-racial, geography-based one (Wesemüller 2014: 78). This forged a common identity by which heroes and victims, oppressed and oppressors could reconcile their differences and connect with one another by virtue of their all being (South) African (Sheckels 2009: 320, 327). This same ideal was embodied in the new Constitution whose adoption Mbeki was celebrating:

The constitution whose adoption we celebrate constitutes an unequivocal statement that we refuse to accept that our Africanness shall be defined by our race, colour, gender or historical origins. It is a firm assertion made by ourselves that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and White. It gives concrete expression to the sentiment we share as Africans, and will defend to the death, that the people shall govern.

The “we” Mbeki is imagining in this quotation as he closed his speech is resonant of Rainbowism in that it rejects “race, colour, gender, or historical origins”- again, directly referencing and rejecting primordialism’s claim to land and nationhood by ‘historical origin’.

Mbeki’s “I am an African” speech is regarded as wildly successful in forging a sense of unity among South Africa’s inhabitants (Sheckels 2009). He does not once mention “the rainbow”, however the speech is nonetheless considered Rainbowist for what it represents: one non-racial, anti-primordial national identity shared in the South African imaginary.

### **1998: Two Nations, One South Africa**

By 1998, the “Rainbow Nation” vision had “caught the public imagination” as a “now ubiquitous image” of the ‘new’ South Africa (Baines 1998). However, some were beginning to feel a bit disillusioned while millions of black citizens continued to live in “squalid townships” and most white citizens “retained the privileged lifestyle they inherited from decades of apartheid” (Harris 1998). In fact, inequalities had worsened in many cases. In response to the questions many had about reconciliation and nation-building, the South African government hosted a debate on May 29, 1998, when Mbeki gave his speech that came to be known as the “Two Nations” speech. Amidst Rainbowist discourses of the time, Mbeki’s “Two Nation” speech was in sharp contrast against the dismissive, ‘post-racial’ discourses of the day because it not only acknowledged the inequality and its source, but it also ‘racialised’ that inequality in a ‘post-racial’ era.

In the “Two Nations” speech at the debate on reconciliation and nation-building, Mbeki appropriately poses the questions “What is nation building?” and “Is it happening?” (1998). Following these questions, he answers them by offering the definition of nation building as, “the construction of the reality and the sense of common nationhood which would result from the abolition of disparities in the quality of life among South Africans based on the racial, gender and geographic inequalities we all inherited from the past” (Mbeki 1998). Mbeki’s definition begins as one echoing the rhetoric of the other speeches, laden with both a construction metaphor and an emphasis on the “commonness” of South Africans through their nationhood. Mbeki’s use of the construction metaphor deviates from those of other rhetors, however, in the sense that Mbeki sees nation-building as the thing that constructs *reality*, whereas other rhetors tend to

evoke construction metaphors to solely refer to the process of nation-building itself. Mbeki's take on nation-building is more realistic both because it emphasizes the construction of *reality* and because it equates common nationhood with the abolition of disparities, which is not a condition that other rhetors stress in their discourses and often ignore for the sake of emphasizing unity. Moreover, Mbeki does not only acknowledge the disparate realities of South Africa at the time, but he also acknowledges their origins and current effects on both the economy and geography of its victims. This definition was already one that shook the fragile foundation of "new" South Africa because it approached the topic of race in a candid, sober manner. Mbeki then continued to answer his second question, "Is it [nation building in the above definition] happening?" He was quick to answer that, if he were to be honest, no, the current form of 'nation building' in South Africa does not adhere with his definition.

Because, according to Mbeki's definition, South Africa is not engaging in necessary nation-building, he asserts that the country has been divided into two nations:

"We therefore make bold to say that South Africa is a country of two nations.

One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure...

The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled.

This nation lives under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure.

It has virtually no possibility to exercise what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity, with that right being equal within this black nation only to the extent that it is equally incapable of realisation.

This reality of two nations, underwritten by the perpetuation of the racial, gender and spatial disparities born of a very long period of colonial and apartheid white minority domination, constitutes the material base which reinforces the notion that, indeed, we are not one nation, but two nations."

Mbeki made three extremely important points in this quote. First, he links race with economic status, geography, and infrastructure. By acknowledging and exposing the disparate realities of the black population (nation) and the white population (nation), Mbeki racializes the reality of the South African imaginary in the 'post-racial' era. Second, he speaks of the "theoretical right" of black South Africans to equality. The theoretical right can be more easily understood in comparison to the literal right or the accessible right afforded to the white population. For example, in the apartheid era the black population was bound by law to separate labour laws than the white population. Post-apartheid, these groups share the same law, but the structural obstacles between the black nation's ability to access that right are much more difficult and thus much more theoretical than the white nation's ability to access that same right. Third, Mbeki exposes the structural legacy of apartheid as the base underpinning and reinforcing the persistent, racialized inequality.

This speech was described as both strategic and revolutionary in its time. Strategic because it's possible that the critical stance Mbeki took was with an eye to the upcoming elections in order to gain more support among the Black population who continued to be affected by the structural legacy of apartheid years after it was formally banned (Bloom 2011; Harris 1998). Revolutionary because it made explicit references to the racial aspects of a nation that was at first dominated by race and marked by racialism and next one set on feigning 'post-racialism' (Wesemüller 2014: 81). In other words, apartheid was an era during which race dominated literally every aspect of an individual's life *by law*. With the introduction of democracy in 1994, this domination was disrupted with the disintegration of the apartheid system *by law* and subsequently replaced by Mandela's vision of a post-racial Rainbow Nation. The reason this post-racialism is 'feigned' is because it remains rhetorical, it remains a speech act and does not

venture beyond the speech into the reality of poverty and inequality disproportionately affecting Black Capetonians. By 1998, not much had changed in terms of the socio-economic advancement of the black population, yet the Rainbow Nation performance continued to dominate political rhetoric (Bloom 2011, Harris 1998).

While the “Two Nations” speech may have been both strategic and revolutionary in interpreting South Africa as two racialized nations, I argue that it is done in order to highlight the importance for unification. Mbeki argued that the more that time passes, the more difficult reconciliation becomes, and the more nation-building appears to be a “mere mirage” (1998). The need to reconcile and unify became urgent, and the differences between the ‘two nations’ became secondary to the oneness of the Rainbow Nation: “We, the people of South Africa recognise the injustices of our past...(and) believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.”

### **1999: WHAM?**

June 16 1999 marked the end of the ‘Mandela era’ with the first transition of the post-apartheid government Mandela’s successor, Thabo Mbeki. This transition spurred uncertainty and skepticism in the hearts of both South Africans and the international community as Mandela, a beloved hero and global icon, stepped down from office (Orgeret 2008). It suffices to say that Mandela was a tough act to follow, and the pressure was on Mbeki to deliver social and economic reforms in response to the “WHAM” (What Happens After Mandela?) question (Orgeret 2008). Five years into Mandela’s Rainbow Nation, the country continued to be plagued by high crime, joblessness, poor schools and a climbing AIDS rate, and some believed the

country was more polarized than ever in 1999 as white people saw their privileges diminishing and black people said change was not coming fast enough (Daley 1999).

In his inaugural SoNA, Mbeki framed the struggles that continued to plague the black majority as struggles of South Africa as a whole: “*we* surely must be haunted by the suffering which continues to afflict millions of *our* people” [emphasis added] (Mbeki 1999). Almost the entire crowd at the inauguration was black (Daley 1999), so using the first person plural pronoun ‘we’ and ‘our’ in reference to the plights affecting the black population was likely understood, however Mbeki nonetheless peppered his speech with euphemisms to primordialism and the apartheid myth without explicitly mentioning it. For example, later in the SoNA, Mbeki alludes to white nationalism and the apartheid system it upheld by speaking of “the dreadful centuries in which the practice and the ideologies of *some* defined *us* as subhuman” [emphasis added] (1999). Again, there is no question that Mbeki was referring to white nationalists and their primordialist belief system that positioned non-whites as subhuman, however, in alluding to or euphemizing race and racial injustices, the unity of the Rainbow Nation’s “new dawn” is forefronted. The “new dawn” symbolizes the “new beginning” of the nation both with the new democracy and with the new presidency under Mbeki.

In fact, throughout Mbeki’s 1999 SoNA, he places “the nation” on a sort of timeline as he describes South Africa coming forth from the darkness of “the abyss” (past), again euphemizing apartheid, transitioning in the “new dawn” of the new democracy (present), and striving toward the “new light” (future) embodied in the ideals of Rainbowism. Mbeki’s “new dawn” is frequently referenced, and serves to metaphorically represent the continued transition of South Africa from old, white nationalism, to new, Rainbowism:

“What it [the new light, the new dawn] must show is a palpable process of the comprehensive renewal of our country, its rebirth, driven by the enormous talents of all

our people, both black and white, and made possible by the knowledge and realisation that we share a common destiny, regardless of the shapes of our noses” (Mbeki 1999).

By 1999, the novelty and glamour of the “Rainbow Nation” vision was beginning to wear off and Rainbowism began appearing more and more mundane (Gqola 2004: 6). Referring back to his “Two Nations” speech from the year prior, Mbeki employs a call to action, or rather a call to unify, in order to bolster appeal for “the new dawn” (which was basically the “Rainbow Nation” rebranded) and remind South Africans of the importance of their unity. By emphasizing “newness” and light (dawn), Mbeki was further differentiating the current South Africa from the past “abyss” and darkness of the apartheid myth, without explicitly mentioning it.

Mbeki alludes to the apartheid racial classification system in this excerpt as well when speaking of the “shapes of our noses”. The criteria for racial classification was heavily based on outward appearance, in other words whether someone “appeared” white or black based on their skin tone, facial structure, hair texture, and yes, nose shape. Much like other Rainbowist discourses, Mbeki makes reference to the apartheid myth, but only in forefronting unity in the *common* destiny shared by all [regardless of race].

### **2009: Where have all the Rainbows gone?**

Fifteen years of post-apartheid nation-building had not amounted to the degree of unity envisioned by Mandela’s Rainbow Nation vision. South Africa’s economy was as intensely divided as the apartheid era, if not more, unemployment was on the rise, and poverty was rampant (Zuma 2009). By 2004, scholars began to notice that the ‘halo period’ or ‘honeymoon stage’ of South Africa’s independence had begun to fade, and the “rainbow nation” had disappeared almost entirely from public parlance only to be replaced by other forms of

Rainbowism (Gqola 2004: 6). While South Africa no longer felt the need to declare itself as the “Rainbow Nation”, it did turn to face the “textures” of Rainbowism (Gqola 2004: 6). In articulating the “textures” of Rainbowism, South Africa’s Rainbowist discourses turned to emphasize diversity, expanding and echoing the “Rainbow Nation” in a way that acknowledged the persistent inequalities and yielded to critics of Rainbowism while still adhering to the Rainbowist ideology.

Zuma saw the critical condition of his country and its economy, and saw it as an opportunity to (re)discover unity. He used his 2009 inaugural SoNA to do just that:

“We are a people of vastly different experiences...  
 Yet we share a *common* desire for a better life, and to live in peace and harmony.  
 We share a *common* conviction that never shall we return to a time of division and strife.  
 From this *common* purpose we must forge a partnership for reconstruction, development and progress.”

Zuma did nod to the differences of the “experiences” of his one people, a euphemism to apartheid, yet the reason for which he mentioned difference was to then emphasize the commonness shared by those differences and despite those differences. “Commonness” constructs somewhat of a neutral space in which “differences”, whether acknowledged or not, may “forge a partnership” and find unity through commonness. Rainbowism was morphing and evolving to cater to rising criticisms so that it no longer centralized the “Rainbow Nation” vision, but unity and diversity (Gqola 2004: 6).

### **2018: Rainbowism declining**

Twenty-four years post-apartheid, the South African imaginary had evolved significantly so that the “Rainbow Nation vision” had become a thing of the past and had almost entirely disappeared from “public parlance”, including ANC SoNAs (Gqola 2004: 6; Turner 2019: 81). Despite this

shift, Rainbowist ideals continued to be perpetuated in more subtle ways, and Ramaphosa ‘recycled’ many of the other myths and metaphors of his predecessors (Turner 2019: 99). Among them, Ramaphosa reactivated Mbeki’s “new dawn” image and drew upon the legacy and promises of Mandela: “It is a *new dawn* that is inspired by our collective *memory of Nelson Mandela* and the changes that are unfolding...we should *reaffirm our belief that South Africa belongs to all who live in it*” [emphasis added]. This is resonant of Mbeki’s “I am an African” speech when he said “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white” (1996). Even for Mbeki, this was not a new idea, but one adopted from the ANC’s Freedom Charter in 1955 (Wesemüller 2014: 78). In doing so, Charterists, Mbeki, and then Ramaphosa were all countering the apartheid assertion that South Africa belonged to white people only, and instead stating that South Africa belongs to *all*.

Ramaphosa goes on to say, “For though we are a *diverse* people, *we are one nation*. There are 57 million of us, each with *different* histories, languages, cultures, experiences, views and interests. *Yet we are bound together by a common destiny that we are South Africans*”. This example is very different from Mandela’s Rainbowism in that it emphasizes difference and diversity. Unity through difference appears oxymoronic in nature because it both emphasizes unity and division, however within Rainbowist discourses the element of diversity functions second to the element of unity. This is obvious in Ramaphosa’s argument that *though* we are different/diverse, we are *one*, as if it is by virtue of that diversity and difference that South Africans are one. As early as 2004, South Africans had become critical of Rainbowism because of the redundant and static emphasis on unity (in diversity, oneness, or otherwise) despite reality remaining largely unaffected.

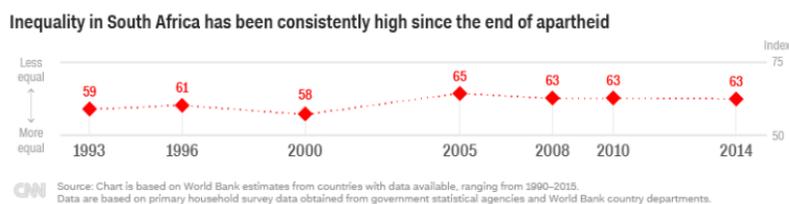
In fact, by 2015, some began arguing that the “Rainbow Nation vision” had become obsolete and was in the process of being replaced by a rising counter myth: Fallism (Turner 2019: 82). Fallism criticizes Rainbowism for being ‘color-blind’ (“blind” to the persistent inequality and disparity along racial lines) or for remaining “aspirational”, in other words idealistic, utopian, or unachievable (Turner 2019: 82-84). While the details of Fallism are beyond the scope of this analysis, it suffices to say that, by the third decade of Rainbowism’s presence in the South African imaginary, its status as dominant myth has become threatened.

## **Conclusion**

It does not have to be argued that inequality exists, nor from where it originated. The apartheid system was explicitly aimed at disenfranchising the black majority in order to promote the upward mobility of the white minority, and it largely succeeded in doing that through the segregation of races economically, socially, and geographically. From the ashes of a heavily fractured society rose Rainbowism, a direct response to and refute of the primordially-conceived notions of ethnic superiority and belonging that founded and legitimized apartheid. As explored in the data section, Rainbowism underwent changes in its manifestation over the past three decades of democracy; first, it entered into the South African imaginary with the enthusiastic debut of the “Rainbow Nation vision” during the halo period, then it transitioned to emphasize unity in diversity and difference, and lastly, it began to decline as criticisms and counter myths arose in response to the consistent and growing inequalities.

While many scholars today understand Rainbowism to be performative, Gqola was first to key into the illusion of the Rainbow vision in 2001. Gqola argues that “Rainbowism became an authorising narrative which assisted in the denial of difference” (2001: 98). She argues that by

invoking collectivity, Rainbowism stifles discussions of power differentials and superficially emphasizes difference but prevents its discussion (Gqola 2001: 98-99). More recently, Turner (2019) cites Gqola and echoes her work in saying, “the Rainbow Nation has been a suitable concept to both display as well as fade out and blur social, cultural and political differences of South Africans” (97). The ‘denial of difference’ is not a passive denial, however. Difference is obvious in South African realities, and by denying it, Rainbowism rhetorically affirms existing structural inequalities by not addressing them (Turner 2019: 97). This is not to say that the ANC intentionally denies difference. On the contrary, denying or even silencing difference has never been the intention of the inventors of the metaphor (Turner 2019: 97). However, I argue that Rainbowist discourses inherently deny difference when emphasizing unity, which has in turn obscured and perpetuated the economic inequalities of South Africans today.



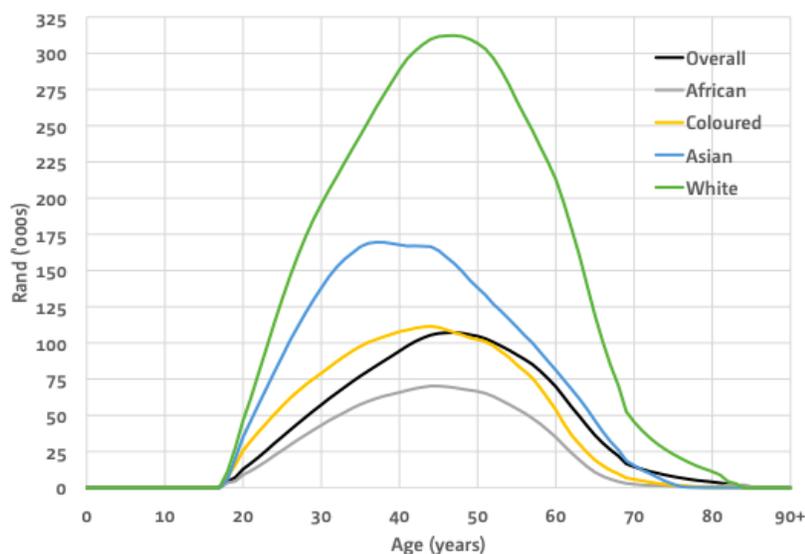
As the chart to the left shows, at the end of apartheid, the GINI coefficient was at 59. At the end of apartheid, “difference”

was obvious as it had been ingrained into the very fabric of the South African imagination. Directly following the abolition of apartheid, inequality increased by two points, and eventually fell, only to rise eight points again in 2005. In the 20 years post apartheid covered by this graph, only one year (2000) boasted a GINI coefficient lower than the apartheid years. This shows that, despite changes in the demographics of the middle class to represent more intraracial inequality as opposed to the interracial inequality of the past (Nattrass & Seekings 2001), a fraction of the population continues to enjoy the “lion’s share” of the wealth (CNN 2019).

With the exception of the rising black elite and increasing intraracial inequality, today, many of the vast inequalities in education, health, and access to safe water, sanitation, and housing remain intact along racial lines (Farkash 2015: 12-13). There is an increasing body of research that turns to the histories of colonial occupation, racial capitalism, and neo-colonialism to understand the persistence of these racial inequalities (Farkash 2015, UNU WIDER).

Similarly, a report by UNU WIDER (2019) found that there continue to be marked differences in the economic lifestyles of South Africans, as represented by the chart below. It is alarming to see

**Figure 1: Income from work by race over the lifecycle**



that income inequality continues to adhere to the same hierarchy despite the formal abolition of the laws that created it; Africans earn the least, followed by Coloureds, then Asians, with Whites at the top, by far. Not only does the white population appear to earn

over triple the earnings as the Black population, but it is also clear that the white population averages significantly higher than the overall national average, the black population lower, and the Coloured population almost identical to the average.

The UNU WIDER report was published in 2019, showing that almost three decades post-apartheid, the income distribution was stratified racially to the extent illustrated above.

Despite the formal end of apartheid, its structures remain intact. Despite claims of structural reform, poverty and inequality for the black majority has only marginally improved.

Even still, South Africans do not possess a uniform national identity due to the continued attachment and emphasis on historical categorical differences between Black/African, White, Coloured, and Asian/Indian (Isaacs-Martin 2012: 180), and due to the lingering apartheid geographies in the townships. Social identity performances remain attached to those imposed under apartheid classifications (Isaacs-Martin 2012). The apartheid-era racial classifications: African/Black, White, Coloured, and Asian/Indian, while no longer used as they once were, are still used today in data collection, and many South Africans continue to identify with the racial identity ascribed to them or their ancestors under apartheid, indicating that despite nation-building efforts, primordial social partitions conceived in the apartheid era persist (Isaacs-Martin 2012: 175).

To conclude, I argue that Rainbowism was an appropriate and necessary response to the apartheid myth at the birth of the new South Africa because it allowed black South Africans to reimagine themselves as nationals, equal to white South Africans, as well as counter and replace the apartheid myth in the South African imaginary. As the literature shows, replacing the apartheid myth was imperative for the health and stability of the democratic nation-state. However, I argue that Rainbowism is not suitable for long-term use, and begs to be replaced by a rising counter myth that allows South Africans to acknowledge race and racial disparities- social, economic, and geographic- in a more substantive way. A new myth that could reconcile the persistent economic inequalities could theoretically de-construct the legacies and realities of the apartheid system for many South Africans, and could keep many like Ms. Sikade moving from “shack to shack” in the townships (Goodman 2017).

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