

Perpetuated Borders: Boundaries and Mistrust in Post-Apartheid South Africa

South Africa has a tainted past of state enforced racial segregation, violence and colonialism. Now, in an era where the devastating Apartheid Regime has been abolished, South African society is characterized by a Bill of Rights, which prohibits discrimination along the lines of race, color, gender, religion and ethnicity. But how much has truly been eliminated since the abolishment of the apartheid regime in 1994? Was it enough to eradicate the state enforced system of racism? Eighteen years ago, all individuals of South Africa were socialized to accept and consider divisions based on the process of race-ing human bodies as the basis for normalized geographical, economic and social divisions in society.

The apartheid system has constructed physical, psychological and social borders in South Africa, further promoting conceptions of “self” and “other.” South Africans have been socialized to function amidst these borders resulting in the emergence of turmoil and mistrust in society. This binary has produced ideals, which have been translated into competition and violence in the form of crime due to racialized economic discrepancies, attempts at maintaining a patriarchal order in the form of gender-based violence, and the presence of antagonism against African immigrants in the form of xenophobia.

The enactment of the Apartheid laws in 1948 stood as the moment when racial discrimination became institutionalized and socially instilled into the South

African system. Apartheid literally means “apartness” or separateness in Afrikaans and Dutch languages (Clark, 3). The Apartheid system was created by the National Party and ultimately dictated where one lived, worked and died. This created a system of violence in which “race” became a point of contention. In 1950, the Population Registration Act established that all South Africans be racially classified into one of three categories: “White”, “Black”, or “Coloured” (mixed decent). The “Coloured” category also included people of Asian and Indian decent (Clark, 6). Now that divisions were drawn, not only of geographical but also psychological understanding, the institution began the process of socialization that created mistrust and competition amongst what was once a South African community. The Department of Home Affairs was responsible for the racial classification of the citizenry. If one attempted to defy these race laws they would be dealt with harshly. All blacks were required to carry “passbooks” which contained in them fingerprints, a headshot and information on access to non-black areas (Clark, 5).

The creation of the Bantu Authorities Act in 1951 increased the disparity amongst the various racial groups, which created African reserves known as “homelands” (Clark, 3). Homelands were independent states where “Blacks” were placed by the government according to their record of origin. Any political rights, including voting, were restricted by the designated homeland. “Blacks” living in the homelands needed passports to even enter South Africa, eventually becoming aliens in their own country. There were a series of uprisings and protests, which were handled by the banning of opposition and imprisonment of anti-apartheid leaders. State organizations then quickly responded with repression and state-sponsored

violence that continues to affect the people of South Africa today. In the 1980's reforms to the apartheid system failed to pacify the opposition, which resulted in the start of negotiations to end the system in the 1990's by president Frederik Willem de Klerk. These negotiations ultimately culminated in a multi-racial democratic election in 1994, which was won by the African National Congress under the lead of Nelson Mandela.

Though South Africa has come a long way since the days of Apartheid, these boundaries have become socially enforced. As many individuals still struggle to survive, the large economic discrepancies between communities have created a system in which people are fighting for resources in a larger battle for survival. Having spent six months in South Africa, I have seen how the apartheid regime still affects the interworkings of South African communities. Nyanga, a "Black" township ten minutes outside of the wealthy and flourishing city of Cape Town, is filled with poverty, disease and violence. How is one to expect crime to be a rarity in an environment where a small percentage of the population, being predominantly "White", contains the majority of the wealth while all others, especially "Blacks" and "Coloureds" are predominantly poor and struggling to survive? Crime quickly becomes legitimized when seeing an environment where some individuals live in a state of luxury, while the community directly next door is filled with families struggling to stay alive.

During my township visit, the strength of the Apartheid system to socialize multiple generations even after its demise became apparent during a bike tour throughout the dirt roads of Soweto. During our bike ride, children in the township

frequently ran towards us, many jumping on our bikes while others grabbed onto our clothes to stop us from riding. Many of the kids asked us for money and jokingly searched through our clothes. These actions were not taken as being threatening, and the tour guides quickly stopped them, but this experience was rather enlightening. Many of the children were much more inclined to run up to the white students for the reason that they represented wealth. This was very telling in that these kids attributed white skin to wealth, which shows the way they have learned to conceptualize difference in the wake of apartheid. These children saw the “White” students as the “other”, which is powerful and affluent due to their skin color. Though these children were no older than six, they have been influenced and socialized by Apartheid to see these racialized differences, further showing the way this system still exists in South African society today.

In a fight for power, people are all working to mobilize and find financial stability within their communities. This is then placed in a system where the “other” is conceptualized as a threat to one's ability to mobilize, which causes issues such as gender-based violence, crime in and amongst the various racially segregated communities and discrimination against migrants from various regions of Africa as threatening South African's in a fight for resources.

The elimination of the apartheid policies dismantled the system under the face of the law. However, as academic research has shown, South Africans have now been socialized to live in a system of economic, social, and political separation. With the elimination of the apartheid regime much work must be done to create a society of coexistence amongst the various collectives that have become alien to one

another. Norman Duncan discusses the reality of post-apartheid “race” relations in South Africa in his article *From Their Perspective* when he writes, “The remnants of the old order still remain starkly evident, particularly in terms of how ‘race’ and racism continue to determine the usage, occupation, and ownership of residential, recreational and educational spaces in South Africa (Duncan, 465).”

Apartheid has created a system of boundaries that must now be altered in the present democratic society. This continued segregation and intrinsic racism has led to violence and crime, both in the impoverished townships and in the major cities. The South African government has begun to create a program to encourage social cohesion to address concerns of violent crime to reestablish a collective national identity. This program is called The National Policy on South African Living Heritage and it is implemented through the promotion of the philosophy of Ubuntu, which promotes an obligation of humans towards the welfare of one another, while also collectively taking responsibility for the environment. In a place where billions of people’s histories were abolished, it is essential to create a new living heritage to promote national solidarity. This policy is focused on ensuring the vitality of intangible cultural heritage to create a sense of unity for future generations

Though some positive steps have been made towards the healing of the South African society, crime and mistrust are still apparent in the social fabric of many communities. In his article *Crime, Community and the Governance of Violence in Post-Apartheid South Africa* Suren Pillay examines the impact of crime on emergent forms of community and how this effects tendencies towards fragmentation rather than unification which undermine all efforts of “nation-

building". This crime, as a result of large economic discrepancies and anguish of ill and impoverished communities, is directly combating policies focused towards unification and forgiveness. These steps cannot be made until people are receiving the assistance and reparations they deserve from being directly affected by the Apartheid regime.

Violence ultimately impacts South Africa at a physical, psychological and structural level. These violent communities are beginning to cohere around conceptions of marginalization, xenophobia and susceptibility to gender and sexual violence. On another hand, this violence in middle class communities shows signs of creating enclave counties with privatized security, which divides people as a result of "fear of the poor" which also links to "race." This now solidifies not only the racial boundaries but also emphasizes the class divides in the South African community. Pillay explains her overarching point when she writes, "The terrain of the encounter between 'Self' and the 'Other' remains therefore a terrain saturated with everyday violence, which may be seen to require an act of violence to secure the self (Pillay, 156)."

The psychological boundary of the "self" and "other" discussed by Pillay is the fundamental basis by which this reality of mistrust has stemmed from. The way one is classified completely dictated how they were treated in society under apartheid. This causes an environment in which "whites" are forced to continuously reassert their dominance for a fear that they would one day be considered one of "them." This is also shown in gender relations in the way many men have been socialized to play out this constant reassertion of dominance in the household in the

form of domestic violence. The apartheid system and post apartheid societal conditions can be used as an ideal example of a situation in which all three of Philippe Bourgeois' forms of violence are represented. The Apartheid regime served as the major form of structural violence that constructed mentalities of separation, mistrust and racism that now serve as symbolic violence in the form of racism, sexism and a fear of the "other" which ultimately play themselves out through everyday violence in South African society.

Helen Moffett, as a part of the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town, utilizes anthropological techniques such as ethnography, to examine the overwhelmingly common occurrence of gender-based violence in South Africa. "The rates of sexual violence against women and children, as well as the signal failure of the criminal justice and health systems to curtail the crisis, suggest an unacknowledged gender civil war (Moffett, 129)." One of the predominant issues that Moffett sees is that many rape-narratives have been rewritten as stories about racism rather than gender. This works to demonize "Black men", thicken racial barriers and ignore issues of gender. Moffett supports the ideal of boundaries and mistrust as remaining effects of apartheid in concluding that, "contemporary sexual violence in South Africa is fuelled by justificatory narratives that are rooted in apartheid practices that legitimated violence by the dominant group against the disempowered, not only in overtly political arenas, but in social, informal and domestic spaces (Moffett, 129)." The ideals of apartheid exist in and beyond the private sphere; this creates a system where hierarchies of power prevail amongst and within racialized and gendered groups. This system works then to socialize

individuals, ultimately spreading ideals of how to interact in society, which then play themselves out in the household as well as in the streets.

Now in post apartheid, democratic South Africa, sexual violence becomes sexually endorsed for maintaining a patriarchal order. “Men use rape to inscribe subordinate status on to an intimately known ‘Other’ – women. This is generally and globally true of rape, but in the case of South Africa, such activities draw on apartheid practices of control that have permeated all sectors of society (Moffett, 129.) For over 50 years South Africans operated in a system in which the “other” was unstable, potentially powerful and dangerous, and needed to be kept in its place through constant demonstrations of force. Women, as a current subclass, are also seen as having agency and therefore pose a potential threat. Today, as under apartheid, there is a considerable social anxiety about a powerful, unstable subclass that must be controlled. Therefore, the language of apartheid is then translated into the home.

As these divides flourish inside the South African community, they also become problematic when foreigners try to migrate into these social spheres. Cristina Steekamp has studied the common occurrence of violence against African migrants in South Africa. In May 2008, South Africans made international headlines by embarking on a, till now, unprecedented campaign of violence against African migrants. Steekamp takes an anthropological approach to the phenomenon in light of social capital, which highlights trust as being crucial for social development. Steekamp explains the devastation the May 2008 event caused when she writes,

“ Within weeks at least 62 people were killed and hundreds injured.

Houses and businesses belonging to migrants were destroyed or looted. Around 35,000 people became internally displaced, while thousands more queued at borders to return to their country of origin. Within a single month, notions of a 'rainbow nation', pan-African solidarity and equality in South Africa were ringing hollow. (Steekamp, 439)."

This violence is a part of a wider pattern of intolerance and antagonism against African migrants in post-apartheid South Africa. At the heart of this prejudice there is an existence of socio-economic deprivation in which there is a constant concern of competition for jobs. Most of the existing knowledge on the matter is in terms of nationhood, citizenship or post-apartheid immigration policy.

Migrants tend to possess skills and present opportunities, which could be useful to local community development in South Africa. If a sense of trust can be formed, this migration can be particularly useful. Many South Africans do not possess this trust, especially of the unknown, after being mistreated by the state under apartheid in which they were forced to lose trust in all others, especially those who are from different geographical regions than themselves. Trust is required between those identified as "self" and those known as the "other" for these foreigners to be widely accepted by South Africans in society. But how can this occur in the wake of Apartheid and the events of May 2008? Steekamp writes, "Trust needs to be rebuilt on various levels: between South Africans; between locals and foreigners; and between the state and civilians (Steekamp, 446)."

Boundaries and divides have been the foundation by which South Africans

have learned to navigate society, ultimately creating a mistrusting and competing community. It is through these physical, mental and social borders that issues of xenophobia, gender-based violence and crime due to racialized economic discrepancies become surfaced. Apartheid, as a form of structural violence, remains in effect in the construction of symbolic and everyday violence that has become a normalized aspect of present day South Africa. In order to traverse away from the murky waters of apartheid, borders must be dismantled in efforts of creating a cohesive and trusting society in which the constructions of gender, "race" and status are no longer used to construct the "other" but rather understood as simple pieces in creating the "self."

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