

**RHETORIC IN SOCIETAL CONFLICT: APARTHEID IN SOUTH
AFRICA**

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ABSTRACT

Background of the Study: The South African Apartheid was a time of social conflict between the black majority in the country and the small white minority. The racist system lasted from 1948 to the 1990s and was characterized by systematic separation of whites and blacks throughout the country so that minority whites who held all the power could ensure that they maintain their position of authority.

Purpose of the Study: The paper analyzed the rhetoric in societal conflict in apartheid South Africa

Findings and conclusion: The decade-long battle for human rights and freedoms was finally won as a result of the persistence of black protestors and the motivation and leadership they received from their leaders. The cooperation that was observed between de Klerk and Mandela led them to win a Nobel Peace Prize. Moreover, a truth and reconciliation commission started to investigate all the human rights abuses and memorialization of these abuses. Although the transition to a less discriminatory South Africa was not wholly non-violent, when it ended, a new reality was established in the country that was only found as a result of the continued resistance of those who were oppressed even though they were the racial majority. Throughout the decades, the establishment and agitators used a variety of methods to maintain and demolish the apartheid movement, respectively. Today, South Africa has a democratic government and universal suffrage that gives all South African the right to vote and hold political office. However, the movements and protests were not entirely successful as a high percentage of the country's non-white population suffers from severe poverty and the hopelessness generated from the high unmet expectations, which result in violence, high crime rates, and civil unrest in the nation.

Keywords: *Societal Conflict, Apartheid & South Africa*

Background to the Study

The South African Apartheid was a time of social conflict between the black majority in the country and the small white minority. The racist system lasted from 1948 to the 1990s and was characterized by systematic separation of whites and blacks throughout the country so that minority whites who held all the power could ensure that they maintain their position of authority. The black people in the country had to struggle for decades in order to change the policy which influenced every part of their lives. The country had been trapped in a centuries-old pattern that would take consistent long-term resistance to overcome. The pattern of segregation started in 1948 when the National Party rose to power. The party developed policies that established white supremacy and empowered all the white South Africans of Dutch and British descent living in South Africa while limiting the rights and power held by black Africans (Schoon & VandenBerg, 2021).

The system was based on the history of slavery and colonization, which had plagued the country for decades prior. The Dutch settlers who settled in the country had relied on slave labor to build South Africa since the 17th Century. Slavery was abolished in South Africa in 1863, around the time the settlers discovered gold and diamonds. This presented a significant and lucrative opportunity for whites who owned mining companies that employed and exploited their black workers (Barnes, 2018). These companies did everything but truly enslave their black miners using intimidation and discrimination tactics to control them while gaining massive wealth from the gold and diamonds they mined.

Apartheid means apartness in Afrikaans. The apartheid policy governed the race relations in South Africa between the majority non-white population and the minority whites in the nation. It established and propagated racial segregation. The Population Registration Act of 1950 classified every South African group as Bantu for all Black Africans, Colored for mixed raced people or white. Although racial separation had been legal before the National Party, included more directives into the policy and named in apartheid.

Agitators

The black South Africans were greatly disempowered, but they still rose up to protest they were treated during the apartheid. The agitation began in the 1950s with the formation of the African National Congress (ANC) (Schoon & VandenBerg, 2021). This is the oldest black political party

in the country which led to an increase in the number of people willing and able to fight against the racist laws in a campaign known as the Defiance Campaign. Black workers came together and boycotted working in white-owned businesses, staged non-violent protests, and went on strike. They persisted in fighting against the racist policies they were forced to live under for forty years until they were a success.

Establishment/ Control

Control over the country and its economy was all monopolized by white South Africans referred to as Afrikaners; for instance, they held all the rich natural resources which made up one-third of gold reserves in the world. The Afrikaners developed a philosophy and theology that explicitly established the racial superiority of white South Africans. They also implemented legal and economic systems that were enforced by the military and police force that perpetuated the status quo and ensured that non-whites held no political or economic power (Barnes, 2018). When the black South Africans began to protest against the racist policy, the Afrikaners used every avenue to stay in power.

Control's Ideology

After an establishment secures power, its highest priority is to ensure that its dominance is protected and assured. The establishment must take measures to maintain its position of power and repel any forms of attack from other forces. Moreover, the establishment must prove that its ability to lead is more exceptional than the ability of any other group. Rhetoric is an essential part of helping groups that are in control stay in power. The primary ideas that guide the rhetorical stance taken by the establishment are that the leaders of the establishment: 1) have to assume that in the instance of agitation, the worst will happen and 2) must prepare themselves to protect themselves from any attacks by agitators.

The black South Africans who came out to protest the racial segregation in the country were beaten, and those who were arrested were tried through unfair legal proceedings that were stacked against them. The Afrikaner leaders wanted to squash the protests before the black protestors could achieve their goals as they wished to maintain the control they held over the country, its natural resources, and its black population. The legal proceedings to judge the black protestors ensured that they would always be found guilty as the Afrikaners assumed that the

worst would happen if they lost control. They feared that they would lose their power, wealth, and access to very cheap labor (Schoon & VandenBerg, 2021).

Agitator's Ideology

The agitation was based on lateral deviance as the black people in South Africa opposed the value systems and were fighting to establish a value system where black and white people were treated the same and given the same rights. Agitation refers to the persistent fight for social change in a regime where resistance to change is also persistent. The agitation included all the black South Africans who took part in protests, strikes, and boycotts while fighting for social change in the country (Barnes, 2018). The black people were fighting the oppression they faced in their own country and fought to live freely and have the same freedoms and opportunities as their white counterparts.

Strategies of Agitation

The civil resistance against the system of apartheid in South Africa was initially based on Gandhian ideas. The origin of these ideas was in South Africa as Gandhi worked as a lawyer for an Indian trading firm in 1906 (van de Ruit, 2017). The ANC was founded in 1912 to oppose the oppression that was perpetuated by the apartheid system, which served only 20 percent of the population, which put the majority at a great disadvantage. During its first forty years, the ANC only used legal strategies to fight against the oppressive system.

- **Promulgation**

Promulgation is a strategy used by agitators to state their goals publically and includes several tactics to win the support of the public. The agitation needs to gather enough members in order to gain the attention of the establishment. At the promulgation stage, the agitators make efforts to recruit as many members as possible in order to create a successful movement. The Afrikaners increased the support of the opposition by most of the community and labor militancy as well as the successful strikes in Durban in 1973, the vulnerability of the existing regime was made clear. On one January morning in Durban, brick and tile workers walked away from their job, first transport workers followed, and then the municipal and industrial labor followed suit. The labor activism in Durban inspired strikes across the country.

This was followed by a student uprising which included a Soweto march that ended with the police shooting a thirteen-year-old boy. After the Soweto Uprising, there was a major crackdown in 1977 which caused many South Africans to be hesitant to join the movement. However, they were inspired to join in spite of their fear because of the community problems they faced, including escalating rents and sanitization, which the movement promised to solve. Resistance against black oppression intensified in the 1980s as peaceful and non-violent protests gained international attention. Moreover, the imprisonment of the leader of the movement, Nelson Mandela, who was very powerful and well known, inspired his followers to keep resisting and conducting negotiations in secret to bring the apartheid to an end.

- **Solidification**

The solidification strategy is mainly used for the unification of followers within the agitation movement but can also serve polarization and promulgation functions. Solidification involves creating a sense of the community within the movement that may be essential in its success. The process involves creating cohesion within the agitative movement to increase the responsiveness of the members to the beliefs, ideologies, and values of the movement (van de Ruit, 2017). The military superiority held by the white people caused the anti-apartheid forces to unite and form a non-violent resistance where non-whites all had the same ideology, goal and used agreed-upon measures to achieve these goals. The anti-apartheid forces and their rhetoric managed to bring non-whites together, cause division between non-whites and gain support from international powers that pressured the nationalist government to abolish the racist regime.

- **Polarization**

Most movements use polarization after gaining a substantial number of members. Polarization is the assumption that any individual that does not align with the agitation is in support of the establishment. This is partially true as any person who does not commit to the proposed changes can be assumed to be in acceptance of the current state of affairs. All the blacks who failed to join the movement were termed dissenters as they did not actively participate in fighting the regime. Their lack of participation was seen as them supporting the racist regimes that kept the whites in power and ensured the subjugation of black South Africans (Sides, 2017).

- **Nonviolent Resistance**

After movement leaders have used polarization and solidification to recruit members and create a functional and cohesive group, the agitative movement can then use non-violent resistance to attempt to implement the proposed change. In the beginning, the anti-apartheid protests were non-violent as the non-whites realized they were disadvantaged and wished to avoid violent brushes with the authorities. The protestors used non-violent tactics, including boycotts, strikes, walkouts, and peaceful protests. For example, in 1985, Mkhuseleli Jack, a 27-year-old black man, organized boycotts of white-owned businesses in Port Elizabeth (Sides, 2017). The boycotters came in great numbers and held a number of demands, including an end to workplace discrimination. Moreover, resisters in 1989 resurrected the 1950s Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign, which included civil disobedience of the intolerable apartheid legislation and policies like banning dissidents. The movement used direct confrontations as well as alternative community-based institutions such as legal resource centers, community clinics, and cooperatives that many black South Africans turned to instead of going to government organizations. Other non-violent tactics used by the agitation include:

- Rent boycotts
- Cultural and sports boycotts
- International sanctions and divestment
- Social disobedience such as inter-racial bridge-building (Sides, 2017).
- **Gandhi and Guerilla**

The Gandhi and Guerrilla strategy involve the use of a large number of agitators who commit themselves to non-violent strategies and another large group that focuses on violent measures and the physical destruction of the establishment. Although the two groups use very different tactics, they work towards the achievement of a common goal.

The protestors were discouraged as the non-violent tactics they used did not lead to the results they fought for. Therefore Nelson Mandela and other leaders decided to start using an armed uprising and therefore created the Umkhonto We Sizwe (“Spear of the Nation”) that were used simultaneously with non-violent strategies (Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani, 2017).

- **Revolution**

A revolution does not involve the use of symbols or rhetoric but means the agitation is turning to war to achieve their goals. After the ANCs legal and militant non-violent forms of protest failed to bear fruit, the movement started advocating for violent action as the Pan Africanist Congress was revived. The violent actions were limited to several bombings of government facilities, but measures were taken to avoid civilian death.

Strategies of the Establishment

The government imposed major penalties for all political protests including non-violent protests. Thousands of people died in cells while awaiting trial many times as a result of horrifying torture. Additionally, those protestors who made it to court ended up being sentenced to death, imprisoned for life or banished.

- **Suppression**

In order to suppress agitators, the establishment needs to be informed, understand the opponents, their ideology, and have a strong commitment to fight against the agitators. The tactics used with this strategy focus on weakening or removing the leaders of movements that oppose their rule. The mining companies used a tactic that had been used by slave owners and British settlers to control their workers, known as pass laws. These laws required all non-whites to carry identification at all times, and their movement was restricted to certain areas. When the nationalists took over in 1948, they made the discriminatory laws that had already been established more draconian. Although the nationalists claimed that apartheid was aimed at allowing the different races to develop on their own, they ensured that the black South African were poor and stayed poor (Onyebadi & Mbunyuz-Memani, 2017).

They used “grand” apartheid laws that kept black people in their designated “homelands” and “petty” apartheid laws that made restrictions on most parts of black South African’s daily lives. Through pass laws and apartheid policies, blacks were prohibited from going into urban areas unless they found a job immediately. Black people were legally expected to always carry their passbooks; they could not marry white people and could not set up businesses in areas where white people lived. Everything was segregated to ensure that they were easy to control. The establishment was only 20 percent of the population and therefore suppressed the freedoms and rights of blacks.

Some of the other suppression tactics used by the nationalists include:

Denying the demands of the agitators- As a response to the 1960 protests, the government established a state of emergency. This strategy was meant to limit the movement and assembly of black protestors in order to slow down the movement (van de Ruit, 2017). Additionally, the strategy allowed the government to enact more apartheid laws.

Banishment- The state of emergency did not deter the anti-apartheid protestors from organizing and taking part in protests. This caused the government to crack down on many movement leaders and force them into exile abroad.

Acceptance of some of the agitation's demands - Although the movement was not successful in abolishing the apartheid regime, the government capitulated in 1989 when the South African President, P.W. Botha, resigned. F.W. de Klerk took over leadership and determined that it was time to negotiate and put an end to apartheid (Sides, 2017). He lifted the ban on the ANC and all other opposition groups and released Mandela from prison. Although the protestors still engaged in political violence, de Klerk and Mandela formed an alliance and continued intense negotiations.

Purgation involves killing members or leaders of the agitative movement. This cause of action is both extreme and illegal and may be risky as the killed person may be viewed as a martyr for the cause. As protestors were conducting a peaceful protest in 1960, the police shot 69 of the protestors in an effort to disperse the crowd and dissuade the black South Africans from taking part in any other protests. However, this was unsuccessful as the shooting resulted in national dissent and numerous strikes. As the lives of many black South Africans became harder under the apartheid regime, anti-apartheid protests raged on. In 1976, 10,000 black school children marched to protest a law that required they learn Afrikaans in school (Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani, 2017). The police force responded by shooting down more than 100 protestors, which resulted in total chaos. However, this tactic was ineffective as the movement spread throughout South Africa, and more protests were held across the nation. Moreover, the movement leaders who had been exiled recruited more people to resist apartheid and the oppressive rule.

- **Capitulation**

The last strategy available to the establishment is to accept and adopt the ideology of agitation. The ideas, beliefs, goals, and personnel who were proposed by the agitation must be used to replace those of the establishment. In 1992, approximately 67 percent of all white South African voters stated that they approved of negotiations to end the apartheid system. The National Party was finally defeated in 1994, and Mandela became the president of South Africa. The first free election in the nation where the whole population was allowed to vote resulted in a black president. A new constitution that tore down all the racist policies and institutions was developed and implemented. The new constitution took effect in 1997.

Conclusion

The decade-long battle for human rights and freedoms was finally won as a result of the persistence of black protestors and the motivation and leadership they received from their leaders. The cooperation that was observed between de Klerk and Mandela led them to win a Nobel Peace Prize. Moreover, a truth and reconciliation commission started to investigate all the human rights abuses and memorialization of these abuses (van de Ruit, 2017). Although the transition to a less discriminatory South Africa was not wholly non-violent, when it ended, a new reality was established in the country that was only found as a result of the continued resistance of those who were oppressed even though they were the racial majority. Throughout the decades, the establishment and agitators used a variety of methods to maintain and demolish the apartheid movement, respectively. Today, South Africa has a democratic government and universal suffrage that gives all South African the right to vote and hold political office. However, the movements and protests were not entirely successful as a high percentage of the country's non-white population suffers from severe poverty and the hopelessness generated from the high unmet expectations, which result in violence, high crime rates, and civil unrest in the nation.

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