Stepping out of a dark past characterised by segregation presents us with the unique challenge of transformation. Yet 15 years on, it would appear that little has changed. There is also a sense that rather than unite us, our multiracial make-up tends to keep us apart. The Dinokeng Scenarios suggest that until we forge a single common identity out of our diversity, we will not be able to harness the social capital needed to address the country’s challenges. Overleaf, Dr Mamphela Ramphele writes about how we could begin to walk together to do just that. Julius Malema argues that until we tame the beast of racism lurking among us we will never walk at all, while Professor Kader Asmal cautions against overflagging the race card, which could force the project of transformation to a halt.
TRANFORMATION conjures up different meanings and images in the minds of South Africans across the political spectrum. The term entered our discourse to signal a departure from the old apartheid ways of doing things, to the new one ushered in by our transition to democracy. The ideals of a transformed South Africa are captured eloquently in the preamble of our race-based constitution of a society united in its diversity where discrimination on the grounds of race, class, gender or beliefs has no place.

In the context of our constitution then, transformation should be understood to be a process of radical change of our society in both form and substance to become that which is envisaged: a non-racial, non-sexist, egalitarian, prosperous democracy.

Transformation viewed in this comprehensive way involves change in the way we relate to one another: ushering in new social relationship models — more egalitarian ones — away from another, patriarchal ones.

It entails more inclusive approaches to ensure that black people, women, traditionally excluded from public life and wealth creation, become active agents of development.

Transformation seen in this way enriches society by enlarging the pool of talent, harnessing leadership styles from a diversity of backgrounds and forging new ways of tackling the complex problems of the 21st century.

Success of such a transformation process would be measured by the extent to which the society moves towards those ideals as evidenced by diversity of profiles of leaders, managers and practices in our homes, communities, workplaces — in private and public entities — and in our wider public life and the conduct of our politics.

The twin goals of promoting equity and excellence in all we do become aligned to the ideals of our constitution.

Unfortunately, the past 15 years have seen a divergence of views and practices of transformation. For many people, transformation is seen as the replacement of white people with black people in public and private entities.

Some go as far as suggesting that as the apartheid government had supported Afrikaners to become leaders in both the economy and the polity, the post-apartheid government should support black people.

This approach informs the mechanistic implementation of black economic empowerment (BEE) policy to ensure that politically well-connected black people have access to opportunities to enjoy the benefits of wealth creation.

Success in this formulation would be measured by how many black people have become wealthier and are visibly occupying key positions in society in both the private and public domains.

The unintended consequences of the replacement model of transformation are becoming evident across our society and are undermining the hopes of many committed citizens.

In public life, the same hierarchical, male-dominated patriarchal and patronising leadership styles have led to disenagement of citizens.

The middle class, which is essential to strengthening democracy, has either disengaged or been completely and turned its focus on material well-being for itself or is paralysed, part of the new elite feeding off state tenders.

Disengagement by poor people is driven by a sense of powerlessness and inability to hold those they have voted for accountable to deliver on the promises of freedom.

The system of proportional representation has made public officials and politicians accountable to their parties rather than voters.

It comes as no surprise that a significant number of public servants often treat the poorest people with disrespect, rubbing salt into the wound of marginality.

Disengagement by citizens in our democracy contributes to weakness of the state, setting off a vicious cycle of failure, frustration and loss of trust between citizens and the state.

Mechanistic implementation of BEE has also created a vast opportunity for a culture of corruption and nepotism that threatens the integrity of our public life.

Rewarding loyalty above competence undermines the integrity in the public service and violates the clear stipulation of the Public Service Act.

It is encouraging that the ANC leadership now admits that its deployment policy has undermined the quality of public service.

The chaos that is crippling our democracy contributes to weakness of the state, setting off a vicious cycle of failure, frustration and loss of trust between citizens and the state.

The private sector has also failed to put up with incompetence at every level of their daily lives — from lack of potable water to dysfunctional health facilities — have largely paid for the weak base of our economy are very high.

Such practices are also corrupting and promote nepotism.

In some cases companies have knowingly granted equity stakes to entities that are fronts for the ruling party or well-connected officials.

While not subscribing to the conspiracy theory that BEE was designed by corporate interests to protect their strong economic interests, I certainly believe that a significant segment of corporate South Africa has allowed itself to become associated with the promotion of a culture of greed and corruption.

The private sector has also failed in another respect — empowered companies led by black people have not always differentiated themselves by excelling in ethical business practices.
... LET’S JUST BUILD ON IT!

Why can we not experiment with programmes to engage poor people in the planning and building of their own homes and community facilities? Imagine the energy and sense of purpose that could be unleashed in informal communities that have shown local leadership!

Recent cases of anti-competitive practices that have kept and/or raised prices artificially high for basics such as bread and essential services such as cellphones or banking are another form of tax on poor people to pay for the empowerment of the elites.

Transformation of business practices with an eye on efficiency and effectiveness that benefits the broadest base, especially the least among us, has yet to become commonplace.

The challenge of transformation is to create a social climate in which South Africans can walk and work together for the greatest long-term good for most people in our society. A prerequisite is acknowledgement that walking together is the hardest approach for us as a society with our history both before and after 1994.

We need a new approach that acknowledges the social pain that many still live with, notwithstanding the success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

We need to accept that the level of humiliation and disrespect suffered by black people remains deeply etched in social and personal memories.

We also need to acknowledge the pain of loss of power and influence suffered by white people, especially Afrikaners, whose own history of humiliation remains fresh.

Many feel excluded and marginalised despite their commitment to serve and contribute to a prosperous democracy.

We need to create open spaces for acknowledgement of this pain to occur and for joint action around concrete programmes.

The huge public investment in infrastructure should be used as a platform to train some of the millions of young people marginalised by lack of education and skills.

We need to radically change our development model away from top-down authoritarian patronising approaches that have created a dependency culture that underestimates the capacity of poor people to be a source of creative solution to complex problems.

Involving poor people in the re-imagining of our society and the form of development approaches we take would unleash the huge energy that lies within them and channel it into productive purposes.

Development becomes sustainable to the extent that it enhances the capabilities of those who stand to benefit, turning them into active agents of their own futures. Handouts deprive poor people of the opportunity to participate in the economy and regain their self-respect as engaged citizens.

Why can we not experiment with programmes to engage poor people in the planning and building of their own homes and community facilities?

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Using all people’s energy and skills for the greater good

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Imagine the energy and sense of purpose that could be unleashed in informal communities that have shown local leadership!

We need to acknowledge the reality that the skewed nature of investment in skills over many centuries is bound to remain reflected in the profile of available skills.

Our tendency to wish away white male skills has cost us much, especially in areas that matter most to poor people: technical skills to run public services have been lost in the past 15 years.

It is not too late to invite retired engineers, town planners and financial managers to walk with young black professionals to tidy up the chaos in municipalities.

A refocus on competence as a key criterion for public service would make it attractive to many young South Africans, some of whom have left our country in despair.

We need to embrace the skills and talent of all South Africans – black and white – to ensure that we become more competitive in our efforts to grow our economy.
24 years of hard work, stuck in a suburban twilight zone

Patience

It's not clear how long it has been since she last saw the sun. The only natural light that penetrates the room where she lives is from the window, which is covered with thick black plastic. The room is filled with the scent of sweat and soap, and the sound of her breathing is the only noise. She has never been able to afford a mirror, let alone a television. Her only companions are the books and records she has managed to scrounge together over the years. She calls her employers “madam” and her employers call her first name. They talk about her as if she were a commodity, a piece of property to be bought and sold.

She has been working as a domestic helper in Cape Town for over 20 years. She started out in the suburbs of Pinelands, where she worked for a family whose house had two floors. She was paid a small amount of money each week, but the work was hard and the hours were long. She had to start at 6 am and work until 6 pm, with only a short break in the middle of the day. She was never given a chance to sit down and relax, and the only time she had for herself was late at night, after all the cleaning was done.

She has had four different employers in various parts of the city. Today she calls Linden home; she lives in a small room at the back of the modest house she has been working in for the past 10 years. Her employer is a middle-aged woman who has been living in the house for 20 years. She works long hours and she puts her back out cooking, cleaning and washing at her employer’s request.

She is used to the hard work and the long hours. She knows no other life. And though her income is pathetic, she knows that she is lucky if she works more than 60 hours a week. In her world, hard work is the only way to survive. She has never had a chance to go to school, and she has never learned how to read or write. She knows very little about the world outside her employer’s house, and she has never had a chance to travel or see new things. Her life is limited to the small space she lives in, and the only company she has is her employer and the other domestics who work in the house.

Her life is not easy, but she is used to it. She knows that she is in a fortunate position compared to many other domestic workers in Cape Town. But she also knows that she is in a vulnerable position. She has no rights, no union and no protection. She is at the mercy of her employer, and she knows that she can be fired at any time for no reason.

She has been working for the same family for the past 10 years. Her employer is a kind woman who always pays her on time, and she is used to the routine of her work. But she also knows that she is trapped, and that she will be stuck in this situation for the rest of her life. Though she has no way out, she knows that she cannot give up. She has to keep working, no matter how hard it is.

She dreams of a better life, but she knows that it is impossible. She has no education, no skills and no prospects. She is stuck in a twilight zone, a place where she is stuck in a time warp.

She calls her employer “madam” and her employer calls her first name. They talk about her as if she were a commodity, a piece of property to be bought and sold. She has no rights, no union and no protection. She is at the mercy of her employer, and she knows that she can be fired at any time for no reason. She is trapped, and she will be stuck in this situation for the rest of her life.
“W hen I see a white person begging at the robot, then there’s something wrong with the picture for me,” explains Polo Radebe. “Something in me asks what could have gone wrong. What happened?” Yet when I see a black person begging, it’s not that I don’t feel sorry for them, but it appears as more of a normal picture for me to see,” she continues, as she acknowled- edges the stereotypes she has built up in her own mind over the years.

“But I believe that once our society realizes, we will probably see a proportion number of black and white people in every walk of life, but we’re not there yet.”

The 30-something graduate of commerce joined the Department of Trade and Industry in 2004 as the Director of Access to Finance for Black Economic Empowerment, which by then was attracting its fair share of critics for having lifted only very few black boats in the rising tide.

The BEE Commission had delivered its verdict some years earlier, arguing that there were too many transactions at the expense of too little skills development and not enough transfer of wealth. And so it was that the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act was passed in 2003 to try and widen the net and the benefits of the slowly transforming economy.

A year later Radebe found herself drafting the codes of good practice for BEE which were gazetted two years ago.

Today she is the CEO of Identity Development Fund, a company that is wholly owned and managed by black women professionals who support small and medium-sized black-owned business, yet she monitors the pace of transformation closely.

She looks askance at the South African economy where black-owned companies account for less than 10 percent of all listed companies on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. “And assuming you can take that to be a reflection of what’s happening in the rest of the economy, then that’s what ownership is sitting at today.”

What is meant by black ownership is a term that has varying definitions.

JSE CEO Russell Louwser says if indirect ownership is taken into account, then the black-owned slice of the cake would be far greater than 10 percent, adding that the exchange is currently trying to establish “an intellectually defensible” definition of the term that would “dispel many of the existing myths”.

Radebe prefers a more clinical definition. “I always say that we should look at what would be left of our estates in the morning if we died, what exactly our children would inherit, once the banks and other stakeholders are paid out. That’s what would give us a true account of black ownership, and that’s where we are sitting, at much less than 10 percent.”

Just prior to the Asian crisis in 1997, the JSE was trotting out figures suggesting that black ownership of the listed companies was anywhere around 9 percent or 10 percent.

But by the time the crisis had ended, it had dwindled to about 3 percent, a challenge that was staring Radebe in the face when she embarked on the codes soon after.

“Mentoring is helping, even if it’s not wide-scale,” she explains. “We’ve been focusing on giving financial help to black-owned businesses and not there yet.”

Their aim was to have 25 percent of the economy in black hands by 2017. To get there, skills development would be critical, as would enterprise development to promote SMES. Without an entrepreneurial spirit, it just would not happen. Yet South Africa records a worrying low level of entrepreneurship. In the most recent survey carried out by Global Entrepreneur Monitor, the country ranked 32nd out of 41 countries, well below the 13.2 percent average for all countries.

Added to that is her concern that the general support structures are either not in place or are still not optimal. “It’s debatable how effective our institutions are and it’s a concern that we’ve had for quite a while, but I don’t see us jumping up and down and saying there’s something fundamentally wrong with what we’re doing.”

There’s also a sense that the left hand is not talking to the right hand at government level, she continues.

“We should have realised that we’re still not getting it right. We’re spending a lot of money on BEE, but the truth is we’re probably wasting a lot of money as well.”

The structures of the BEE deals don’t help matters, with too much benefit skewed in favour of the financiers. “We get all excited when we see these deals in the papers but it’s the banks who are smiling behind the scenes. They’re too high asking prices just add to the debt levels.”

All things told, “we still haven’t learnt our lesson, because we’re making the exact same mistakes today as we did at the time of the Asian crisis. We’re telling the exact same stories as we did in 1998 and 1999, with so many companies going under.”

Yet she’s reluctant to throw the baby out with the bathwater and believes she’s witnessing transformation becoming more relevant today, even if the pace is still painfully slow.

“The skills pool is growing. It’s not there yet, but it’s growing in the black communities,” she believes.

Budding entrepreneurs are beginning to develop some excellent ideas for small-sized enterprises, rather than just buying into existing companies.

The BEE score cards are proving critical, not for the sake of ticking the boxes, but because they are forcing business to think differently.

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Diversity training and management are also playing a big role in cracking the racial divide.
Nelson Mandela told the world that “Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world.”

But 15 years later, we are still struggling against racism in South Africa. Despite the many progressive strides that have been recorded in the new democratic dispensation, a significant legacy of racism exists in all spheres of society.

Racist attitudes, stereotypes and actions continue to characterise our society. Only a few days ago the incident at the University of the Free State showed its face again, more than a year-and-a-half after African workers were shamefully humiliated by white racist students.

But racism does not stop at the Free State. And it is not only alive in schools and institutions of higher learning. It exists in the workplace and in the corporate sector. It can be found in every city and town. It is building stereotypes every single day of the week. What is revealed in the media only tells a very small part of the story because the media only tells a very small part of the story.

The majority of private corporations in South Africa do not employ Africans into key and strategic positions. If we look at the positions of chief executive officers and chief financial officers across the country they are mainly occupied by non-black South Africans. In instances where non-whites take the seats, it is often where they are closely partnered with a white counterpart who watches over their shoulders. The black CFO of Nedbank is one example. The CEO of Edcon is another.

The underlying message is obvious: white South Africa is still unable to embrace their black brothers. And it doesn’t stop with corporate South Africa. Millions of farm hands, factory workers and domestic helpers live with brutal racism on a daily basis. The only difference is that their voices are not heard.

Many white children are reared within a belief system that teaches them that Africans are sub-humans, inferior to them and sitting at the bottom of the race ladder. In multi-racial schools, African children are forced to adapt to white people’s way of doing things. They are encouraged to take on their accents, and cultured under institutionalised racism and who are unable to appreciate and comprehend that black people, and Africans in particular, are human beings too and that they are as capable, if not more capable, of doing the job.

The ANCYL has been open and robust in its programme to confront racism. And it will continue to be so while we struggle to build a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa.

If we allow racism to continue, we can never achieve our goals. Racism belongs to another era. It was the ideological weapon of the apartheid oppressors to subjugate the African majority and blacks in general, under a racist government which denied our people basic rights.

But it cannot belong to our democracy. And where it does, the ideological weapon of racists should be exposed and defeated through open confrontation.

This is not an easy task because racism is not always overt. Its roots are deep in a long history of economic exclusion. It is one of the most difficult evils to uproot. But that doesn’t mean it cannot and will not be done.

If we want to be rid of racism, we have to accept some truths. The massive class and economic divide that exists between black and white people is keeping us apart. Black people, and Africans in particular, should share in South Africa’s wealth and benefit from the opportunities presented by our democratic government. The ANCYL’s call that we should realise economic freedom for the black majority and Africans in particular in our lifetime is a vital component in the struggle to build a non-racial better South Africa. The struggle did not end in 1994.

Our frank engagement on the issue of race does not mean that we are blind to the many positive developments that are happening. There are both black and white people who are growing to understand and appreciate that South Africa belongs to all people who live in it, regardless of their colour. If we do not recognise these advances we would only undermine the progress the country is making in building a truly non-racial society.

The ANCYL calls upon white people to participate in the developmental agenda of our democratic government. We also call on them to bury their fear of the unknown. We will never support any dominance by any one race, including any call to drive the whites to the sea.

But we will continue to engage each other in a more open and robust way until we get a buy-in from everyone to redress the imbalances created by the nonsensical apartheid regime. Julius Malema is the president of the ANC Youth League.
GREAT EXPECTATIONS?

Overt signs of racism are gone, but nastiness lurks below the surface

BY KADER ASMAL

white South Africa has not acknowledged the great crime committed against black people under apartheid in this country.

Are we unreasonable in criticizing the newly-appointed vice-chancellor of the University of the Free State when he absolves a group of white students who humiliated poor black workers by treating them as objects for their racist pleasures?

Should we not make a distinction between the role of the previous oppressor and victims?

Conversely, are we playing the race card when we are not able to launch a credible argument or when we have run out of options?

If we don’t get what we desire – a BEE deal, a job or an appointment, is it a question of a chip on the shoulder if we shout “racism”?

There can be little doubt that when even ministers demand that Transnet must appoint a particular black person that they are playing a race card of a particular variety although they ought to have recognised that the candidate the board may have had in mind was a himself a black person!

Or even more recently, the director-general of the Department of Labour with his Black Management Forum hat on opined that the possible resignation of the CEO of Eskom as a result of its board’s unhappiness with his performance was part of attacks on black chief executives.

This is hardly credible. The board is appointed by the government.

The government is now also beginning to realise that its employment policy has had unintended consequences, especially at local government level, where service delivery has been seriously disrupted because of unqualified or inappropriately qualified persons who have been appointed to senior managerial posts.

Yet, there are a huge number of vacancies across the board in local government, provincial and national departments which are left open because of the need to meet “representative” levels.

At a political level, when the going gets tough, there is a tendency to have recourse to euphemisms such as the need to discuss the implications of the “national question” to the matter at hand, when what we really mean is that there are too many white people, Indians or coloureds around.

It is therefore not good enough to refer to the opening lines of the Freedom Charter: South Africa belongs to all those who live in it, black and white, as a total answer to the problems of allocating resources, posts, offices or benefits.

The clarion call of the Freedom Charter – which drove us in the freedom struggle through its deep humanist appeal – does not provide an answer to the way we should deal with the damages present in our society through deprivation and prejudice.

What we need, therefore, is to debate the deep roots of prejudice in our society, not the flawed approach of the vice-chancellor of the University of the Free State, but one that draws on our history, our humanist appeal – does not provide a total answer to the way we should deal with the damages present in our society through deprivation and prejudice.

In this way, we may claim to live up to the foundational and core values of our Constitution – equality, freedom, dignity and justice.

Kader Asmal was a member of the NEC of the ANC from 1991 to 2009 and is a former minister.

CONSCIENCE: Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has said white South Africans have not acknowledged the crime of apartheid.