

NERVOUS CONDITIONS: THE BURDEN OF RACE, CLASS AND GENDER IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE POST-COLONIAL ORDER

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1. INTRODUCTION

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. It is a great honour for me to be with you tonight, an honour for which I thank the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRAMISTRA) and the University of Johannesburg. I would like to acknowledge the Chairperson of the Board and Board members of MISTRA and the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg. Welcome all and thank you.

This evening I will share some thoughts on Nervous Conditions: The Burden of Race, Class and Gender in the Construction of the Post-Colonial Order. The conclusion I will present to you this evening is that we can have the Africa we want. We can be the Africans we want to be in the nations and communities we want to have, on the continent we desire. As South Africans know very well, it's possible. Indeed it is possible in spite of our nervous conditions. Having the Africa we want and being the Africans we want to be in that Africa is going to require a little work, though. It is that work that I am going to engage with this evening.

I will begin by defining a nervous condition. I will go on to look briefly at the incidence of nervous conditions on the continent. I will then engage critically with the notion of post-colonialism, referring to two main challenges I have with the notion. I will be reframing the arguments from my own perspective. This will lead me to formulate my understanding of the era in which we find ourselves. I will use the following concepts:

The colonised protagonist; the colonising antagonist; the colonised mind; the colonising mind; guerrilla state and internal colonisation. I will argue that Africa is facing, in the first instance, not a crisis of leadership but a crisis of personhood. I will map briefly the role of leadership and the people

in the genesis of this crisis and will end by proposing a remedy for the crisis. In proposing a remedy I will invoke Zakes Mda's concept of justifying the enemy. I will end with a note on gender.

2. NERVOUS CONDITIONS

What do we mean by a nervous condition? A nervous condition can be defined as one that affects a person's emotions and a person's state. To be nervous is to be frightened or worried about something that is happening or that might happen to the extent that this fear or worry is evident in a person's behaviour. A nervous person is tense, apprehensive and easily upset. She is excitable, sensitive and highly strung. These negative emotional states then become the person's condition, a nervous condition.

Nervous conditions are caused by biological and environmental factors. The two categories are not completely mutually exclusive. However, for the purposes of this discussion, environmental factors are of interest. These include poor nutrition, exposure to toxins, stressful life events, chronic stress, culture, abuse, poverty and war. All of the conditions on this list of environmental causes of nervous conditions are prevalent on our continent.

Human beings experience these nervous emotional states as distressing and undesirable. Therefore, human beings undertake action to dispel these states and to return to a positive emotional balance. Correction of negative emotional states can be brought about in several ways. Firstly, people can leave the environment which causes the nervous state. Secondly, people can change their perceptions of the situation that causes the nervous condition. Changing perceptions of a negative state can be done in several ways also. Drugs can be used to target the physiological processes of perception. These drugs may be medical, or they may be drugs that are used recreationally. This latter category of recreational drugs includes alcohol. A second method of changing perceptions is to change behaviour. Behaviour may change at either internal cognitive or overt physical levels. Internal cognitive behaviour change involves a person changing her own thought processes to change her perceptions. Other means of adjusting perception are all those activities that can alter consciousness by inducing trance-like states, such as dancing, exercise and fasting. Meditation, as well as connecting with a meaningful higher power through practices such as prayer usually engage both internal and overt mechanisms. The categories do overlap.

We all suffer from nervous conditions at time. We all go through phases when we are excitable, or worried. However, when a nervous condition is of such an intensity and of such an ongoing duration that an individual is no longer able to function, we talk of a person suffering from a nervous illness.

2.1. Incidence of Nervous Conditions

According to the UN online magazine, Africa Renewal, Kenyan health experts estimate that one fourth of the Kenyan population of 44 million suffers from a range of mental diseases, including schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, bipolar disorders, depression and severe anxiety. A 2003 South African study, ratified in 2014 by professors in the Departments of Psychiatry in the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch, estimated that approximately one third of South Africans suffer from some form of mental disorder. The professors noted how, given that the figures excluded children and adolescents as well as a number of other key disorders, the prevalence of mental disorders in SA is probably higher than one third of the population. It was difficult to obtain mental illness incidence figures for African countries, so I will end with figures from one other country, Zimbabwe.

No official statistics were readily available, but one of Zimbabwe's leading weekly newspapers, the *Financial Gazette* had this to say on April 6, 2017:

'THE effects of almost two decades of an economic free-fall has had a devastating mental, emotional and physical toll on the generality of Zimbabweans who can no longer absorb the rigours of the meltdown. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), some 1,3 million of the country's 14 million people, representing 10 percent of the population, are now mental patients. There were just above 600 000 mentally ill people in 1999, which means that the figure has more than doubled in less than 20 years.'

The Herald Newspaper of January 4 this year adjusted the figure of 10% incidence upwards when it stated that:

Neuropsychiatric disorders are the leading cause of disability in Zimbabwe accounting for 18,7 percent of all years of life lost to disability and premature mortality especially from suicide in {those} under 35 years of age.

These figures might be an under-representation of the incidence of nervous illnesses in Zimbabwe. As we know, Zimbabweans are frequently rather coy about calling things what they are. I will return to that later. However, the reason why I say the above figures may be an underestimate of the incidence of nervous illness in Zimbabwe is that several years ago I heard a joke about this subject.

I was working for an organisation called ‘Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe’ at the time. We had put out a call to Zimbabwean women for documentaries on themes that they felt were important for their well-being. We received a concept for a documentary on post-natal depression. It was during research for this project that I came upon the joke. It goes like this. 33% of Zimbabweans are on anti-depressants, 33% are on alcohol and the other 33% are on both.

More recently a journalist in Zimbabwe has made a wonderful documentary on mental illness called ‘State of Mind’. Yes, in case you asked, that documentary filmmaker is male.

Dr Sacrifice Chirisa, in his article for *The Herald*, linked mental illness to suicide. Table 1 below shows 2017 World Health Organisation (WHO) figures for suicide in the ten African nations ranking highest from such deaths.

Kenya is not included as its rate is relatively low at 6.5. This suggests that in spite of a high incidence of mental illness, Kenya is managing this illness so that suicide rates remain relatively low. WHO tells us that suicide is a global phenomenon, with 78% of suicides occurring in low- and middle-income countries in 2015. In that year suicide accounted for 1.4% of all deaths worldwide, making it the 17th leading cause of death in. It is worth emphasising that in 2017 it was the second leading cause of death amongst youths aged fifteen to twenty-nine. So nervous conditions can be fatal. They affect our youth disproportionately and as such require our express attention. Of note is the higher incidence of suicide for males as opposed to females. This is a global trend.

Country	Suicide mortality/100 000	Region
Equatorial Guinea	22.6	West Africa
Angola	20.5	Southern Africa
Ivory Coast	18.1	West Africa
Central African Republic	17.4	Central Africa

Sierra Leone	15.4	Southern Africa
Swaziland	14.7	Southern Africa
Gabon	10.9	West Africa
South Africa	10.7 (F=4.6, M=17.1)	Southern Africa
Zimbabwe	10.5 (F=5.6, M=15.5)	Southern Africa
Lesotho	10.4	Southern Africa

Table 1. Suicide rates in selected African countries, WHO 2017

3. POSTCOLONIAL ORDER

I will now look at the postcolonial order.

The category 'postcolonial' is one I am increasingly contesting, as have so many others. My two main criticisms are the following.

3.1. A Transforming Colonialism

Firstly, at the theoretical level, I do not understand how a system that transforms itself into another version of itself can be perceived of as being post itself. European colonisation of Africa has only been modified, it has not come to an end. The purpose of colonisation was to transfer wealth from where it was found outside the colonising nations into the colonising nations. Today we still see that net movement of wealth.

The colonial system may have changed in that it has adjusted some of its more excessive practices, such as direct rule, legal rendering of local populations as less than human, apartheid systems and genocide. There are more individuals today across the globe who are toiling to end the work of colonialism. However, the purposes of colonisation are still served in our era by systems that were created in order to be adopted after the end of direct colonialism. Therefore the system of colonialism has merely changed but it is still in existence.

To my mind, being told we are in the post-colonial era is an integral part of a strategy to keep that colonial system functional. If we all believe it is over, we will not look to dismantle it. We will concentrate on other things. Here we see the power of naming in effect. Those who have the power to name are those who have the power to determine. The term post-colonialism is said to have emerged in the 1970s in response to cultural production that dealt with the relationship between the

colonised protagonist and the colonising antagonist. Emanating from the academy of the 1970s, it is unlikely that many colonised protagonists were part of this academic conversation. The naming, then was done by individuals who were part of, or at the very least who were beneficiaries of, the colonial project.

The appearance of the term 'postcolonial' in the 1970s followed a period of fundamental change in the nature of colonisation as a response to transformations in economic imperatives caused both by technological advances and also by actions for independence undertaken by colonised protagonists, as well as by their allies who resided within colonising antagonistic nations. The term originated out of engagement by the academy with the works of anti-colonialism writers such as Fanon, Said and Spivak, within the academy itself. In the field of fiction, representatives of the canon are writers such as Achebe, Ondaatje, Allende, Coetzee and Walcott. In the area of non-fiction, Kincaid is a notable figure. The explicit term 'postcolonial' does not occur often in the texts of these writers, particularly not the early texts. Fanon writes rather of a dying colonialism. Said uses the term on p275 of his seminal work *Orientalism*. He writes 'Oriental studies were to be thought of not so much as scholarly activities, but as instruments of national policy towards the newly independent, and possibly intractable nations of the postcolonial world.'

With this statement Said analysed how colonial forces that had given up political control of the nations they had colonised were repositioning themselves for continued engagement under the banner of post-colonialism. Clearly this term was coined in order to enable a conversation about a particular historical epoch. Nevertheless, it was the colonising antagonist and not the colonised protagonist speaking.

3.1.1. The Colonised Protagonist and the Colonising Antagonist

I have used the phrase 'colonised protagonist' several times. This is the result of a choice I have made not to use the term 'colonial subject'. My reason for this choice is that a subject has an architect. A subject is propounded by a principle that is prior, that exists before the subject. This prior principle is a mind. It is an intelligence that thinks. This intelligence perceives objects in its universe and it positions these objects with respect to itself on one hand, and with respect to each other on the other hand. This mind enunciates positions of objects and the relationships between objects to the one who acts. This one who acts is the subject. Thus the subject is created by the mind that moves it. The

mind is the first actor. A colonial subject would therefore be she who is created by the colonial mind and who is moved by this colonial mind.

A protagonist, however, is the first or principle actor moved by her own mind to order the universe according to her own principles. In the world of the colonised protagonist, there are therefore two minds – at *least* two minds – in operation. The first is the mind of the protagonist prior to colonisation. The second is the mind of the colonising antagonist. This is a situation of conflict. It begets the nervous conditions thematised this evening. Nevertheless, a colonised protagonist does not inevitably give up her mind to the colonial universe. A colonised protagonist has a choice of whether to become a colonial subject, or whether to continue to be her own subject who orders the universe in accordance with her own principles. Both choices come with costs.

From this point of view, I am more comfortable with the term neo-colonialism as opposed to post-colonialism.

3.2. Internal Colonisation

My second concern with the notion of post-colonialism flows from the first. It is my submission that the objectives of colonisation are being served by new powers within the former colonised countries. There are two principle ways of looking at this. One way regards the new governments as agents of the coloniser, intent on extracting wealth from the south to the north for the benefit of the north. The second perspective sees the new governments as new colonial agents themselves, intent on extracting wealth from the south for their own benefit. This wealth often ends up in the north as well, but their primary concern is to extract wealth from the country for themselves. In either case we can see the colonial antagonistic mind at work to effect the project of colonisation. The trajectory of events in Zimbabwe leads me to argue that the Zimbabwean government, and indeed possibly governments elsewhere on the continent, fall into the second category.

I'll expand on this idea. Zimbabwe's leadership was and is of a specific nature. The Zimbabwean armed struggle against the colonial antagonist was waged from 1966 to 1979. Those who left the country to lead the armed struggle became in effect the leaders of an establishment that can be thought of as a Zimbabwean state in exile. This state in exile was able to and did raise an army. It exacted donations from Zimbabweans both within the pre-independence state and outside it. As these donations were necessary to the exiled state, in order for it to continue to run and to pursue its

objectives, the payments that the exiled state extracted can be regarded as a kind of taxation or tribute. Such contributions were often freely given. However, within the pre-independence state, and not outside it, sanctions frequently followed failure to comply with the demand for contributions and it was common for these sanctions to be of a brutal nature. The situation here is that of a military state having been effectively created outside the borders of Zimbabwe, led by a military government that was also situated outside the physical boundaries of the country. I call this entity the guerrilla state. It is this guerrilla state that reinvented itself as a political party called ZANU-PF in the last phases of the armed struggle and which gained formal control of the nation to become the Zimbabwean government at Independence. The occupation of a nation by an extractive guerrilla state that had previously claimed to be waging a guerrilla war in the name of the people it occupies is what I call internal colonisation.

How did this state of internal colonisation come about when Zimbabwe was the hope of many in the world, both inside the country and outside it, at its independence in 1980? Indeed, following the guerrilla war and the end of colonial direct rule in 1980, ZANU-PF was almost universally popular in most of Zimbabwe. At that time, Zimbabwe was proud of possessing a number of educated political leaders. It also possessed sound infrastructure and a functioning economic system. This infrastructure and economic system had resulted from about one hundred years of British colonial rule. In addition, events on the continent had given Zimbabwe's new leaders the chance to learn from history. The country also was home to numbers of trained Zimbabweans who had received a good education under the Rhodesian strategy of building a black middle class as a buffer between white settler society and the rest of the population, or as a result of the activities of missionaries. It was not, in most quarters, specifically stated, but it was tacitly expected that these educated Zimbabwean leaders and people would perform well with respect to maintaining and developing the economic, political and social pillars of the nation.

Social reforms were quickly carried out by the incoming ZANU-PF government. The reforms led to improved access to services such as health and education for the majority. The remains of the Rhodesian system of apartheid, which had already begun to be dismantled during the war, were finally done away with. These reforms were a cause for increased confidence in the ZANU-PF government, that had been ushered in by the people with elation at Independence. Zimbabweans soon boasted to others and to themselves that they were amongst the most literate and most intellectually accomplished people on the African continent.

Thirty-eight years after Independence Zimbabwe is on its knees socially, politically and economically. Following leadership change in November last year, in an action that Zimbabweans coyly name 'the coup that was not a coup', the country is led de-facto by a military government. The current president is only the second head of state to govern the country in nearly four decades. Unemployment stands as high as 95% by some estimates, although the government recently released a figure of 6,62% while in 2014 the World Bank quoted a figure of 4%. The financial system is living on borrowed time. Annual inflation was at more than 14% in 2017. The local currency is artificial and not exchangeable. Citizens are unable to access cash from banks. There are no signs of corruption being curbed. The budget deficit is 12% of Gross Domestic Product. The economic challenges have affected the government's ability to deliver social services almost to the point of non-delivery. All the pillars of the Zimbabwean nation are very crumbled.

4. THE CRISIS OF PERSONHOOD

What happened in Zimbabwe is that after Independence, ZANU-PF embarked on a strategy to entrench itself in power at the same time that it engaged in social reforms. The strategy of entrenchment had three principle components. Through propagating a 'glorious saviour' myth of its ascent to power, the ZANU-PF government bought time in which to entrench its rule.

The first part of the ZANU-PF strategy of entrenchment was and remains control of the population. This was and continues to be done by controlling the media and, where necessary, by intimidation that deployed – in the new state against citizens – the practices of the guerrilla war. The second set of tactics involved neutralising rivals. This was done in a number of ways. On the one hand, rivals were kept happy by buying them off. Another tactic was establishment of complex corruption networks that served as an incentive for loyalty, but that also trapped individuals into silence and obedience. Where these tactics did not work, rivals were eliminated. The third feature of the entrenchment strategy was the holding of regular elections. The election served to provide information about opposition patterns and to legitimise the standing government. Leaders were kept in line by a combination of carrot-and-stick and favour-and fear-incentives. The overall effect was a level of *gleichschaltung*¹, or the standardisation of political, social and economic institutions in the

¹'Gleichschaltung' refers to the process of achieving rigid uniformity and cooperation within an authoritarian state

manner that was first seen with the National Socialist – Nazi - government of Germany in the last century.

The Zimbabwean people colluded in this internal colonisation. In the beginning, most appeared too jubilant at what they took to be the defeat of the colonial regime to interrogate their new government. There were no objective voices raised in Zimbabwe when the triumphant guerrilla state and its armies marched into the country at the beginning of the internal colonisation process.

I remember women singing ecstatic but incredibly ill-advised songs at that time. For example, one of the songs exhorted Mr Mugabe to get onto the women's backs because the women wanted to piggyback him in a towel. There was no public critique of this kind of behaviour from any quarter. Nor do I remember any private critique. People went with the tide. It was a wild orgy of celebration. Today some older Zimbabweans say, 'Oh, we knew...we knew Mr Mugabe this, Mr Mugabe that...' but at the time they were silent. When pressed, they contend that they were silent because they feared the incoming, tribute-demanding, guerrilla state that had once been in exile and had now become the recognised national government within the country. Other Zimbabweans simply did not know anything beyond the celebrations they saw. These responses persist until today, decades after Independence. To this day, many remain silent out of fear. Others chuckle and continue as before. Thus, whether conditioned by the media, terrified by intimidation, depleted of resources or all of these or none of these, the generality of the population was and is unable to organise any successful counteraction, or to construct any significant alternative.

The behaviours described above were performed by Zimbabweans. They were chosen and engaged in consciously. This is the crisis of personhood that I referred to earlier. The fact that needs to be faced is that, even if colonial forces exerted pressure on Zimbabweans, it was possible at any point for any of the stakeholders concerned to choose to act differently. Yet, virtually all the protagonists of the nation of Zimbabwe saw fit to behave in ways that resulted in Zimbabwe being the broken state that it is today. The Zimbabwean nation, both its leadership and its people, forsook responsibility as their nation tumbled to ruin. Even today, people and government blithely utter empty phrases such as 'business as usual', 'open for business' and 'please pass the popcorn' even though their homeland is perishing. Zimbabweans as a nation has failed utterly to engage with the tragedy of its own implosion.

I invoke three ideas to unpack this horrible state of affairs. The first idea is that of ignorance. The second is the idea of trauma. The idea of vicarious gratification is the third.

4.1 Ignorance and the Crisis of Personhood

Ignorance applies to both people and leadership. It is related to control of the people. Because ignorance is entangled with control of the people, it appears as though ignorance operates only within the people and not within the leadership. I argue that only an ignorant leadership can exert control over the citizenry in such a manner and to such an extent that the citizens can no longer contribute to strengthening and advancing the nation. The Zimbabwean leadership did not know how to engage the people in the project of constructing a prosperous nation. The Zimbabwean leadership might even have been ignorant of the fact that constructing a prosperous nation is the role of national leader. There are many facets to ignorance of leadership, which include personal and social history, lack of specific leadership education and lack of exposure to key experiences.

The ignorance of the people derives from their wish for a supreme authority that absolves them of personal engagement with and responsibility for the affairs of their nation. This desire is often related to extreme control in the past and includes that form of control found in tribal societies. Thus the population has no concept of itself as the citizenry of a modern nation state, nor of the roles and obligations of the citizens of such a state. The colonising guerrilla state gladly takes over the role of supreme authority that has been left vacant by the end of direct European colonial rule. It presents a particular image of itself and constructs a particular narrative around itself. Emerging from a tribal society into a period of direct colonial rule followed by a ferocious war, in the absence of information to the contrary, the people believe the myth of the guerrilla state constructed by that state.

With time, however, evidence of the dictatorial nature of the colonising guerrilla state comes to light. It is an incremental process. With the standardisation of information, news of state atrocities comes in dribs and drabs. The atrocities themselves occur against people designated as being in some way 'other': They are 'dissidents' often due to ethnicity; they are foot soldiers of the European colonising forces; they are opposition or, they are rural folk who are merely a resource for the guerrilla state and have no significance in and of themselves. Finally, as we hear today, they are Zimbabweans who do not have liberation war credentials. Over time, such categories of otherness with respect to the guerrilla state broaden to include more and more citizens. Eventually each person in the population is confronted with the truth of the repressive nature of the internal colonisers. Every individual is

faced, sooner or later, with the choice either of believing the new evidence concerning the nation's supreme authority or discounting this evidence. Whether the new evidence is accepted or rejected, its existence produces extreme levels of cognitive dissonance in the population as old beliefs become unstable. This cognitive dissonance is experienced as conflict and tension, in other words, as a nervous condition that exacerbates previous nervous conditions. As such it leads to the second idea around the genesis of the crisis of African personhood. This is the idea of trauma.

4.2 Trauma and the Crisis of Personhood

Trauma is a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental, emotional or physical stress or injury. Trauma results from an event, or from a series of events, or from a set of circumstances harmful or life threatening in any way, as experienced by an individual. Harmful or life-threatening events are by definition violent. Thus the experience of violence is a leading cause of trauma. Trauma research identifies anxiety as a common symptom of the condition. Other symptoms are anger, sadness and emotional outbursts. These effects are long-lasting and affect the individual's functioning and mental, physical, emotional or spiritual wellbeing.

In Zimbabwe, research by the government-established Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration found that Zimbabweans have suffered violence for close on a thousand years. Initially, in this period, was the violence of intertribal fights of rival kingdoms of the Shona-speaking groupings. These rivalries were followed by Rozvi and Nguni invasions. After these invasions came a brutal colonisation. Following colonisation a liberation struggle, in which almost no human atrocity was considered taboo, was waged. At the end of the liberation struggle, people endured suppression and oppression under Robert Mugabe's government. Today, there is more of the same under the current leadership. The trauma inflicted on the people of Zimbabwe by the ZANU-PF government has a dimension not present in the other traumas I have mentioned. This is the element of betrayal of the people's faith. While dealing with the trauma of the atrocities themselves, people are also dealing with the effects of betrayal which include shock, loss and grief, morbid preoccupation, damaged self-esteem, self-doubt and anger.

Research has further revealed that prolonged exposure to trauma can change the hormonal environment in the body, and that such hormonal changes can affect both the behaviour of a traumatised person as well as the development of a foetus within a traumatised person. It has been found that prolonged exposure to trauma can affect the DNA structure in the body and that these

changed structures of DNA can be inherited. Thus it is possible that the traumas we have suffered in our part of the world have been encoded into our being through our genetic material. Zimbabweans and other peoples whose history includes colonisation are traumatised beings whose behaviour acts out the effects of this traumatising.

The notion of trauma can help us to understand why both populations and their leaders on our continent choose to behave in unimaginably destructive ways. Both the leaders and the people are traumatised human beings.

4.3 Vicarious gratification and the crisis of personhood

The third idea, that of vicarious gratification, flows from the notion of trauma. The acknowledgement at some level of experience - which need not be conscious - that I have been injured and that I am vulnerable induces the experience of powerlessness. To overcome this state of powerlessness, the individual who is experiencing such a state may identify, consciously or unconsciously, with a powerful entity. This identification allows the individual to stake a claim in that powerful entity's power to compensate for the power that is lacked by the self. Through this identification, the powerless individual opens herself up psychologically and emotionally to a vicarious experience of power when the power holder displays power over others. Thus human beings who experience powerlessness can become ecstatic at the brutalisation of other people who are perceived as powerless, and, when sanctioned by a power holder, will participate in this brutalisation of others also. It is incumbent on us to remember that this state of powerlessness has been experienced by our entire citizenry, leaders and led. Before obtaining positions of power, our leaders were amongst the powerless who were ruled by the colonial antagonist. Our leaders often experienced extreme forms of trauma visited on them by the colonial antagonist. The authority of struggling for liberation and the experience of power thereafter thus unleashed latent ferocity and bloodthirstiness in many of the leaders on our continent.

This unleashing of ruthlessness demonstrates one of the more pernicious attributes of this system of vicarious gratification. The powerless - in the binary of powerful and powerless - are ready at any moment to step into the shoes of the power holder. The only separation between them is opportunity. Understanding this, the power holder becomes more oppressive towards the powerless. The led and the leaders have become existentially entangled with each other.

Another dimension of vicarious gratification is that we love to see black people suffer. We identify blackness as the source of suffering. Therefore we are gratified when that blackness is punished in someone else. The punishment of the other means that the blackness has been punished already so that we ourselves will not have to be punished for being black.

Ignorant, traumatised people who perceive themselves as powerless build dysfunctional nations. There is a crisis of personhood. This condition culminates in crises in the nation's social, political and economic institutions.

5. ENGAGING WITH OUR CONDITION THROUGH THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

So, as a continent, as nations, as individuals, we have a lot of work to do. We have to engage in the difficult labour of recreating our personhood in a manner that enables us to thrive. We need to renew our social, political and economic institutions in order to create nations that flourish. We do this, as Bob Marley and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have informed us, by freeing our minds from the grip of the colonial antagonist. I am here tonight to argue that the creative economy is a foundational institution in achieving these goals.

That the planet has arrived at a moment in its development where it is championing creative economies is not fortuitous. Developments over thousands of years have led to large-scale fabrication of the products that human beings need. This process of upscaling the production of goods began with domesticating the provision of food through agriculture. Over time, the process of amplifying the provision of goods spread to other areas of endeavour, such as the provision of clothing, the provision of shelter and the provision of movement from one place to another. These processes were bound up with and flowed from developments in technology. The rate of provision of goods increased exponentially with the advent of industrialisation, which itself was driven by technological advances. Developments in technology require deployment of human beings' creative capacities, thus these technological improvements were themselves the outcome of creative interventions. Here, I am emphasising that no significant human advancement has ever taken place without tapping human creative potential.

Today technology is impacting all areas of human endeavour and experience at increasingly accelerating rates. This impact is also affecting that area of endeavour that we call the arts. Technology has impacted on the arts to the extent that provision of arts goods has, in many countries,

been up-scaled to an industrial level. Combining the creative processes of technology and the arts, we have today an area of endeavour that is called the creative industries. The system in which these creative industries function is called the creative economy.

5.1 The Creative Economy

An economy is a system where value circulates. In the traditional economy the things that are valued are resources such as land, labour and raw materials. In the creative economy, the things that are valued are resources possessed by all individuals, namely the contents of our minds, our hearts and our souls, and the manifestation of these contents as our emotions. The creative economy values those products that come from our imagination. Imagination comes from experience, so our experience of our universe is our valuable resource in the creative economy.

Africa has so far largely scorned the creative economy, discounting it as a frivolity and a distraction. At least that is how many of our governments have justified their attitude towards the creative economy. It is possible, though, that such statements are made to camouflage other intentions. It may well be that the line many African states have taken toward the creative economy is a pretext because the creative economy is uncommonly powerful at economic, political and social levels in our communities.

At the economic level, the creative economy puts products into markets. The news at the moment is about Nigerian American author Toni Adeyemi's seven figure book deal for her debut children's fantasy novel. Marvel Films has just celebrated *Black Panther* box office takings surpassing the billion-dollar mark around a month after the movie's release. I am sure there are many people in this room who have invested in Bitcoin and others who are devising new ways of doing things using block chain technology, for example. Here at the university, we are all reading text books which have to be bought. It is a rare person indeed who does not switch the television on once in a while or listen to music. We all participate in the creative economy and are buyers in its markets.

However, the creative economy does not only put products into markets. At the political level, the creative economy disseminates ideas into groups, communities and nations. The creative economy offers people alternatives and gives them a voice in which a desire for alternatives may be expressed. By its nature the creative economy works against totalitarianism.

At the social level, the creative economy puts representations of the world into society and into our minds. When we engage with the products of the creative economy, its novels, its films, its music, technology, these become part of our experience and so the creative economy also determines who we are and how we view the world. The creative economy affects how we relate to ourselves, to others and to objects in our universe. It influences the values that societies embrace. It also allows us to revisit past experience in a way that reframes these experiences for us, thus freeing our minds from old patterns. Yes, it fashions and refashions the mind. As such, the creative economy is a wonderful invitation to us to re-create ourselves and our society and its institutions. This re-creation can be done in the image that we decide upon.

In the past, astute governments prioritised those aspects of human creativity that revolutionised the material aspects of human existence, and this put a premium on physical raw materials. Today astute governments are increasingly championing those aspects of human creativity that transform the intangible aspects of our existence and this puts a premium on incorporeal raw materials. This is where our trauma and our nervous conditions become the raw material that we use to create products that go on to re-fashion us in an uplifting manner.

It is possible of course for a creative economy to create destructive products. It is common knowledge how over the course of half a millennium the colonial antagonist produced creative economy products that vilified the colonial protagonist. Protectors of the colonial antagonistic mind continue to ensure, through gate-keeping, that the colonised protagonist does not express herself in a creatively redemptive manner. Beneficial creative economies require careful construction through appropriate strategies for education, funding and distribution. Failure to ensure that beneficial creative economies are constructed will have dire consequences. The following two videos illustrate what I mean and demonstrate how Zimbabwe is being militarised by creative economy products that feature one of Zimbabwe's most talented and popular young musicians.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xESEnQEivk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bP6v19ZTS0U>

I believe that the collaboration resulted from dire need on the part of the young man. He approached me for help with his career before this collaboration began. However, I was not able to assist and now this is the path he has taken. The militarisation on the part of the government however is a deliberate action. This week's edition of *The Daily News* on Sunday reported five thousand soldiers deployed to

Zimbabwe's rural areas. Therefore it is of profound importance that we put in place strategies that will build creative economies that foster peace, democracy and the best that is within us.

Zakes Mda expounds on this point in his fine book, *Justify the Enemy: Becoming Human in South Africa* (pp 35-36). In this text, Bra Zakes reminds us that when we create narrative our goal is not to create characters that are formulaically good or bad, but characters who are understandable in the light of their experiences.

This is what he says – I'm going to read quite a long quote –

' When we black children of South Africa were growing up, we were taught by our parents, but especially by our grandparents, that we were not fully human until someone made us human. Humanity, our elders believed, was not something you were born with. Rather it was endowed by other people. You were therefore a person because of other people. They called this philosophy ubuntu in the Nguni language and botho in the Sotho languages. And how do others endow you with humanity? By giving you bounties of compassion and generosity. (He says) I have since added tolerance to this list, but I do not remember our elders mentioning that particular virtue.) When you thanked someone who had been compassionate and generous to you, you uttered the words: 'You have made me into a person.' As a beneficiary of ubuntu you had to make others into people, too, by showering them with compassion and generosity. Through deeds of compassion and generosity you could attain a high level of humanity, a level that enabled you to show ubuntu to the enemy.'

Adopting the method of justifying the enemy as Bra Zakes exhorts us to, we produce characters that are fully human in the categories of both perpetrator and survivor. We intervene in and act to remedy the crisis of personhood. This does not only apply to narrative. It applies to all products of the creative economy, including technological products. We require a vision for tools of mass construction, rather than tools of mass destruction. By justifying the enemy in our creative endeavours, we act with compassion and generosity, creating the potential for the humanising of those who were enemies and for realising an improved quality of humanity in ourselves. We claim a healthy humanity where justice takes its course in a merciful manner.

South Africa is performing admirably in developing its creative economy when compared with other African states. However, our creative economies will not succeed unless, in addition to structuring them appropriately, we are able to scale them adequately. The example everyone knows of successful

scaling is Nollywood. This is why, as we develop our national products, markets and systems, we must have the end goal in sight, namely that ultimately these structures must feed into regional and also into a continental creative economy. On this note, I conclude with a call to African leaders to invest astutely, with the objective of improving life for all, in the creative economy at national, regional and continental level. I make my call to the continent, but especially to governments that are lagging behind in this respect, such as my own government in Zimbabwe. I hope President Mnangagwa will hear and heed this call.

Finally, I have not had time to touch on some of the issues that are relevant to tonight's discussion, such as gender. In that respect I wonder whether anyone here had a question in the beginning when I spoke of some Zimbabwean women filmmakers who wanted to make a film about post-partum depression. Was there perhaps a question that was muttered under someone's breath? Well, whether the question was on our minds this evening or not, I'd like to answer it. The answer is no, the women filmmakers did not get funding to make their documentaries.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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