# The Cost of Equality

## *The Struggles of Marginalised Groups in South Africa*

by

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# Preface

South Africa's democracy is still relatively young compared to many other African nations that gained independence from colonial rule earlier. The apartheid regime, led by the Afrikaner National Party, held power for 46 years, from 1948 until the historic democratic transition in 1994. This regime only relinquished control after decades of resistance, marked by intense struggle and sacrifice. The country's liberation was hard-won, achieved through the relentless efforts, suffering, and ultimate sacrifices of countless freedom fighters, many of whom did not live to witness or enjoy the fruits of the freedom they fought for. Music has long been central to South Africa's struggle for freedom, serving as both a tool of resistance and a reflection of the country's social dynamics. In the early days of broadcasting, radio, one of the most influential forms of mass communication, was shaped by the apartheid regime's preferential policies. Popular music that appealed to white audiences was prioritised, as white South Africans were the primary target market during the establishment of radio transmission in the country. Access to radio programming was also deeply unequal among black communities, often divided along ethnic lines. This form of cultural discrimination was reinforced by the geographic placement of radio stations, which were largely situated in areas dominated by specific linguistic and cultural groups, further marginalising minority black ethnic communities. Radio programming in South Africa was eventually extended to the black population, but initially only catered to the Zulu, Xhosa, and Sotho-speaking communities. It wasn't until the 1960s that other black South African groups were granted access to air their languages and music through Bantu Radio stations. The introduction of television in the 1970s followed a similar pattern of exclusion and selective

representation. Shockingly, more than 30 years after the advent of democracy and the rise of the first democratically elected government, these imbalances persist. This historical trajectory reveals not only the entrenched marginalisation between white and black South Africans, but also the continued sidelining of minority black groups by dominant black ethnic communities.

This book exposes a persistent and deeply embedded pattern of inequality, where black ethnic majority groups are consistently prioritised over black ethnic minority communities. It reveals how this systematic marginalisation has evolved into a culture of exclusion that deprives black minority groups of equal opportunities, particularly within the media industry. As a result, the cultural expressions of these communities, including music, film, television stories, and dramas, remain underrepresented on mainstream radio and television platforms. This sidelining not only limits creative visibility but also reinforces a legacy of exclusion that continues to shape access and recognition in the post-apartheid era. This form of systemic marginalisation not only limits the creative opportunities available to individuals from black minority groups but also infringes on their constitutional right to freedom of expression. Institutions like the SABC, through their role as gatekeepers, have restricted and continue to hinder the visibility and promotion of minority languages in radio and television broadcasting. Because of their minority status, the cultural products of black minority groups were often deemed commercially unviable, as the media industry, driven by profit, prioritises audience size to maximise revenue. This book interrogates how the dominant narrative of the black majority continues to eclipse the voices and lived experiences of marginalised black minority communities, who still bear the burden of linguistic and cultural exclusion. This enduring disparity is deeply rooted in colonial and apartheid-era policies that deliberately enforced ethnic segregation

and the separate development of black South Africans. As a result, certain ethnic groups within the black community were systematically marginalised, while others received preferential treatment. The lasting effects of these discriminatory policies remain visible across multiple sectors, including the economy, commerce, media, politics, and the music industry. These entrenched inequalities have afforded some communities significant advantages while placing others at a persistent disadvantage, ultimately shaping the course of their historical, socio-economic, and cultural development.

This book offers a meticulous examination of the narratives that have shaped the cultural production of black minority groups in South Africa, particularly in popular music and film, within the broader media industry. It provides a compelling exploration of the historical journey of these marginalised communities, tracing the evolution of their creative expressions over time. In doing so, it highlights the persistent challenges faced by both the artists and their audiences, who continue to be denied equal access to the platforms and privileges that have long been available to the black majority. By interrogating how cultural identity, language, and representation have been unevenly appropriated and amplified, the book contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex intersections between culture, identity, and structural inequality within South Africa's rich musical and media heritage. The dominance of the black majority in the media production of music, film, and drama underscores a persistent market marginality and cultural exclusion that continues to disadvantage black minority groups. This form of systemic discrimination not only undermines their creative survival but also denies them the right to access and enjoy their own cultural products in the same way the black majority does.

The deeply entrenched mythology inherited from apartheid, rooted in the ideology of separate development, constructed a historical narrative that primarily focused on the dichotomy between the black majority and the white minority. However, this same system also reinforced a secondary divide, between the black majority and black minority, further deepening the socio-economic and cultural inequalities that persist in post-apartheid South Africa. The stark divide between the affluent and the impoverished has been a major driver of the widespread inequality that continues to define South African society. However, existing literature tends to focus predominantly on the dichotomy between the black majority and the white minority, often overlooking the equally significant divide between the black majority and black minority groups. This oversight results in a limited understanding of the complex socio-political dynamics at play, failing to capture the distinct struggles of both groups. Consequently, the nuanced experiences of the black minority, along with the internal disparities within the black community, are frequently overshadowed by dominant narratives that celebrate post-apartheid democratic progress while neglecting the unfinished business of social justice and equitable representation.

In the aftermath of apartheid and throughout South Africa's transition to democracy, much attention has been given to the country's broader success stories, often overlooking the complex challenges faced by black minority groups. This neglect is especially evident within the media industry, where societal privileges tend to favour the black majority. Recognising this significant gap in mainstream academic discourse, this book aims to move beyond conventional narratives and serve as a catalyst for challenging and reshaping the ndp prevailing status quo. The book intentionally departs from the dominant narrative, acting as a catalyst for change by presenting a counter-narrative that confronts existing imbalances. Through this

innovative approach, it aims not only to challenge but also to reshape the discourse, offering a fresh and nuanced perspective that fills critical gaps in our understanding. By exploring the genuine struggles and complexities experienced by both the black majority and minority, the book sheds light on persistent disparities that endure despite South Africa's democratic progress. Strategically positioned as a counter-narrative, this book challenges the prevailing one-sided portrayal of South African urban culture, especially within the sphere of popular music. It seeks to deconstruct and critically examine the dominant narrative that has shaped both national discourse and global perceptions of South Africa's musical landscape. By offering a more comprehensive and inclusive perspective, the book aims to make a meaningful contribution to academic dialogue, fostering a deeper understanding of the complex social and cultural dynamics that define South African society.

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# Introduction

South Africa continues to grapple with the challenges of its relatively young democracy, navigating a complex landscape marked by persistent economic hardships, soaring unemployment rates, and enduring racial tensions that, while no longer overt, are carefully managed across all levels of society. The government faces significant difficulties, including managing an escalating foreign debt burden, addressing the multifaceted issues surrounding immigration, and combating widespread corruption that undermines public trust and effective governance. These contemporary struggles unfold against the lingering shadows of apartheid's legacy, characterised by deep-rooted separatism, entrenched racial divisions, ethnic fragmentation, and systemic discrimination. This legacy permeates numerous sectors of society, where entrenched privileges enable the powerful to continually undermine the marginalised. The gap between the wealthy and the poor widens relentlessly, exacerbating economic inequality and fuelling social instability. Within this context, systematic marginalisation has entrenched barriers that disproportionately impact black minority groups, creating layers of exclusion that restrict their access to resources and opportunities. Their languages are relegated to the margins, their cultural expressions sidelined, and their creative contributions undervalued or outright ignored. Despite the idealistic promise of the "Rainbow Nation," these groups often find their identities diminished or overlooked, as the broader national narrative tends to prioritise dominant cultural groups and majority experiences. This ongoing marginalisation not only impedes the full realisation of social justice but also undermines the richness and diversity that should be celebrated as foundational to South Africa's identity. The struggle to

bridge these divides remains a critical challenge for the nation as it strives toward inclusive growth, equitable representation, and genuine unity.

Against this backdrop, this book delves into the vibrant yet often overlooked journey of black minority popular cultural expression within South Africa's creative industries. It focuses on how the music, film, and television programming produced by black minority groups continue to be systematically marginalised, despite their artistic merit and cultural significance. This exploration reveals a powerful narrative of evolution, resilience, and perseverance, wherein these communities have, in the face of persistent exclusion and limited access to mainstream platforms, managed to sustain and elevate their cultural products. The book chronicles how, over time, black minority groups have creatively resisted the forces of erasure, using music and televised storytelling as tools to assert their presence, protect their heritage, and preserve their unique cultural identities. It uncovers the mechanisms through which marginalisation within the media has not only restricted visibility but has also shaped the trajectory of identity formation among these communities. Through the lens of music in particular, the research illustrates how this art form has served as a powerful medium of resistance, a vehicle for self-definition, a platform for cultural negotiation, and a weapon for reclaiming space in a media environment that often renders minority voices invisible. Music, in this context, emerges not merely as entertainment but as a deeply political and strategic form of expression, a negotiating tool for equality and dismantling of a systemic marginalisation within the media industry. Artists from black minority backgrounds have long used song to articulate the pain of exclusion, celebrate their linguistic heritage, and critique dominant cultural narratives that homogenise black experiences under a majority identity. Television, too, becomes a contested space, one where stories that reflect the everyday realities,

values, and traditions of minority communities struggle for representation in a system that privileges popular majority culture.

By centring these experiences, the book aims to illuminate the cultural richness and historical significance of black minority contributions to South Africa's creative industries. It challenges readers to reconsider whose voices are amplified and whose stories remain in the margins, urging a rethinking of inclusivity, equity, and cultural justice in the shaping of the national media landscape. The narrative compellingly captures the enduring struggles and quiet triumphs of black minority musicians as they strive for ethnic and cultural recognition within South Africa's mainstream creative industries, industries largely concentrated in major cities and urban centres that often reflect the tastes, languages, and identities of the black dominant groups. This book foregrounds the historical and ongoing battle waged by these artists to carve out a space for their voices in a media landscape that tends to homogenise black identity under a single, majority-dominated narrative. In examining this one-sided portrayal of black cultural identity within the creative industry and the media, the book places particular emphasis on the pioneering generation of black minority musicians, those who, despite systemic neglect, linguistic erasure, and limited access to platforms, persisted in asserting the legitimacy of their culture through music. These trailblazers not only resisted cultural invisibility but also laid the foundation for future generations, creating pathways for contemporary artists to continue the struggle for representation, linguistic justice, and cultural pride.

By tracing this continuum, the book highlights how music becomes more than an artistic outlet; it becomes a site of resistance, a repository of memory, and a vessel for identity construction. Within this narrative, language, culture, and identity emerge as central pillars in unpacking the deep-rooted marginalisation experienced and

continually endured by black minority groups, even within the framework of South Africa's democratic dispensation. These elements serve as critical lenses through which the enduring legacy of exclusion can be understood, revealing how systemic inequalities persist in shaping who is seen, heard, and valued in the nation's cultural and media landscapes. It reveals how black minority music, often forged in the margins, has served as both a cultural stronghold and a subtle yet powerful catalyst for social change. Through lyrics, performance styles, instrumentation, and language choice, these musicians challenge dominant narratives, affirm the worth of their communities, and reimagine spaces of inclusion within the broader cultural economy. The research also underscores the resilience of black minority musical traditions and their ongoing contributions to South Africa's rich and diverse sonic landscape. It invites a rethinking of what constitutes "mainstream" by illuminating the profound role that marginalised voices have played, and continue to play, in shaping the cultural identity of the nation. In doing so, the book affirms the transformative power of artistic expression in the pursuit of visibility, equity, and inclusivity in the dynamic realm of popular music.

Envisioned as a powerful testament to the author's unwavering commitment to amplifying the voices and cultural legacy of South Africa's so-called black minority groups, this book places particular emphasis on the richness and resilience of their popular music traditions. More than a historical account, the narrative serves as both a cultural celebration and a bold call to action, aiming to bridge longstanding divides and foster unity among black South Africans across ethnic lines. At its heart, the book challenges the persistent prejudices and systemic discrimination that continue to echo the painful legacy of apartheid, particularly the policies of separate development or separate privileges that fractured communities and stratified identities. By spotlighting the vibrant creativity, musical

ingenuity, and cultural dynamism of black minority communities, the book seeks to reframe the national consciousness, moving beyond outdated notions of majority versus minority, and instead embracing a more inclusive vision of cultural equity. It aspires to nurture a renewed sense of solidarity that rejects inherited biases and dismantles the entrenched mindset of ethnic superiority or marginalisation. Ultimately, this work contributes to building a society where all black South Africans, regardless of ethnic background, can see their cultural expressions recognised, respected, and celebrated on equal terms.

Harnessing the transformative power of music within the creative industry and the media, this book seeks to confront and dismantle the enduring legacies of apartheid's cultural and social stratification. It directly challenges the subtle yet persistent ideologies that continue to shape marginality and inequality within the black community, ideologies that privilege certain ethnic groups over others in media visibility, resource access, and cultural valuation. By exposing these inherited patterns of exclusion, the book advocates for a fundamental paradigm shift in how ethnic and cultural representation is approached in South African media. It calls for a deliberate rebalancing of narratives, moving away from profit-driven, majority-centric portrayals that marginalise minority voices and toward a more equitable media landscape that truly reflects the nation's diverse black identities. At its core, the book honours the resilience and creative ingenuity of black minority artists who have carved out space for their cultural expressions despite systemic marginalisation. Yet it does more than simply celebrate their tenacity; it issues a powerful call to action. The book urges stakeholders, academics, policymakers, media producers, and the broader public to reckon with the lingering shadows of apartheid and work collectively to build a cultural environment where all black South Africans are given equal space to

thrive. By promoting diversity, championing inclusivity, and rejecting reductive ethnic hierarchies, this work envisions a more harmonious, representative, and socially just South Africa, one where unity is built not on sameness but on the richness of difference.

The apartheid regime, through its calculated and divisive strategies, systematically engineered a cultural hierarchy that privileged certain South African black ethnic groups while marginalising others. This was not just a political or economic stratification; it extended deeply into the cultural and linguistic spheres. One of the clearest manifestations of this cultural hegemony was the establishment of Bantu Radio stations and regional television platforms, where the marginality of the black minority groups was visible. These state-controlled media outlets were designed to reinforce ethnic divisions under the guise of separate development, but in practice, they favoured the languages and cultures of select black ethnic groups. This selective amplification resulted in the persistent under-representation and cultural sidelining of others, whose languages and stories received little to no coverage. Tragically, the residual effects of this orchestrated cultural imbalance continue to echo in contemporary South Africa. Today, certain black ethnic groups still enjoy disproportionate visibility and media presence, while others struggle to find platforms for their cultural expressions. Television programming, in particular, reflects these historical inequities, with limited airtime and support afforded to the voices, narratives, and creative content of black minority groups in their own languages. These patterns of exclusion are not merely relics of a bygone era; they are embedded within the very structures of post-apartheid cultural life.

The book also interrogates national symbols, such as the national anthem, which is intended to reflect collective unity and national

pride. Yet, even in this emblem of supposed inclusivity, marginalisation persists. The national anthem, while multilingual, features only the languages that are deemed 'majority' or 'nationally significant,' conspicuously omitting others spoken by black minority groups. This exclusion, though subtle, is deeply symbolic. It signals a continued unwillingness to embrace the full spectrum of South Africa's cultural and linguistic diversity. Far from being a benign oversight, such omissions serve as acts of cultural erasure, reinforcing a silent yet powerful message about whose identities matter most in the national imagination. By shedding light on these enduring forms of cultural inequality, the book calls into question the integrity of the "rainbow nation" ideal and suggests a critical reassessment of how national identity is constructed, represented, and lived in post-apartheid South Africa. It invites readers to consider how true unity cannot be achieved while the voices, languages, and creative contributions of entire communities remain marginalised and unacknowledged.

# Chapter 1:
# Reimagining Equality:
# Challenging the Invisible Apartheid of Today's South Africa

More than three decades after the official end of apartheid, South Africa continues to grapple with its deeply entrenched legacy, one that extends far beyond the dismantling of legal and political structures. While 1994 marked the beginning of a democratic era, the transition to freedom was primarily political, leaving the socio-economic architecture of apartheid largely intact, underpinned by inequality. What has since emerged is a more covert, yet equally pernicious, system of exclusion: a modern iteration of apartheid that operates through structural inequalities, market-driven gatekeeping, and culturally embedded biases. These newer forms of exclusion—often cloaked in the language of meritocracy and economic rationality- reproduce the same hierarchies that apartheid once enforced by law in a different way. This chapter interrogates the persistence of apartheid's logic in post-apartheid South Africa, exploring how its residues are embedded in institutional cultures, social attitudes, and economic systems. It argues that the failure to redistribute land, wealth, and cultural capital meaningfully has allowed apartheid's invisible machinery to adapt rather than disappear. Through mechanisms such as colourism, linguistic exclusion, rural marginalisation, and selective economic access, new forms of privilege have emerged, privileges that continue to favour proximity to whiteness, urbanity, and dominant cultural norms. These dynamics have rendered many state-led reforms, such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and Employment Equity,

performative at best and exploitative at worst, as they are often subverted through practices like fronting and nepotism.

This chapter locates the continued marginalisation of historically disadvantaged communities not only in economic disparities but in the lingering psychological and social architecture of apartheid. It draws attention to the persistence of a "social apartheid," a system of informal segregation perpetuated through spatial patterns, workplace cultures, language hierarchies, and everyday interactions. The chapter further explores how apartheid's ideology of separation has been internalised and normalised, shaping instincts of territorialism and sameness that stifle efforts at genuine social integration and collective healing. By focusing on the intersections between policy, power, identity, and everyday life, this chapter challenges the notion that apartheid ended in 1994. Instead, it suggests that apartheid has mutated, moving from an overt legal regime to a subtle but deeply entrenched cultural and structural force as described by Hall (1991, p. 91) that "Economic marginalization is often subtle". The chapter calls for a reimagining of liberation that moves beyond symbolic represent-tation or access, toward the radical restructuring of resources, narratives, and relationships. Only by confronting this multifaceted legacy, its economic, psychological, and social dimensions, can South Africa begin to realise the promise of a truly inclusive and equitable democracy.

In the African continent, the colonial project, even though it has ended politically, still has remnants of its currency within the continent in various ways. In South Africa, in particular, apartheid left behind deeply entrenched and multilayered inequalities that continue to shape the socio-economic and cultural landscape to this day (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012; Cooper, 1994). While the formal structures of apartheid were dismantled with the advent of democracy in 1994, its

legacy persists in more insidious and less visible forms (Alexander, 2007). What has emerged in its place is a modern iteration of apartheid, a systemic and structural form of oppression that no longer relies on explicit force or legislative brutality to marginalise people. Instead, it manifests through complex dynamics such as racial inequality, ethnic exclusion, colourism, urban versus rural privilege, unequal access to quality education, and highly selective job markets. For example, factors such as physical space, skin colour, and ethnicity are often manipulated through isolationist strategies that serve to uphold social privilege (Maylam, 1990; Smith, 2003). These elements become tools for reinforcing exclusion and maintaining power structures, where only those deemed as belonging to a so-called "privileged class" are granted access, recognition, and comfort within certain environments. This separation is not accidental; it is a deliberate form of social engineering that positions some as inherently worthy while marginalising others as perpetual outsiders. This new form of exclusion, often disguised as meritocracy or market-driven logic, reinforces the same hierarchies that apartheid once explicitly encoded into law. In particular, it privileges those with proximity to whiteness, urban centers, and dominant cultural or linguistic norms, while continuing to disadvantage the poor, rural populations, and speakers of minority languages.

These forms of privilege operate subtly but effectively, deciding who gets to access better living spaces, higher education, who finds employment, who is heard in the media, and who remains invisible in the national narrative. Importantly, when South Africa achieved democracy, it did so primarily through political liberation, not through a parallel transformation of economic power structures. This meant that those who attained political power had limited control over the economic direction that shaped their lives and the lives of future generations. The legacy of economic disenfranchisement

continued to weigh heavily on Black, Coloured, and Indian communities, while economic privilege remained largely concentrated among white populations. Although political power created some avenues for economic participation among the previously marginalised, these opportunities were not equally accessible. A new layer of marginalisation emerged, one that operated within the broader marginalised groups, often favouring the majority among them and further sidelining minority voices within these communities. The economy, and by extension the opportunities for business ownership, land redistribution, and cultural capital, remained largely in the hands of a privileged few. This meant that while voting rights were granted and apartheid laws abolished, economic and social inequalities remained deeply entrenched—and in many ways have even widened in the post-apartheid era. The result is a society where freedom is unevenly distributed, and opportunity is still determined by historical fault lines. For many South Africans, especially those from historically marginalised ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, true liberation remains elusive. The promise of equality must therefore be reimagined—not merely as a legal or symbolic gesture, but as a tangible restructuring of power, resources, and representation across all sectors of society.

The South African political landscape continues to grapple with a range of complex and deeply rooted social reforms aimed at addressing the historical injustices of apartheid. Key among these are efforts to redistribute land, promote economic equality, and reduce poverty among the majority of the population, particularly Black and Coloured communities who remain disproportionately affected by systemic exclusion (Netshivhambe, 2025b; Hall, 2004; Ntsebeza & Hall, 2007). Since the dawn of democracy, successive governments, particularly the ruling African National Congress (ANC), have attempted to introduce policy frameworks aimed at transforming the

economy and creating a more inclusive society. Policies such as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE), Employment Equity, Affirmative Action, Women Empowerment, and land reform were designed to compel those who control the levers of the economy to open access to previously disadvantaged groups. However, the implementation of these reforms has been riddled with challenges.

Many of the transformation policies, though well-intentioned, lack the necessary enforcement mechanisms to ensure real accountability. Employers and those in positions of power often exploit existing systemic gaps, deepening the layers of marginalisation in South Africa. Instead of addressing inequality, they reinforce it by manipulating socio-economic divides for their own benefit, thereby perpetuating exclusion and sustaining a cycle where the most vulnerable remain at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy. Transformative policies have often been reduced to performative gestures. In many cases, companies and institutions comply on paper but subvert the spirit of the reforms through practices such as fronting, where Black individuals are placed in strategic positions merely to fulfill quotas without being granted real decision-making power or economic benefit (Mathebula & Odeku, 2023; Matotoka & Odeku, 2022). Consequently, the lived reality for many South Africans remains largely unchanged.

Economic apartheid, though no longer sanctioned by law, persists in subtle but powerful ways. Job opportunities, access to capital, and economic mobility continue to be concentrated in the hands of a privileged minority. For many Black and Coloured South Africans, especially those from rural areas or who speak minority languages, the promise of equality has become an elusive dream (Adhikari, 2006). Even for those who manage to attain formal qualifications and enter the workforce, the sense of belonging and empowerment is often

undermined by workplace cultures that view them as recipients of benevolence rather than as equals who have earned their place through merit. This sentiment creates a toxic environment in which individuals are subtly, and sometimes overtly, discouraged from speaking out against inequality (Neocosmos, 2008; Adhikari, 2006). The message is clear: be grateful, stay silent, and don't challenge the status quo. Such attitudes not only undermine the principles of equity and justice but also stifle the voices that are essential for meaningful transformation. The enduring imbalance suggests that while South Africa has made significant political strides, the structural barriers to true economic liberation remain firmly intact. To break this cycle, reforms must go beyond symbolic inclusion and aim for deep, structural change that redistributes not just opportunity, but dignity, ownership, and agency (Murray & Simeon, 2007). Many Black South Africans, along with other historically and socially disadvantaged groups like the Coloured community, have long turned to trade unions as a critical tool for resisting systemic inequality and confronting entrenched structures of economic and social exclusion in spaces such as the work environment (Mokofe & van Eck, 2021; Pannini, 2025; Adhikari, 2006).

In a society where access to power and opportunity has remained disproportionately skewed in favour of white South Africans, unions have served not only as platforms for labour rights but also as protective spaces where marginalised individuals can collectively challenge injustice, exploitation, and exclusion (Pannini, 2025). For many, unions represent one of the few institutions through which they can push back against the status quo—a status quo that, despite the end of apartheid, continues to favour white economic dominance while relegating Black labour to roles of limited empowerment and upward mobility (Mokofe & van Eck, 2021). This, in some instances, has also evolved to tribal rivalry amongst the black people who work together,

where the majority groups dominate most of the top spaces in many places while the minority language speakers are often marginalised (Moyo, 2010; Ndlovu, 2007). In an effort to redress historical inequalities and integrate Black South Africans, including the Indians and the Coloured community, into the economy, the government introduced the tendering and public procurement system.

This system was intended to democratise access to state-funded business opportunities by prioritising previously disadvantaged individuals and Black-owned businesses in the awarding of government contracts. On paper, this was a significant step toward economic inclusion and transformation. However, in practice, the system has been deeply compromised and has become a tool for corruption or a strategy to loot resources from the government coffers (Mantzaris, 2014; Williams & Quinot, 2007). Rather than serving as a genuine vehicle for empowerment, the tender system has too often become a breeding ground for corruption, nepotism, and the looting of public resources. Instead of uplifting communities, these opportunities have frequently enriched a small elite class of politically connected individuals, sometimes referred to as the "tenderpreneurs" who benefit disproportionately from government contracts without necessarily delivering value or service to the public (Magang & Magang, 2021; April & Itenge, 2023). This elite, while nominally representative of transformation, often serves its own interests, creating new forms of inequality within the Black community itself.

The tendering system has also been manipulated through the practice of fronting, where some white-owned companies place Black individuals—often employees or figureheads—at the forefront of their operations in order to meet Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) requirements and gain access to government tenders (Du Plessis & BProc; 2022). These arrangements are designed to create the

illusion of transformation while ensuring that the economic power and decision-making remain in white hands. This exploitation of B-BBEE policy not only undermines the intent of affirmative action but also continues to sideline genuinely Black-owned and community-based businesses that lack political connections or access to capital. As a result, many ordinary Black South Africans feel increasingly disillusioned. The tools and policies meant to enable their economic emancipation have been co-opted, leaving them to face new versions of the same old oppression. The promise of shared prosperity is continuously deferred, while structural barriers remain intact beneath a surface of political correctness and symbolic reform. For meaningful change to occur, South Africa must not only reform its procurement policies but also establish robust oversight mechanisms, enforce anti-fronting legislation, and ensure that economic participation is broad-based, transparent, and genuinely inclusive. Only then can the vision of economic justice, envisioned at the dawn of democracy, begin to materialise for all. What Kaschub (2024) refers to as "economically marginalised" should be the thing of the past, where people who are not afforded opportunities to participate economically are of a particular race and gender.

## The Lingering Shadows of Apartheid: Unmasking the Social and Psychological Legacy of a Divisive System

Apartheid, as a colonisation project, entrenched itself not merely as a system of governance but as a deeply rooted social ideology designed to dehumanise and divide, what many have called the "divide and conquer" system of ruling (Morrock, 1973; Acemoglu, Verdier & Robinson, 2004). Morrock defines divide and conquer as a process of segregating people according to their differences. He argues that ""Divide and rule" may be defined as the conscious effort of an imperialist power to create and/or turn to its own advantage the

ethnic, linguistic, cultural, tribal, or religious differences within the population of a subjugated colony" (Morrock, 1973, p.173). According to Henrard (2003, p. 37), "Apartheid is characterised by its central policy of 'divide and rule,' which was aimed at ensuring white survival and hegemony by dividing the nonwhite population along racial and even ethnic lines."

The oppressive nature of the divide-and-rule strategy became so pervasive that the very term *apartheid* transcended its original political meaning and entered everyday South African vernacular as a metaphor for discrimination and inhuman treatment (Marx, 1991; Ansell, 2004). In colloquial use, to refer to someone as a person who epitomises "apartheid" is to accuse them of acting in a manner that stripped others of dignity, fairness, or humanity. People often use the term 'apartheid' to describe individuals who display inhumane behaviour or employ tactics that violate ethical principles and human dignity by referring to that person as one who has "apartheid," meaning the person has a bad character. In this context, apartheid is understood not merely as a historical system or process, but as a quality or trait that a person can possess—one that drives them to act in ways that are unethical and dehumanising. It suggests that such behaviour stems from an ingrained aspect of their character, making cruelty or discrimination a habitual response rather than an exception, and distancing them from the norms of humane interaction. The word came to symbolise an attitude that people see in a person that many cannot relate with, which is a way of relating to others that reflects intolerance, exclusion, and superiority, rather than just a historical regime. It became shorthand for identifying unjust behaviour and systemic prejudice in everyday life.

This linguistic evolution highlights a deeper truth, apartheid was never only about laws and policies; it was about shaping how people

perceived themselves and others in terms of class, race, and privilege (Moodley & Adam, 2000). Apartheid as a system conditioned generations to accept a hierarchy of human value based on race, class, language, privilege, and geography. And even after the official dismantling of apartheid in 1994, its psychological and social residues remain entrenched in the collective consciousness of the country. The saying, "you can take the boy out of the ghetto, but you cannot take the ghetto out of the boy," is particularly fitting in describing the lingering effects of apartheid in the post-apartheid era not as an institutionalised system but as a personal character or behaviour that individuals have in them with regard to how they relate to others. Although South Africa has transitioned politically, the habits, fears, and biases formed during the apartheid era still linger in the ways people treat one another, both consciously and unconsciously. The end of legal apartheid did not automatically erase the mindsets, privileges, and social structures it created. These remnants continue to shape relationships, social interactions, and access to opportunities, often in subtle but powerful ways (Alexander, 2007).

What persists today is a form of "social apartheid" in the midst of other apartheids such as the equality apartheid, work positions apartheid, living conditions apartheid, and belittling apartheid, which are all not enforced by law, but reproduced through attitudes, institutional cultures, spatial segregation, economic inequality, and systemic exclusion (Alexander, 2007). Whether it's in workplace dynamics, access to education, urban planning, or the arts and media industries, the legacy of apartheid remains present. It shows up in who gets heard, who gets hired, who feels they belong, and who continues to be marginalised or racialised (Maylam, 1990). In this sense, apartheid must be understood as more than a past political system; it is also a cultural and psychological inheritance that requires deliberate unlearning because it is still alive and well in various

spheres of people's lives. True liberation, therefore, demands more than political freedom; it requires a radical transformation of hearts, minds, and systems (Christopher, 2001). It calls for a collective reckoning with the ingrained behaviours and assumptions that continue to divide South Africans today. Only through such introspection and systemic change can the country begin to heal and move toward a more inclusive, empathetic, and equitable society. The apartheid system, as a method of governance, did more than just enforce legal and spatial segregation; it embedded a deeply ingrained social psychology that continues to influence how people interact and identify with one another (Özler, 2007). One of the most enduring legacies of apartheid is the way it nurtured a gravitational pull toward sameness, a tendency for individuals to instinctively align themselves with those who look, speak, think, or behave like them. In post-apartheid South Africa, this manifests in subtle yet powerful social patterns, people often cluster by race, language, or cultural background, even in spaces where legal restrictions no longer dictate such separation (Moodley & Adam, 2000). This phenomenon is not merely the result of personal preference, but the product of decades of institutional conditioning that valorised homogeneity and stigmatised difference.

This alignment with sameness can be likened to an instinctive territorial behaviour, akin to patterns observed in the natural world. In the animal kingdom, many species demonstrate an inherent need to protect their space from outsiders, especially those perceived as different, even if they are not overt threats and their survival depends on this. Animals mark their territories, form groups based on similarity, and instinctively resist the presence of others who do not conform to their group’s norms or appearance. The apartheid regime, in many ways, mirrored and manipulated this instinct, structuring society to reward conformity and punish deviation, particularly along

racial, ethnic, and linguistic lines (Christopher, 2001). However, what distinguishes human societies from animal behaviour is the capacity for reason, empathy, and moral reflection. While territoriality in animals serves as a biological imperative for survival, in humans, the persistence of apartheid-era divisions is not instinctual but ideological, invented, orchestrated, and sustained by unaddressed trauma, economic inequality, social engineering, and the lack of transformative justice (Özler, 2007; Moodley & Adam, 2000). The normalisation of sticking to one's own kind for humans is not a natural occurrence, but a socially manufactured consequence of decades of enforced division and mistrust (Alexander, 2007; Acemoglu, Verdier & Robinson, 2004).

This framework has not only hindered social cohesion but has also limited the country's ability to fully harness the richness of its diversity. In workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, industries, and even in cultural production, the legacy of apartheid still guides who feels welcome, who belongs, who does not belong, and who is othered. It perpetuates a silent code of exclusion that, while no longer enshrined in law, remains deeply etched in everyday social behaviour (Du Toit, 2004). To dismantle this enduring gravitational pull toward bias sameness, South Africa must confront the psychological architecture of apartheid just as vigorously as it once dismantled its legal framework. This requires deliberate efforts in education, cultural representation, media, and public discourse to challenge inherited biases and foster inclusive identities. It means creating environments where diversity is not only tolerated but genuinely embraced, and where shared humanity overrides inherited divisions. Only then can South Africa begin to undo the gravitational legacy of apartheid and build a society where unity in diversity is more than a slogan enshrined in the constitution but it becomes a lived reality.

This kind of behaviour, protecting territory and defending space, is deeply embedded in the animal kingdom. It serves as a natural survival mechanism, allowing animals to preserve resources, ensure safety, and maintain control over their environments. However, when this instinctive behaviour manifests in human societies, particularly in contexts where people are expected to coexist and share space and resources, it can take on a more destructive form. People should be able to share workspaces, social events, residential areas, economic opportunities, and vital resources, such as land, wealth, and power, without the divisions that have historically separated them. A willingness to share often emerges from a shared purpose or sense of commonality, whether rooted in faith, vision, collective goals, or mutual concerns around safety, health, and survival. Among human beings, this territorialism is no longer about survival in a biological sense; it becomes intertwined with social identity, power, and control. People begin to guard not only physical spaces but also social, economic, and cultural territories, often reacting with suspicion, fear, or hostility toward those who do not look, speak, think, or behave like them. This is one of the underlying roots of apartheid, not just as a political system imposed from above, but as a social reality that draws on a deeper psychological and emotional resistance to difference.

When someone of a different race, skin tone, body type, or language enters a space that others perceive as their own, a defensive response is often triggered. This response is not based on rational fear or real threat, but on an internalised ideology that regards the "other" as an intruder, the othered body, an outsider who does not belong (Staszak, 2008; Van Pelt, 2000). Apartheid, in this sense, is not only a historical system of governance crafted by a minority regime to control the majority, it is also an emotional and ideological system, fuelled by fear, nurtured by hate, and sustained by an ingrained belief in one group's superiority over another. It is a system that devalues love and

human connection, choosing instead to elevate exclusion, suspicion, and resentment. It thrives on the dehumanisation of those deemed different, drawing power from humiliation, belittlement, and the systemic denial of dignity to the "other" (Van Pelt, 2000; Du Toit, 2004). This form of social apartheid continues to haunt post-apartheid South Africa, even in the absence of legislated segregation (Christopher, 2001). It manifests subtly in everyday interactions, in the unspoken discomfort when people of different backgrounds occupy the same spaces, in the implicit bias that informs hiring practices, access to services, and who is welcomed or excluded in social circles. It is visible in the way language becomes a barrier, and in how opportunities are distributed along lines of racial and cultural proximity.

To truly overcome apartheid, then, it is not enough to dismantle the political system; we must also confront the lingering social and psychological attitudes that keep people divided. It requires a radical reimagining of how we share space, relate to one another, and build communities based on empathy rather than fear. It calls for a new consciousness that celebrates difference rather than guarding against it, and that sees humanity not in similarity, but in the shared capacity for love, respect, and coexistence (Sayed et al., 2007). This is the form of apartheid that has never truly ended; people still see each other as different in every way, and privileges still determine who gets, has, should have, and must have, just like in the apartheid regime. It is not written into law, yet it lives on, quietly but powerfully, within the attitudes, behaviours, and choices people make every day. It is the spirit of exclusion, the unwillingness to share space, the discomfort with difference, and the deep-seated reluctance to associate with those who are perceived as "other", as Powell and Menendian (2000, p. 29) argue that “the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of ‘othering’.” It manifests in subtle but telling ways, the hesitation to think beyond the obvious, the recoil from skin perceived as foreign,

and the irrational fear that proximity to difference is somehow contaminating.

This apartheid is no longer just about race, skin colour, or gender; it has spread into every facet of life. It reveals itself in workplaces, church gatherings, and even in schools, where children from different backgrounds are silently segregated by language, culture, or social class (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2012; Sayed & Motala, 2012). It exists in workplaces, where certain employees are tolerated but never fully included or accepted. It can be found in churches and religious gatherings, where worship is shared but belonging is not. It reaches into our homes, neighborhoods, and public spaces, anywhere people find themselves having to coexist with those who do not reflect their own identity. This form of social apartheid is more insidious because it is not enforced by law or official policy; it is enforced by fear, prejudice, and centuries of inherited division. It thrives in silence, in polite avoidance, in unspoken rules of exclusion. And because it is so deeply embedded in everyday life, it often goes unchallenged. Yet its impact is just as real and damaging as the apartheid of the past. To move forward as a truly united society, South Africa must confront not only the legacy of political apartheid but also this enduring culture of separation, one that continues to shape relationships, limit opportunities, and undermine the nation's collective healing.

## Post-Apartheid Belonging and Exclusion: The Struggle Over Space, Power, and Identity

The post-apartheid era in South Africa evokes mixed reactions. While some commend the ruling party (African National Congress - ANC) for key achievements and progress made since the dawn of democracy, others express growing concern over the country's trajectory. Mounting national debt, rampant corruption, soaring