



## Mbeki's 'I am an African' speech: Mobilising psycho-political resources for political reconstitution of post-apartheid South Africa

Mohamed Seedat <sup>a,b</sup>, Shahnaaz Suffla <sup>a,b</sup> and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of South Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa; <sup>b</sup>South African Medical Research Council-University of South Africa Masculinity and Health Research Unit, Cape Town, South Africa; <sup>c</sup>University of Bayreuth, Germany

### ABSTRACT

We offer a critical reading of Thabo Mbeki's 'I am an African' speech to illustrate how he foregrounded humaning, namely onto-epistemological recovery, as a key dimension of psycho-political reconstruction. Mbeki's speech, delivered on the occasion of the adoption of South Africa's democratic Constitution, was inherent to the larger quest to (re)imagine South Africa and (South)Africanness and assert independent Black intellectual thought. Positioning himself as an epistemic agent, Mbeki historicised that moment of adopting the Constitution and attempted to raise critical consciousness about the protracted struggle for democracy. He mobilised marginalised knowledge about the anti-colonial struggle to challenge forgetfulness and limited interpretations of South Africa's negotiated settlement. Mbeki also invoked the idea of a relational ontology and hermeneutic love to effect an inclusive Africanity constituted of multiple histories and 'races'. Mbeki, resisting Afro-pessimism, referenced the making of an inclusive Africanity against Africa as a generative place despite the colonial encounter, African humanism and South Africa's aspirations for reconciliation as articulated by the ANC and the Constitution. Notwithstanding the psycho-political import of Mbeki's speech, the process of humaning remains incomplete.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 December 2020  
Accepted 7 June 2021

### KEYWORDS

Mbeki; psycho-politics; onto-epistemological; epistemic agency; relational ontology; identity; Africa

Consonant with demands for deracialisation and democracy, there has been a concentrated focus on political reconstitution in South Africa (see Madlingozi 2018), which has produced 'foreign natives' and 'native foreigners' (Neocosmos 2010), and which has endured the bifurcating effects of a persistent institutionalised racial paradigm of difference for over 300 years. Political reconstitution is thus inseparable from the stubborn 'national question' of the reinvention of South Africa into one united nation as underpinned by a constitutional democracy (see Webster and Pampallis 2017). A key dimension of political reconstitution is what Zimitri Erasmus (2017, xxii) named 'humaning'. Humaning is a fluid 'process of life-in-the-making with others' (Erasmus 2017, xxii) beyond

**CONTACT** Mohamed Seedat  [seedama@unisa.ac.za](mailto:seedama@unisa.ac.za)

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50 racialisation, and it is unlike humanisation that is predicated on fixed understandings of human. 'Humaning as praxis is historically and contextually specific' and constituted as 'social and cultural practice' (Erasmus 2017, 29). 'Humaning', saturated with both determination and feelings, embodies an activist intellectual shift towards forging lexes for (re)-thinking 'race'. In this sense, 'humaning' – to become – imagines possibilities beyond the logics of coloniality, and white supremacy and regressive nativist thought.

55 There have been multiple 'humaning' interventions in South Africa. The adoption in 1955 of the Freedom Charter, wherein post-Apartheid South Africa was imagined as a non-racial society that belongs to all who live in it, is perhaps among the early attempts of a politically constituted humaning process. The Black Consciousness Movement and Bantu Stephen Biko's explications of a collectivist relational ontology located in psycho-political praxes (Alexander & Gibson 2008; Biko 2004; Mngxitama, Alexander & Gibson 2008; Oliphant 2008; Suffla & Seedat, forthcoming), and Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe's articulations of anti-racist ontology, influenced by Pan-Africanist thought (Hook 2019; Pogrud 1991), may be considered as contesting forms of the many humaning interventions in the country (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). The adoption of the South African Constitution in May 1996 is a more recent example of an intervention aimed at reconstitution of the political that connected with the quest for humaning, albeit perhaps implicitly. The South African Constitution is based on the values of human dignity, human rights, freedom, non-racialism, gender equality, the rule of law, and universal adult suffrage (South African Human Rights Commission 2006). The Constitution, reflective of liberal democratic ideals, and guaranteeing a 'better life for all', may be interpreted as the foundational and transformative basis for socio-economic, political and cultural justice in the country (De Vos 2001; Pieterse 2008).

70 On the occasion of the adoption of South Africa's Constitution on 8 May 1996, just over two years after the country's April 1994 democratic elections, Thabo Mbeki delivered his iconic 'I am an African' speech. Mbeki, performing his speech as deputy president in Nelson Mandela's Government of National Unity (GNU) and as the representative of his political party – the African National Congress (ANC) – connected that poignant moment of political reconstitution and the process of humaning. On this occasion, Mbeki seemed to have constituted political reconstitution as psycho-material transformation (see Malherbe 2018). We are interested in understanding the psycho-politics that undergirded Mbeki's speech and the attendant accent on humaning. We submit that speeches by political actors are dialogic sites through which to analyse and understand enactments of psycho-politics. Public speech – as a psychosocial device – is pitched at the liminal spaces that invite subjects to connect the personal and the political, history and the present, and the imagined, the possible and the necessary (see Martin 2019).

85 In the political sphere, psychological resources are invoked to galvanise and conscript subjects to align with particular ideological positions and imaginaries. Here, the subject is constructed as 'at once a product and agent of history as well as a site of experience and memory, an agent of knowing as much as an actional being' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 134). Key political actors, such as Nelson Mandela, marshalled conceptual psychological resources as well as metaphor at different moments to advance the country's democratic vision and goals. Mandela (1993) invoked psychological concepts as a political resource in his national televised address after the murder of Chris Hani, who was the leader of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and a member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the

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95 ANC's military wing. Sensitive to the dynamics of that perilous moment, poignant with  
 black anger and white fear, he did so to maintain dialogue at a critical point in the coun-  
 try's negotiation process (Seedat 2017; Zagacki 2003). Mandela appealed for black-white  
 emotional proximity and drew on the idea of non-binary subjectivities to encourage  
 public mourning, and contain both black anger and white fear, embodying an interven-  
 100 tion in conflict management (Seedat 2017). Zagacki (2003) argues that Mandela was firstly  
 inviting South Africans to delink from the logics of war and retribution, and contested  
 white tropes about black militancy; he petitioned both blacks and whites 'to [publicly]  
 share grief, empathy and understanding' (Zagacki 2003, 712) as a way of promoting  
 emotional proximity, critical for establishing inter-racial relations, and he embodied and  
 enacted behaviours and emotional registers to which he was appealing in his speech.  
 Notwithstanding analysis that perceived the speech as having succeeded in averting a  
 bloody civil war and restoring dialogue, and symbolising the imminent rise of blacks to  
 105 political power, Mandela seemed to have discounted whites' hold on economic power  
 and privilege and instead called for the deradicalisation of modes of expressing black  
 anger. Privileging self-control, purposefulness, sagacity and dignity, he entreated the  
 moral and ethical merits of a non-racial South Africa, but herein under-considered centu-  
 ries of political conflict and deeply entrenched economic monopolies (see Zagacki 2003).  
 In as much as Mandela's speech may be viewed as a moment of political decisiveness and  
 110 moral transformation, it was silent on how social inequality would be eradicated.

Mbeki's speech has stimulated literary adaptation, academic scholarship – framed  
 largely within communication studies, politics and African studies – artistic and musical  
 performances, and social commentary (for example, Gantscho 2012; Xaso & Modise  
 2016). Some of the academic analyses of the speech are located within the body of litera-  
 115 ture concerned with the political dynamics underlying the use of rhetoric in speeches,  
 theorising the devices employed in the construction of identities, and delineating the  
 modes and makings of new identities, as well as their instrumentalisation (see Castells  
 1997). Seshego Makoro (2018), describing Mbeki as an artful and persuasive orator, per-  
 ceives how the former president – like other political actors, including Barack Obama,  
 120 Nelson Mandela and Muhammadu Buhari – used personification, personal pronouns  
 and repetition, among other rhetorical devices, to evoke emotions intended to  
 produce public consent around particular political aspirations and visions. Theodore  
 Sheckels (2009) discerns how Mbeki stylised his tone and speech to that of John  
 F. Kennedy, shifted between personal singular pronouns and personal collective pro-  
 125 nouns, and infused his narrative with a mystic aura to tell the story of the long struggle  
 for freedom and articulate a unifying non-racialised vision of both Africanness and South  
 Africanness as part of the project of nation-building.

Our turn to psycho-politics, which finds elaboration in the scholarship of Derek Hook  
 (2004, 2005) and Lebeau (1998), aims to bring a psychological reading to racism and colo-  
 130 nised subjectivity, and the psychological dimensions of colonialism and apartheid. Both  
 state and non-state actors enact psycho-politics in different moments and spaces for pol-  
 itical purposes. The concept of psycho-politics, as used by Lebeau (1998), refers to both  
 the politicisation of the psychological and the psychologisation of the political. In  
 Hook's (2005, 476) articulation, psycho-politics is 'the conjunction of the psychological  
 135 and the political, the affective and the structural, the psychical and the governmental'.

Specifically, we interpret two analytics related to the psychological concepts that Mbeki employed as political resources to enact onto-epistemological recovery: *epistemic agency*, and *relational ontology*. Epistemologists, discerning epistemic agency in its multi-dimensionality, comprehend epistemic agency as intentional praxis: a critical awareness, consideration and application of the mores, expectations and social practices underlying epistemic exchanges within knowledge or meaning-making environments in which epistemic agents may be embedded (Elgin 2013). Epistemic agents ‘think of themselves as, and act as, legislating members of a realm of epistemic ends: they make the rules, devise the methods, and set the standards that bind them’ (Elgin 2013, 135). Equally, epistemic agency is the demonstration of ‘epistemic sensibility’ (Goldman, 2010; Tollefsen 2004), the knack to detect which beliefs, thoughts and behaviours should be confronted, suggested and perhaps directly privileged. For purposes of our analysis, we propose that epistemic agency entails an alertness and resistance to both epistemic and symbolic violence inflicted by colonial-apartheid systems that seek to erase consciousness, memories and public manifestations of Black identities, subjectivities, histories, legacies and knowledge-making, and conceal power relations in the production of distorted representations of colonised people and their knowledge and cultural systems respectively (Suffla, Malherbe & Seedat 2020). Epistemic agents pronounce on their agency through conscious inscriptions of first-person views (singular and/or plural); they may invoke multiple methods, processes, heuristics, phraseologies, emblems, paradigms and conventions to legitimise and/or dispute understandings of events and socio-historical phenomena (see Tollefsen 2004; Vásquez-Arenas 2018), as well as imaginaries of a decolonised and deimperialised world, and pluriversal humanity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). Epistemic agency advances decolonial modes of knowing that push back against collective forgetfulness and raises consciousness about the aftermaths of colonial violence. Epistemic agency historicises the present (Maldonado-Torres 2016; Mignolo 2009; Zondi 2017). We proffer that a key dimension of epistemic agency is the over-turning of the epistemology of ignorance, conceptualised as more than the absence of knowledge or facts (Alcoff 2007; Mills 2007). The epistemology of ignorance is indicative of a structural condition that perpetuates false beliefs and limits ‘true’ beliefs that, among other things, serve to construct patriarchy, racism, sexism, and discriminatory practices as exceptions rather than as the norm inherent to hegemonic structures in the contemporary world order. The epistemology of ignorance entails ways of knowing and cultural practices that enable obliviousness, distortions, and myths about realities, experiences and facts that are quite apparent (Mills 2007).

Relational ontology is well articulated by Édouard Glissant (1997, 144) in terms of ‘relation identity’ linked to ‘consciousness and contradictory experience of contacts’. Contesting highly individualised constructions of modes of being, relational ontology perceives humanity’s inter-connectivity despite geographical boundaries and distances, culture, ethnicity, faith traditions, political practices, gender formations, and the diverse legacies and customs that make us human. Ontological presence is gained through relationships with others, nature and the many complex cosmologies in which humans are situated and by which they are formed (Benjamin 2016). In part, relational ontology is founded on love as a hermeneutic that, beyond the liberal romantic ideal (see Sandoval 2000), entails modes of engagement that may supposedly move polarised groups irrespective of their social location, towards critical yet compassionate and shared affective

practices. Love as hermeneutic, representing a break from colonising systems predicated on hate and war, may act as connectors between polarised people (Maldonado-Torres 2007); such hermeneutic love 'places black lives at the centre [...] without in any way diminishing the other, even if the other were the source of their erstwhile psychological or physical inferiorisation and diminution' (Cooper & Ratele 2018, 250).

### Psychopolitics in Mbeki's 'I am an African'

Whereas Mandela's televised address came at a precarious moment in the negotiating process, Mbeki delivered his speech at a time of supposed collective accomplishment, heralding a phase of reconstruction, and development. Mbeki, in his speech, inscribed onto-epistemological recovery as a key constituent dimension and driver of liberation struggles, and in the process created a canvas for Africanity as an open and flexible identity that is historically determined.

Reminiscent of the 1906 'The regeneration of Africa' speech, rendered by the founding member of the ANC, Pixley ka Seme, at Columbia University (Makoro 2018; Seme 1906), Mbeki – over-turning exclusionary colonial identity formations – eloquently addresses the vexed question of African identity and emphasises the rule of law and the promotion of human rights, as well as the struggle for democracy that spanned centuries (Louw 2015). Just like Pixley ka Seme, who proclaimed, 'I am an African, and I set my pride in my race over against a hostile public opinion' (Gevisser 2009, 29), Mbeki – resisting Afro-pessimism – references the identity, dignity and humaning of Africans against Africa as a generative place despite the colonial encounter, ubuntu – African humanism – and South Africa's aspiration for liberal democracy, as enunciated by the ANC.

Perhaps attentive to the political import of that moment of adopting a liberal democratically crafted constitution, acclaimed at the time as among the most progressive in the world (Posel 2002; Swartz 2006), Mbeki, repeating the phrase 'I am an African' five times (Sheckels 2009), assumes the standpoint of the black majority that was excluded from the very space that constituted an exclusionary apartheid parliament for decades, and which – together with other state institutions, and cultural and political practices – functioned to criminalise, delegitimise and silence the struggle for social justice and democracy. The apartheid parliament promulgated laws that naturalised racial segregation and economic exploitation, and the psychological dispossession of the country's black majority.

Mbeki's iconic speech is also indicative of a noticeable shift from Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu's ahistorical 'ecclesiastical' branding of the new post-Apartheid as a 'rainbow nation' to a poetic, yet very historically nuanced articulation, of the nation. This shift is resonant with Gillian Hart's (2002) observation that:

In the mid-1990s discourses of non-racial national unity were ascendant, exemplified in the language of the 'rainbow nation,' and the towering moral authority of Nelson Mandela. Since the late 1990s the picture has become far more complex, as the power bloc led by Thabo Mbeki has shifted images from rainbows to the African Renaissance, positioning the ANC at the front of battles against racism. (Hart 2002, 32–33)

Mbeki's speech, representing one of many events that marked the demise of legalised political apartheid and one of the outcomes of the protracted struggle for freedom,

was delivered during a zeitgeist of optimism. It was a period when the majority population in particular, buoyed by the outcome of the country's first democratic elections, attached their hopes and aspirations for a better life to the government's transformation agenda, animated in the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP). The RDP was in effect the policy framework of the ANC-led Government of National Unity (GNU). This transformation agenda concentrated on improving the quality of life of all, changing the political, social and economic relations, and democratising state structures. The RDP prioritised job creation, social housing, electrification, provision of social services, redistribution of cultivatable agricultural land, and basic education. The RDP was viewed as the instrument through which to accord substance to the Bill of Rights, which was entrenched in the South African Constitution (South African Human Rights Commission 2006). Mbeki's speech was rooted in South Africa's democratic and reconstruction aspirations, multi-dimensional development mechanisms, and constitutional ideals of a non-racial and non-sexist society (Posel 2002; Swartz 2006).

### Epistemic agency

Mbeki positions himself as an Africa(n)-centred epistemic agent ('Being part of all these people, and in the knowledge that none dare contest that assertion, I shall claim that – I am an African'). He claims his Africanness in the space that historically embodied whiteness and domination, centring his black body and intellectual agency to assert inclusionary psycho-political practices. As an epistemic agent, Mbeki adopts a reflexive critical openness (see Fricker 2003); as a form of critical consciousness, he mobilises marginalised knowledges to recover collective and historicised memories of the struggle for justice and raised the salience of marginalised knowledges in resisting forgetfulness. Mbeki began his speech historicising that moment of adopting the liberal democratic Constitution, connecting that moment to *the first colonial encounters* ('I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape – they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land has ever seen, they who were the first to lose their lives in the struggle to defend our freedom and dependence and they who, as a people, perished in the result'); *the experiences of slavery* ('In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slaves who came from the East [...] The stripes they bore on their bodies from the lash of the slave master are a reminder embossed on my consciousness of what should not be done'); *the resistance waged by African leaders and warriors* ('I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsá and Sekhukhune led, the patriots that Cetshwayo and Mphephu took to battle, the soldiers Moshoeshoe and Ngungunyane taught never to dishonour the cause of freedom'); and *the continent-wide successful battles against colonial forces* ('My mind and my knowledge of myself is formed by the victories that are the jewels in our African crown, the victories we earned from Isandhlwana to Khartoum, as Ethiopians and as the Ashanti of Ghana, as the Berbers of the desert').

Mbeki also locates that determining moment of adopting the Constitution as integral to the 'Long March to Freedom', which he traces back to the first colonial encounter of the 1600s in which the KhoiKhoi and the San people opposed domination by the Dutch occupiers, and connects that moment to the dislocation of people of Malay



ancestry who were forcibly shipped from the East to the Cape by the Dutch, and the battles waged by traditional chiefs against British rule, as well as the struggle for freedom against colonialism across the African continent. Mbeki seems to be underscoring that the moment was more than the outcome of multi-party political negotiations of the late 1980s and early 1990s or simply the marker of 'Madiba Magic', namely Nelson Mandela's charismatic leadership, wisdom and transformative capacities to build consensus and social compacts across class, race, and other social cleavages as part of humanist-moral-ethical forms of politics of reconstitution of a new political society (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016; Seme 1906). He is resisting dominant political and media narratives that tended to attribute the transition to liberal democracy as the primary outcome of negotiated settlement between the ruling apartheid National party and the broad-based liberation movements. The historicised account represented a challenge and an epistemic intervention against hegemonic and distorted interpretations of the struggle for democracy. Mbeki (1996) pushes back against social forces wanting to forget and deny the history and legacy of colonial-apartheid ('I have seen concrete expression of the denial of the dignity of a human being emanating from the conscious, systemic and systematic oppressive and repressive activities of other human beings') in the name of a problematic conception of reconciliation.

As an epistemic agent and as an act of epistemic correction, Mbeki (1996) invokes collective memories of the past and mobilises subjugated knowledge of the struggle for democracy to encourage critical consciousness of the historical and social forces, struggles and social actors that shaped the path to democracy and that specific moment of adopting the Constitution. The recovery of historical memory, representing the assumption of the perspectives of the oppressed on the struggle for social justice and the attempt to de-ideologise understandings of the socio-political journey that led to the formation of a liberal constitutional democracy, may also be comprehended as an act of resisting collective forgetfulness and socio-political amnesia ('Today, as a country, we keep an audible silence about these ancestors of the generations that live, fearful to admit the horror of a former deed, seeking to obliterate from our memories a cruel occurrence that, in its remembering, should teach us not and never to be inhuman again').

We suggest that the forgetfulness to which Mbeki is referring is a marker of the epistemology of ignorance (Alcoff 2007; Mills 2007), the patterns of power arising from colonialism, that continue to manifest in the contemporary global order and development policies. Mbeki is challenging coloniality as constituted by the heterogeneous structural processes that usurp, shape and control African and other colonised people's cultures, knowledge orders, economies and political systems (see Escobar 2007; Grosfoguel 2011; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Mignolo 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Mbeki's enactment of epistemic agency is evident in the pointed way in which he sought to dislodge the kinds of hegemonic knowledge perpetuated by apartheid-colonialism. Apartheid rulers used legislative promulgations, cultural practices, dominant narratives and ways of knowing to silence and submerge as well as criminalise the knowledges and experiences of the oppressed majority, thereby deliberately producing fabrications and obliviousness about the realities and consequences of apartheid-colonialism.

## Relational ontology

As an entangled enactment of epistemic agency Mbeki also foregrounds the (re)making of African subjectivity, firstly through (re)membering the ontological ruptures effected by colonial-apartheid, and secondly by inscribing a relational ontology to the present. Mbeki recalls the *ontological consequences of oppression* ('I have seen what happens when one person has superiority of force over another, when the stronger appropriate to themselves the prerogative even to annul the injunction that God created all men and women in His image'), and the related *dehumanisation of the country's majority people* ('I know what it signifies when race and colour are used to determine who is human and who, sub-human'), alluding to the zones of being and non-being produced within the hierarchical logic of coloniality. Mbeki raises memories of the *psycho-material consequences* of socially engineering identities by 'race' and colour ('I have seen the destruction of all sense of self-esteem, the consequent striving to be what one is not, simply to acquire some of the benefits which those who had improved themselves as masters had ensured that they enjoy'); and the *racialisation of class and material relations* ('I have experience of the situation in which race and colour is used to enrich some and impoverish the rest'); as well as the *moral degeneration of the dominant class* in colonial-apartheid society ('I have seen the corruption of minds and souls as [...] the pursuit of an ignoble effort to perpetrate a veritable crime against humanity'). Throughout Mbeki's articulations of the ontological ruptures, his metaphors and prose are imbued with the pain and suffering of those located in the zones of sub-humanity or non-being, denied access to the basic means of existence, and subjected to structural conditions that question their very humanness.

A major part of Mbeki's speech revolves around the (re)formulation of African identity and dignity. Overturning Afro-pessimism ('Our sense of elevation at this moment also derives from the fact that this magnificent product is the unique creation of African hands and African minds'), he references African identity and dignity against Africa as a generative place despite the colonial encounter on the one hand and ubuntu – African humanism and a community-centric worldview – and the ANC's ideals for liberal democracy on the other hand. Mobilising a relational ontology, Mbeki articulates a multi-racial humanism shaped by African cosmology. At the heart of this humaning process is a notion of African subjectivity – being in relation – that is animated through and by relationships with the land ('I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land'), and ancestral connections and heritage ('I am born of the peoples of the continent of Africa').

In contrast to the apartheid state that prevented the formation of one national identity, Mbeki gestures towards a multi-ethnic Africanness and South Africanness that transcends the apartheid exclusionary signifiers of belonging and humanness:

I am formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home on our native land. Whatever their own actions, they remain still, part of me.

In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slaves who came from the East. Their proud dignity informs my bearing, their culture a part of my essence.

I come of those who were transported from India and China, whose being resided in the fact, solely, that they were able to provide physical labour, who taught me that we could both be



at home and be foreign, who taught me that human existence itself demanded that freedom was a necessary condition for that human existence.

Being part of all these people, and in the knowledge that none dare contest that assertion, I shall claim that – I am an African.

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We are assembled here today to mark their victory in acquiring and exercising their right to formulate their own definition of what it means to be African.

The constitution whose adoption we celebrate constitutes and unequivocal statement that we refuse to accept that our Africanness shall be defined by our race, colour, gender of historical origins.

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It is a firm assertion made by ourselves that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.

It rejoices in the diversity of our people and creates the space for all of us voluntarily to define ourselves as one people.

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Through careful historicisation, Mbeki successfully redefines an inclusive South Africa inhabited by Africans in their diverse colours. His rendition of history is a form of reminding all South Africans how they became Africans. Mbeki employed both poetics and affect to appeal for attitudinal change and rethinking the political reconstitution of the nation. For Mbeki, being African is not a primordial fixture but a political concept born out of encounters and struggles, translating into 'knowing in being' (see Sauzet 2018). Hence, the process of becoming human – in resistance to imperialism, slavery, colonialism and apartheid – constitutes the reclamation of African imaginations and knowledges, memories of struggle, and non-racial African personhood (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

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In Mbeki's rendition, humaning also entails pushing back against the endemic consequences of apartheid epistemic socialisation manifest in the formation of exclusive 'interpretive and affective attitudes' (see Fricke 2003, 161); an exclusionary 'social training' that in addition to entrenching ignorance, racialised and ideologised the expression of care and compassion.

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Breaking from the exclusionary affective traditions of apartheid-colonial socialization, Mbeki (1996) recognises the death and violence suffered by Afrikaners at the hands of the British in the South African war:

I am the grandchild who lays fresh flowers on the Boer graves at St Helena and the Bahamas, who sees in the mind's eye and suffers the suffering of a simple peasant folk, death, concentration camps, destroyed homesteads, a dream in ruins.

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In recalling memories of both colonial violence experienced by the African majority and the violence experienced by Afrikaners during the South African War (see Omissi & Thompson 2002), Mbeki (1996) seemed to be gesturing towards non-racialised and de-ideologised affective relations. He invokes love as a hermeneutic to perhaps advance the ideals of truth and reconciliation, as framed by the Mandela Presidency, and inscribe shared affective relations as a key dimension of psycho-political transformation (see Cooper & Ratele 2018).

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We suggest that the hermeneutic love to which Mbeki appealed called for reflexive critical openness (see Fricker 2003); critical yet emotionally regarding ways of understanding the 'lived-experiences' of all those who inhabit South Africanness. Mbeki constitutes

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reflexive critical openness as the psycho-emotive and cognitive capacities to remain alert to and resist the internalised emotive and attitudinal repertoires of colonial-apartheid epistemic socialisation (see Fricker 2003). We observe that in as much as Mbeki historicises the moment of adopting the Constitution and raises consciousness about the location of whites and Blacks in the colonial-apartheid structures, he seems to demonstrate emotional regard for his diverse audience.

### 415 **Mbeki's psycho-political resources for political reconstitution**

In the broadest conceptualisation, Mbeki enacts epistemic agency and invokes a complex relational ontology to (re)imagine the (re)existence of South Africa after centuries of dismembering politics of racism. At the centre of Mbeki's epistemic agency and relational ontology is what Madlingozi (2018, 54) described as 'inclusive homemaking and thus ending the state(s) of disjunctive exclusions and homelessness'. In resonance with our own analysis, Madlingozi (2018, 54), highlighting the connections between Mbeki's enactment of epistemic agency and his inscriptions of relational ontology, asserts that 'Mbeki's declaration that no one can contest his assertion that 'I am an African,' the opposite of being an Invisible Man, was an attempt to counter namelessness, depersonalization, and invisibility inherent in official colonialist designations such as Kaffir, Native, Bantu, and the Black'. Positioning himself as an insurrectionist epistemic agent, Mbeki articulates a deracialised and inclusive Africanity that represents an unequivocal refusal 'to accept that our Africanness shall be defined by our race, our colour, our gender or our historical origins' (Mbeki 1996).

430 Mbeki's speech embodies a shift from 'de-nationalisation' of indigenous black people into 'native foreigners' to 're-nationalisation' of those that were denied citizenship and belonging, central to the struggle for political reconstitution in the country (Hart 2013). We note that for Mbeki the long-standing national liberation struggles were multifaceted. He ensures to mention various forms of suffering and struggles involving the Khoisan, Bantu, Malay slaves, Indians, Boers, and pre-colonial African leaders who led in the wars of resistance as a process for collective claim and constructing an inclusive foundational myth for the post-apartheid inclusive nation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). He performs his narrative to encourage reconciliation and invited his diverse audience to 'recognize their own identity as African' (Sheckels 2009, 320).

440 Mbeki's enunciation of a non-racialised South African identity is to be understood against the backdrop of contesting and multiple articulations of Africanness and South Africanness. Deeply inherent to Mbeki's articulation of Africanness is the notion of diversity. Problematising how diversity is summoned to uphold a politics of unity, Mboti (2013) argues that Mbeki's invocation to Africanness, predicated on diversity, is but an 'aporetic' (453) that functions to fabricate consent around hegemonic connotations of citizenship, where citizenship is pre-constituted. As much as Mbeki's speech represents an overturning of identity fragmentation produced by colonial-apartheid, Mbeki imagines a South Africanness that is constituted by multiple ethnicities and 'races'. As such, Mbeki's epistemic act of (re)imagining South Africa renders the ideal of an anti-racist society elusive. In this sense, 'humaning' – to become – imagines possibilities beyond the logics of coloniality, and white supremacy and regressive nativist thought.

## Conclusion

455 We attempt a psycho-political reading of Mbeki's iconic speech twenty four years  
after the adoption of the Constitution when, in contrast to the optimism that pre-  
460 vailed in the early 1990s, the country is encumbered by patronage politics – the dis-  
tribution of public services and resources in exchange for political support (Lodge  
2014) – and deep socio-political and economic cleavages. South Africa remains  
polarised by race and class, and burdened by intractable gender inequalities. The  
465 current responses to the Covid-19 pandemic have reminded us that the African  
majority population continues to experience a disproportionate burden of jobless-  
ness, poverty and social inequality, as well as negative health and educational out-  
comes. The rates of crime, homicide, gender-based violence and child abuse,  
indicators of the absence of safety and social protection, result in major health,  
470 psychological, social and economic consequences. Residential spaces and social  
relations remain largely racialised just as 'race' remains spatialised. Economic  
power is concentrated in white hands and the process of reconciliation, as envisaged  
by the Constitution and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, eludes the country  
and its people, as is manifest in political relations marked by nativist and narrow  
nationalist tendencies and white denialism. Figures such as F.W. De Klerk, the last  
475 prime minister of apartheid South Africa, and Helen Zille, one of the leaders of the  
official political opposition, the Democratic Alliance, are on record for repudiating  
the enduring consequences of apartheid-colonialism. In February 2020, De Klerk  
denied that apartheid was a crime against humanity (for example, Makinana 2020);  
following major public pressure, especially from black people and the Desmond  
480 and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation, he offered a contrite legalistic apology (for  
example, Kiewit 2020). His response, lacking any moral or ethical substance, is a per-  
sistent embodiment of white unrepentance (see Krog 1998, 2020). In a most cardinal  
form, these chasms and disavowals are at once both indicative and entrenching of a  
fractured psycho-politics. These chasms raise the importance of 'white work', that  
485 Wilhelm Verwoerd (2019), grandson of apartheid architect Hendrik Verwoerd,  
argues necessitates white acceptance of historical culpability, as well as the develop-  
ment of historical consciousness of the trauma and racialised privilege wrought by  
apartheid-colonialism.

In this fractured context, the work of 'humaning' (see Erasmus 2017) – onto-epistemo-  
485 logical recovery, namely becoming through enactments of epistemic agency and rela-  
tional ontology – remains ever more salient and urgent.

## Acknowledgements

490 We gratefully acknowledge Najuwa Arendse for technical assistance with the preparation of the  
manuscript.

## Disclosure statement

495 The authors did not receive any funding for this work.

## Notes on contributors

**Mohamed Seedat** is the current head of the University of South Africa's Institute for Social and Health Sciences and is affiliated with the South African Medical Research Council-University of South Africa Masculinity and Health Research Unit.

500 **Shahnaaz Suffla** is an associate professor at the University of South Africa's Institute for Social and Health Sciences and is affiliated with the South African Medical Research Council- University of South Africa Masculinity and Health Research Unit.

**Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni** is chair of Epistemologies of the Global South, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany.

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## ORCID

Mohamed Seedat  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9018-3370>

Shahnaaz Suffla  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4597-5472>

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