

**THABO MBEKI AND BLACK PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS: THE  
POLITICS OF TOLERANCE AND CRITICISM IN POST-1994  
SOUTH AFRICA**

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## **Abstract**

This study's primary aim is to examine how black public intellectuals engaged with Thabo Mbeki publicly, in post-1994 public discourse. The concept of black public intellectuals used here relates to the capacity of critics who engage with ideas in their public speech. Therefore, this study will observe the antagonistic relationship between the Mbeki and black public intellectuals because it shaped South Africa's public and political discourse. However, the study will specifically focus on three black public intellectuals namely, Sipho Seepe, Xolela Mangcu and William Gumede. These three intellectuals were among the most vocal critics of former President Thabo Mbeki thought through their media commentary, public debates and books. It is imperative to determine whether Thabo Mbeki was tolerant of the criticism he received from public intellectuals during his tenure. Equally important for this study is to evaluate the extent to which the intellectuals were tolerant of the ideas formed by and circulated in the new dispensation by those in power. The year 2007 will be crucial to this study because criticism towards Mbeki from these public intellectuals heightened in 2007. Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede; disagreed most prominently on Mbeki's views on AIDS, race and the media. This study also aims to investigate whether or not Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede have been tolerant of the criticism they received from Thabo Mbeki.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Following the end of apartheid, the South African public sphere was opened to all public intellectuals to participate in. This was particularly remarkable for black public intellectuals, since the apartheid government was intolerant of their criticism. These intellectuals were forced to criticise those in power in obscure ways and in banned newspapers. The assumption held by most South African intelligentsias was that the end of apartheid would result in the public discourse being shaped by public intellectuals from all races and those in power would refrain from using their influence to bully those who disagreed with their viewpoints.

The first democratically elected government under the ANC came into power in 1994. Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa and served only one term from 1994 to 1999. Thabo Mbeki took over from Mandela in 1999 and was South Africa's head of state from 1999 until in 2008 when he was recalled. Mbeki stressed the importance of black public intellectuals' participation in the public discourse. Therefore, this was the reason for black public intellectuals to be jubilant when Mbeki ascended into power. However, this anticipation was not permanent as Mbeki and these public intellectuals disagreed on many issues and accused each other of being intolerant of their criticism. The antagonistic relationship between Mbeki and the selected black public intellectuals will form the cornerstone of this study.

Before Mbeki came into power he advocated for the freedom of the black voices in the public domain, more specifically for them to be able to freely criticise their leaders. But, when Mbeki came into power black public intellectuals practiced what he advocated for, which is speaking truth to power, in return he would challenge the criticism of black public intellectuals through his weekly articles called ANC today. Black public intellectuals deemed this as an act of intolerance towards their criticism of him and they demanded tolerance of their criticism by Mbeki This study will determine if Mbeki was tolerant of criticism he received from black public intellectuals, similarly this study will also focus on investigating whether or not public intellectuals were tolerant of the criticism they received from Mbeki.

This study focuses on the hostile relationship between Mbeki and black public intellectuals in the post-1994 era. This will be done by using two concepts, namely politics of criticism and politics of tolerance. More specifically, this research will attempt

to determine if robust debate occurred between Mbeki and three black public intellectuals, namely: Siphon Seepe, Xolela Mangcu and Mervin Gumede. This will be done by going through their writings, namely: books, newspaper articles, opinion pieces, speeches that were directed at one another. Central to this research is therefore to determine whether or not these opponents were tolerant to criticism.

Although, these intellectuals were consistent in their criticism towards Mbeki, it is important to note that these public intellectuals did not have a homogenic voice, nor did they agree with each on all matters. Even when they disagreed with Mbeki on the same issues, they all critiqued him from their own individual viewpoints. Black public intellectuals have different outlooks, beliefs, ideological beliefs etc. and are also critical of each other. The terms by which these three intellectuals engaged with Mbeki appear to be different. Their points of what to emphasise when criticising Mbeki appears show lines of continuity and sometimes discontinuity. These dimensions have not been interrogated in previous scholarship.

Mbeki often lumped black public intellectuals as one group. He did not treat them as a heterogeneous group and did not acknowledge their individual as well as unique viewpoints. When Mbeki criticised black public intellectuals, it was often to the whole group. As Seepe and Kgophola (1999:1) noted that “in his address on the occasion of the installation of Dr Mathole Motshekga as Chancellor of Vista University, President Mbeki lamented the ‘startling and terrible relative absence of black intelligentsia from public discussion going on in our country about its transformation’”. Mbeki was under the impression that black public intellectuals had to debate certain issues and in a certain manner, and if they decided to contest other issues or disagreed on his views, then he viewed this as an act of betrayal. Later in the same speech Mbeki stressed that there was “a paralysis of thought or a withdrawal from an open engagement of burning issues of the day or withdrawal from an open engagement of the burning issues of the day among this this important section of our population”.

The selected public intellectuals dedicated their intellectual work and commentary in challenging Mbeki, they believed that Mbeki’s constant presence in the public sphere as well as directly challenging their criticism of him had regressed the public sphere to that of the apartheid era. Seepe and Kgaphola (1999:46) assert that “the new government is highly sensitive to criticism is the common refrain. It is also an irony in history of history that the same Mbeki stands accused of introducing this intellectual paralysis”. Thus, from this basis, the three intellectuals were not afraid to speak truth to Mbeki even when they

were intimidated into becoming less critical of those in power, particularly by Mbeki and his government.

The year 2007 will be central to this research because this was the period when black public intellectuals cemented their role by making their views more pronounced in the public sphere. Their views have been most of the time expressed in opposition to those of Mbeki. It was also during this time that those who operated in the public sphere, questioned the independence of the media and felt that it was threatened by those in power. Bloch (2006:5) declared that “the current anti-intellectual populism that blames commentators, intellectuals, unidentifiable conspirators; that bays at independent views was likely going to hurt the young democracy”. Black public intellectuals accused Mbeki and his allies of trying to muzzle their criticism of him. Mangcu, Seepe and Gumede were nonetheless determined to speak truth persistently and consistently to power. In 2007 Mbeki increased his criticism of black public intellectuals by directly challenging the intellectuals who did not tow his line, and this will be evidenced in the different sections and topics covered in the study.

It is widely agreed upon that the public discourse needed to be reformed and treated as an independent entity in post-1994 South Africa. Tolerance and criticism are important components whenever contestation of ideas takes place, particularly in the public sphere. Tolerance is central to a democratic dispensation as it encourages acceptance and respect of viewpoints of others even if they differ from your own. This follows that public intellectuals are vital in strengthening a young democracy such as that of South African in that they are supposed to hold the people who are in power accountable for their actions. Thus, this research study will extensively examine if there was tolerance of ideas and criticism by both Mbeki and black public intellectuals.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

This study centres on how three black public intellectuals, namely: Siphon Seepe, Xolela Mangcu and Mervin Gumede and Thabo Mbeki engaged with each other in post-1994 period and how this shaped the South African political discourse. This will be achieved through applying the concepts of politics of tolerance and politics of criticism. There was a hostile relationship between Mbeki and black intellectuals as they continuously exchanged ideas in their respective public platforms. The year 2007 is central to this research, this was the period when black public intellectuals made their views more pronounced.



These selected public intellectuals may be black men, but it is imperative to take into account that black public intellectuals do not speak on behalf of all black people, nor do they represent the views of all black people. They use their platform to voice out their own viewpoints and they do not claim to embody the voice of all black people. Their role as public intellectuals is to speak out against social injustices and to make sure that those in power act in the best interest of the public, due to the historical background of South Africa, black people account for majority of those who are disadvantaged.

The selected public intellectuals' accused Mbeki of being intolerant of their criticism and creating an environment which induced fear amongst black public intellectuals. They also accused Mbeki of using his allies to silence them, such as the SABC blacklisting incident, when Mangcu, Seepe and Gumede were among several public intellectuals who were banned from contesting their viewpoints on the various SABC platforms because they were too critical of the government.

### **1.3 Literature Review**

After the end of the apartheid regime, South Africa became a democratic country democracy, which is a political system that encourages inclusivity and respect amongst all social groups and differing of opinions. Democracy encourages inclusion of everyone; along with freedom of expression tolerance of criticism is expected in the public sphere. Gibson (2013:1) asserted that "political minorities in a liberal democracy must be given the means of contestation, the right to try to convince others of the rightness of their positions". This is especially the case with black voices that were oppressed and not tolerated during the apartheid regime.

The narrative of the public discourse should be shaped by all parties, and all who participate in the public sphere should have their criticism tolerated. It is in this context that black public intellectuals should be allowed to contest their viewpoints in post-1994 South Africa. Their intense interaction with Mbeki could be indicative that criticism under the democratic era was going to face serious test. It is, therefore, imperative to determine if public intellectual's opinions and views were tolerated by Mbeki. Coming from the notion that no social group has more of a right to operate in the public sphere than others, it is necessary to ascertain if tolerance was exercised during these tussles. Gibson (2013:412) writes that "political tolerance in a democracy requires that all political ideas (and the groups holding them) get the same access to the marketplace of ideas as the access legally extended to the ideas dominating the system". This was particularly important due to the fact that black voices were muzzled for decades during

apartheid system, black public intellectuals had to fight very hard to be able to contest their viewpoints in the public domain. The black reality was whitewashed and narrated by white public intellectuals, who did not know nor understand the realities, hardships and oppression faced by black people. Black public intellectuals had to speak on behalf of black people in order to ensure that those in power will empower those who were previously oppressed. It is therefore important for the media to give space to black public intellectuals to speak from their own unique viewpoints that are shaped by their historical background

Unsurprisingly, the earlier works on black people and their experiences was written by white people; and those written by black people were banned because they were deemed too critical of the apartheid regime. Gouws (1993:20) wrote extensively on political tolerance in the South African context stated that, “tolerance is directly related to how willing people are to put up with their opponents. It entails the willingness to extend civil liberties to adversaries”. Tolerance is an important component of democracy, and Gouws acknowledged tolerance as a critical component when contesting ideas in the public domain. Tolerance, therefore, encourages opponents to put up with each other’s criticism. The viewpoints of black public intellectuals should be respected in the public sphere, likewise black public intellectuals should respect the criticism they receive.

Moreno-Raino (2002:7) emphasised that “political tolerance is the willingness to extend basic rights and civil liberties to people or groups whose viewpoints differ from one’s own, argues. Gibson and Gouw (2003) added that “all citizens including political leaders have responsibility to practice political tolerance in their action and words”. People in power should be tolerant whenever public intellectuals criticise them, in fact they are duty-bound to hold those in power accountable to the public by speaking out if they do not act in the best interest of the people who elected them.

Political criticism involves and encourages the presence of robust debates with and about those in power by intelligentsia. Political criticism came into existence in the post-1994 South African public discourse. Due to political criticism being relatively new in the country, there is very little literature that specifically focuses on political criticism in the South African context. Political criticism is defined by Amponsah (2004:23) as “an indispensable value to democratically informed public and principal means of protecting democracy itself”. Vigorous debates and discussions in the public platform are imperative in a democratic country, particularly in a transitioning democracy such as South Africa. It is the duty of the public intellectual to be critical of those in power and keep the public

informed about decisions undertaken by those in power. Debates and discussions in the public domain between public intellectuals and those in power, ensures that the public is informed about what is happening in their own country, as well as to gain different perspectives on the topic at hand.

Tolerance is essential when criticism is being practiced, these two concepts are interwoven, and both need to be present when debates and discussions take place in public platforms. Opponents need to be tolerant of the criticism they receive. Said (2002:15) agrees with this by emphasising the need for “critical intellectuals who are equipped to raise embarrassing questions, and to confront orthodoxy and dogma”. Critical intellectuals are essentials and should always speak truth to power no matter the consequences that follows, their sole quest is to ensure that those in power are answerable to the public.

Mbeki (1978:1) emphasised that post-apartheid freedom could not be imagined except by deciding in a rigorous way through open debate of what was wrong about apartheid. He stressed the need for critical robust debate between government and public intellectuals. According to Cowling and Hamilton (2008:27), “South Africa has been an environment that appears to be hospitable to intellectuals, however in the years of Mbeki’s presidency a series of controversies erupted around who is entitled to talk”. Mangcu and Seepe raised concerns that Mbeki appeared to think that black public intellectuals should not criticise the black government. Mangcu (2014) stated that Mbeki would resort to “racial nativism” (see Chapter 4) to portray public intellectuals as traitors whenever they criticised a black President. In addition, Mangcu (2008: 53) inferred that to criticise the government was not only described as unpatriotic but was portrayed as an act of collusion with the enemies of the revolution. Gumede (2007) supported this view by adding that Mbeki’s standard response had been to offer his harshest critics of his policies government positions. They were publicly ridiculed and shut out by the President and his allies.

Mangcu (2014) argues that black public intellectuals have a particular perspective that can inform a national conversation on the public purpose. Themba Sono (1994) scrutinised the dilemmas that affected black public intellectuals in post-1994 South Africa. Sono (1994:12) argued that black public intellectuals “even in the new South Africa remain severely circumscribed for a long time because politics has coloured them differently from other racial groups in South Africa”. Coming from difficult circumstances under apartheid, black public intellectuals are still characterised by the

colour of their skin, they are not referred to as just public intellectuals but, their colour of their skin is attached to what they do. They are still othered in the public domain a space that is supposed to be free and fair for all who participate in it.

Public intellectuals should be independent and they do not owe any loyalty to a political party or to any politician. Alexander (2009:19) characterises them as “actors who can exercise judgement because they themselves are free-floating and independent”. Public intellectuals have independent relations to those in power. Said (2002:20) classifies them as “thinkers who are independent of the state and other interest have an obligation to speak truth to power”. Black public intellectuals are the embattled voices fighting against a dominant discourse, and as independent entities they should ignore those in power when they try to stifle their ideas. Themes that resonate in this research are intolerance during contestation of ideas between Mbeki and black public intellectuals and that criticism of ideas is not welcomed. Said (2002:10) emphasizes that “the intellectual’s role is dialectically oppositional to uncover and elucidate the contest”. This study examines if Mbeki’s rhetoric was actually at the core of the antagonistic relationship between him and black public intellectuals.

#### **1.4 Objectives of this research study**

This research has three objectives in order to adequately deal with the problem statement above. This research will:

- (a) Explore and investigate the relationship between Mbeki and black public intellectuals. The focus will be on three individuals, namely Mangcu, Seepe and Gumede, since they were prominent in the public exchanges with the then president of South Africa.
- (b) Examine the zeitgeist of South Africa in post-994 period, particularly during Mbeki’s tenure.
- (c) Investigate whether or not the democratic project in South Africa did create a conducive environment and platform wherein black public intellectuals would be free to speak truth to power.

#### **1.5 Delimitation**

This research will focus on the political discourse of both Mbeki and black public intellectuals in the public sphere. However, this is too comprehensive for it to be covered in one study, so it cannot be studied in its entirety. This study will deliberate on Mbeki’s discourse with black public intellectuals in the post-1994 period. The timeframe for the

study will be mainly focused on the year 2007 since this was the period where black public intellectuals cemented their position in the South African intellectual discourse. There are many leading black public intellectuals in the post-1994 South African public sphere but this research will only focus on the intellectual work of three black public intellectuals, namely Xolela Mangcu, Siphosiso Seepe and Mervin Gumede. These three were selected because they dedicated their intellectual work to directly challenging Mbeki.

## **1.6 Rationale**

The end of the apartheid regime resulted in the freedom of the public sphere. However, the transitioning of the South African post-1994 political and public discourse was fragile and needed a public sphere whereby tolerance towards criticism was not only encouraged but practiced by all parties who participated in the public sphere. There is little scholarly work on the subject of political tolerance and political criticism in the post-1994 South Africa context, especially in relation to Mbeki and black public intellectuals. The purpose of this study is to assess if tolerance and criticism were practiced by both Mbeki and the selected black public intellectuals.

Focusing on Mbeki and his relationship with black public intellectuals is significant in understanding the dynamics in which political tolerance and political criticism have been practiced and navigated in post-1994 South Africa. The discourse is unfolding, and one cannot neglect the role of black public intellectuals in the public space; which involves contestation, debating and critiquing of ideas. Consequently, there is need to determine if tolerance and respect between Mbeki and black public intellectuals were accomplished. Politics of tolerance and politics of criticism are important in the public discourse. These concepts need to be interrogated and then implemented especially in the public arena. The argument in this regard is, therefore, that if tolerance of criticism is successfully implemented it will encourage vigorous and free debate in public spheres.

The importance of this research is underscored and supported by Mbeki in a speech he made in exile where he critiqued the intolerance of the apartheid government where Mbeki said “post-apartheid freedom couldn’t effectively be imagined except by deciding in a rigorous way through open debate, what was previously bad about apartheid and earlier forms of colonialism Roberts 2007:146). Mbeki raised concerns about the lack of open public debate during apartheid and that critical debates needed to take place in an effective and free government. This study examines if Mbeki and the ANC government

created an environment that encouraged rigorous open debate between public intellectuals and those in positions of authority.

The examination of the relationship between Mbeki and black public intellectuals is imperative in relation to the post-1994 public discourse because it might reveal different ideological positions of both Mbeki and the public intellectuals on the future direction of shaping the country's democracy. This study will contribute to the field by examining the post-1994 South African political discourse and determine if tolerance and criticism was practiced by both Mbeki and black public intellectuals.

### **1.7 Research Methodology**

There are various research methods to choose from, but qualitative method will be employed in this research in order to understand the complex questions posed. Straus and Corbin (1998:10) stated that qualitative research refers to “any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification”. Qualitative research enables researchers to study social and cultural phenomenon. It is purely theoretical and does not deal with numbers, but it deals with unpacking and deconstructing the complexity of the study which is observed or researched. Denzin and Lincoln (2003:13) detailed that “qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter, it attempts to make sense of or to interpret phenomenon in terms of meaning people bring to them”. Qualitative research attempts to make sense of the subject (s) being studied and this is done by looking and dissecting them holistically. However, Creswell (1994:45) states that it involves “a systematic inquiry into the nature or qualities of complex social group behaviours by employing interpretative and naturalistic approaches”.

Creswell (1994:145) detailed that “some of the characteristics of qualitative approach are as follows. Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning how people make sense of their lives, experience and their structure of the world”. This method is explorative in nature, this type of research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process meaning and understanding gained through words.

In the light of the aforementioned definitions and characteristics qualitative research method is deemed to be the most suitable method for this research. Flick (1998:5) advances that “objects should not be reduced to single variables but are studied in their complexities and entirety in their everyday context”. This research method will be the most suitable for this research concerning Mbeki's antagonistic relationship with black

public intellectuals. Subjects' viewpoints are the first starting point Flick (1998:10). This method provides information about the human side of an issue that is often has contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions and relationship of individual.

Textual analysis will be the technique for data collection. According to McKee (2003:1) "textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world". In addition, Fairclough (2003:20) defines textual analysis as "interpretation of texts in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which in particular people at particular times make sense of the world around them".

Creswell (2000:12) stated that "when we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be of that text". People interpret text in different ways, even the same text can be interpreted in different ways by different people. This is relevant for this research because Mbeki and black public intellectuals read the same text but interpreted them in different manners: For instance, Mbeki might view his words as creating a platform in which to engage in open debate with black public intellectuals, but they might interpret the same text as Mbeki being intolerant of their criticism.

The study will adopt thematic analysis as the methodological foreground. This is essential to understand how tolerance and criticisms is compared, contrasted, and correlated in post-1994 South African public discourse. Boyatzis (1998:4) states that "thematic analysis provides a structured methodology for identifying key themes within a data set". It is the most effective method to investigate the strained relationship between Mbeki and black public intellectuals.

A thematic analysis of Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede's intellectual works along with Mbeki's articles and rhetoric was done in order to understand their ideological positionalities in relation to the public discourse in post-1994 South Africa. Gross (2013: 11) stated that "a thematic analysis identifies explicit and implicit themes in data, its recognizable patterns and relationships of meaning (similarities, commonalities, contrasts, differentiations, tensions etc.)". The chosen themes will determine if tolerance and criticism was practiced by both Mbeki and black public intellectuals. This will be done by going through their texts.

Thematic analysis complements qualitative research. It examines the texts and data of the topic at hand, by doing so; it will establish the true nature of a complex relationship that existed between Mbeki and black public intellectuals. Delahunt and Maguire (2017:

3353) state that “the goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes, i.e., patterns in the data that are important or interesting and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue”.

Thematic analysis was ideal for this study; it assisted in attempting to understanding dynamics of the relationship between Mbeki and black public intellectuals. Thematic analysis also assisted in analysing the texts that were fundamental in the study, it ensures that the research is accurate, because themes extracted from the texts are the primary sources. By allowing the texts to speak for themselves, the research will determine if tolerance of criticism was practiced by both Mbeki and black public intellectuals.

## **1.8 Chapter outline**

Chapter 1: Introduction provides the introduction of the study.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework: Understanding public Intellectuals, tolerance and criticism: Provides a theoretical framework of the two concepts that are central to this study, tolerance and criticism in post-1994 South African political and public discourse. This chapter also provides historical background and context in order to understanding the positionality of black public intellectuals.

Chapter 3: The AIDS debate examines the position that defined the AIDS discourse in post-1994 South Africa. More especially, how race and the AIDS discourse were intertwined.

Chapter 4: On the race debate. This chapter lays the groundwork to the understanding of race and importance of understanding and discussing racial issues in post-1994 South Africa.

Chapter 5: The media debate. This chapter critically analyses the media as a contested platform in post-1994 South Africa and examines if black public intellectuals’ criticism was tolerated by Mbeki. Conversely, this chapter will also observe if black public intellectuals tolerated criticism from Mbeki.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Provides a conclusion to the study.





## **Chapter 2: Theoretical framework: understanding public intellectuals, tolerance and criticism**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will provide the theoretical framework for the study, which will be done in reference to two concepts under scrutiny namely, political tolerance and political criticism. These two concepts are crucial for this study and their nexus will be examined particularly in relation to the post-1994 South African public discourse. The first concept political tolerance looks at whether all social groups in South Africa were granted their civil liberties, it emphasises the importance of respecting opposing viewpoints. The second concept, political criticism, is fundamental when contestation of ideas occurs in the public domain, and its presence together with political tolerance creates a vigorous public discourse. These two concepts are interwoven and are central components when contestation of ideas takes place in the public domain a robust public debate. Tolerance of criticism is crucial in the post-1994 South African context; otherwise respect for other people's views would be undermined. As such, the presence of these two concepts is supposed to allow black public intellectuals, to be able to freely contest their viewpoints in the public domain without fear of being silenced by those in power.

Furthermore, this chapter examines whether or not Mbeki created an environment where lively debates can take place in the public domain and also where all viewpoints are tolerated. As a theoretical framework, this chapter seeks to assist in gaining an in-depth understanding of the public discourse in post-1994 South Africa.

### **2.2 Understanding public intellectuals**

South Africa is a country that has been historically polarised by race, black people were treated as second class citizens and marginalized in their own country, the effects of apartheid still linger. Race is vital when trying to understand the South African public, political and social discourse in post-1994. During apartheid, blackness was always the juxtaposition of whiteness, whereas whiteness was associated with being intellectually superior, morally good and sophisticated; blackness was associated with being intellectually inferior, immoral and crass. Black public intellectuals were supposed to change the narratives and eradicate the negative stereotypes associated with blackness. Black public intellectuals had to redefine themselves in post-1994 public discourse through their writings.

During apartheid Mbeki along with black public intellectuals, were publicly vocal against the injustice committed by the white oppressive government towards black people, they would often publicly criticise the intolerant apartheid government. Black public intellectuals were Mbeki's biggest support, they were under the assumption that when Mbeki came into power, he would tolerate criticism, which he had demanded from the apartheid regime. However, the honeymoon phase ended shortly after he became president. Black public intellectuals engaged and criticised Mbeki in a manner that was unapologetic.

Mbeki (1978:1) in his speech stated the "post-apartheid freedom could not effectively be imagined except by deciding in a rigorous way through open debates". Mbeki identified himself as a public intellectual who fought hard to eradicate apartheid in South Africa in favour of democracy. Mbeki was the voice of the unrepresented; he was part of a social group which was denied access to contest their ideas in the public domain. Mbeki challenged the status quo and fled to exile in order to use the international public platform to fight the intolerant apartheid government.

When Mbeki became President, he could no longer speak truth to power because he was in power, his role had shifted from critiquing those in power to being in power, and whereas black public intellectuals continued performing their role of speaking truth to power. Black public intellectuals accused Mbeki of being intolerant to criticism. Mangcu (2007:38) conjectures that Mbeki was intolerant of their criticism and would "start calling out for black public intellectuals to come to his defence on a number of public policies". Mbeki felt betrayed when black public intellectuals criticised his policies or rhetoric, he ignored the fact that the black public intellectuals should have their criticism tolerated, instead of being attacked or bullied for speaking truth to power.

Mbeki was a product of the ANC; his political background heavily influenced his political leadership style. As Gumede (2005:292) points out "the ANC in exile adopted an almost military command style... in exile and in the underground things were run tightly, information was on a need-to-know basis. If information was leaked into the wrong hands it could cause problem for the movement". Mbeki was born into the struggle both his parents were prominent figures in the ANC, the rules of the ANC were entrenched within him and thus, were inherent in his leadership style when he came into power. Mbeki was accustomed to the fact that a leader did not get criticised; those who criticised the leader were to be punished, there was little to no deliberation of ideas. Mbeki as a product of the ANC but he did believe in having an open public domain. He was bound to the

confines of democracy, which promoted robust discussions between those in power and black public intellectuals.

Daniels (2007:41) observed that “during the period of Mbeki’s presidency, it will be argued that labelling critics has become the drum Mbeki has beaten consistently”. Mbeki was a president who was highly regarded amongst his peers and foes. Before he came into power, many public intellectuals, business fraternity and international community sang his praises. Mbeki was not used to being criticised or challenged. As enshrined by the doctrine of the ANC, a leader was never to be challenged, whenever this anomaly occurred to Mbeki, he reverted to name calling or bullying tactics. Gumede (2005:292) points out that “stepping out of line came at a high cost”. He grappled with ruling a democratic South Africa with an open public sphere, with the dogma of a tightly ruled ANC. Mbeki contradict himself throughout his tenure, his rhetoric was contradictory to how he would act. Gumede (2005: 109) concurs with this statement by articulating that “Mbeki would often speak left and act right”. Mbeki had to adjust to a new doctrine and would have to redefine himself and adjust his leadership style to that of a democratic president.

Daniels (2007:65) observed that “Mbeki attacks and labels those who criticise his policies as disloyal, elite, agents of white colonials and so forth”. He lambasted those who criticise him, he believed that no one should question him or his decision, those who dared to criticise him were viewed as disloyal and black public intellectuals who criticised him, were accused of betraying their race. The ANC paranoia with....would often resurface, in the democratic post-1994 he could not imprison those who challenged him, but he would punish them, by attacking them mercilessly along with his allies. He used to his power to manipulate, alienate and attack his opponents. He was a skilful chess player who used people as pawns, for which he used to attack his opponents. He also persuaded, charmed and seduced his opponents, if that did not succeed, he would outright attack them. Those who criticised him or his policies, were not heard or attempted to engage over their differences, but his intolerance of being criticised would lead to him labelling them as disloyal, and therefore working for the white agents who wanted to sabotage the “incompetent” black government.

Mbeki identified himself as a public intellectual and this in itself is problematic. This resulted in him feeling betrayed when his allies (black public intellectuals) criticised him. Public intellectuals are supposed to speak truth to power, but if those in power are also public intellectuals then they cannot be detached or neutral. Hence, it is impossible for

those in power to be public intellectuals. Although, Mbeki would engage directly with black public intellectuals in public, Mbeki created a system of marginalizing black public intellectuals who publicly criticised him. Mbeki was accused of openly displayed intolerance of criticism, by attacking black public intellectuals who criticised him. This could be viewed as Mbeki defending himself and his decisions, this is not an act of intolerance but the case of a misunderstood man defending himself.

Black public intellectuals in the South African context share a common historical background and identity with black people, which is the reason they feel duty bound to highlight racial issues in post-1994 South Africa public discourse. Black public intellectuals' identity is tied to their race, they are not just public intellectuals they are black public intellectuals. Through their intellectual work, they highlight the injustices; discrimination and indignity faced by black people in post-1994 South Africa. Black issues should be contested and highlighted in the public sphere and not swept under the rug it is the duty of the black public intellectual to always highlight these issues in order to eradicate the injustices that were a by-product of apartheid.

Black public intellectuals come from a social group which are viewed in a negative manner; black public intellectuals are stigmatised and categorized by their racial group. Black people in South Africa prior to 1994 were oppressed and prohibited from partaking in the political and public discourse, they have been defined historically as unintelligent, lesser than and intellectually inferior. Black public intellectuals were prohibited from criticising the government and contesting their ideas in the public sphere. Those who were courageous enough to challenge the government, they were jail, tortured or forced into exile during the apartheid regime. Mbeki (2001:1) "emphasised a necessary precondition if Africa is to claim the 21<sup>st</sup> century namely, the need for Africa to recapture the intellectual space and define; and therefore, imperative to develop its intellectual capital". Mbeki believed that black public intellectuals needed to recapture the public sphere, his rhetoric was of someone who encouraged public intellectuals to freely contest in public sphere, and from such statements black public intellectuals assumed that when Mbeki came into power he would tolerate criticism he received from black intelligentsia.

Gumede, Mangcu and Seepe, have identified themselves as public intellectuals whose main aim is to ensure that the government acts in the best interest of the public. Seepe (2004:22) stated his role as a black public intellectual as follows "I have sought to stimulate and enable alternative perspectives and practices. This involves critiquing prevailing discourses with the hope of either enriching or dislodging them". Seepe

identified himself as a black public intellectual, whose duty is to speak out for those who are marginalised and to challenge those in power when they do not act in the best interest of the public. Seepe believes that he should be able to criticise those in power; and those in power should tolerate his criticism. When it came to challenging Mbeki, Seepe held no punches he was a fierce critic of Mbeki. Mangcu (2008:39) noted that “the most courageous role was played by Seepe through his ‘no-hold barred’ column the Mail and Guardian. Seepe’s strategy was to cut through Mbeki’s intellectual façade”. Seepe would boldly criticise Mbeki and his decisions, more especially with his AIDS narrative.

Mangcu (2014:13) identifies himself “as being part of a fortunate group of columnists who engage directly with broader politics and moral questions of our times”. Mangcu acknowledges that being a black public intellectual is a privilege which is bestowed on a chosen few and that he should use the public domain to speak on behalf of his social group who have been discriminated, oppressed and marginalised for decades under the apartheid regime and centuries before.

Mangcu viewed himself as a representative for those who did not have public access. He believes that he should use his public platform to contest issues which would highlight and address black issues amongst others. Mangcu expected his criticism to be tolerated by those in power. As a black public intellectual he believed that it was his duty to hold those in power accountable for their actions. The demand for transparency from the leaders on behalf of the public. Gumede identified himself as a black public intellectual who aims to change the narrative in the post-1994 South Africa public discourse. Black public intellectuals have to highlight the historical legacy of intolerance towards their social group, which lingers on after the end of apartheid. They should disrupt the status quo by asking uncomfortable questions in order to bring change and equality for black people.

Black public intellectuals must demand for space in the public sphere. Mangcu (2004:35) maintains that “intellectual history should be given a place and ideas should be fought for in political discourse”. Black public intellectuals speak from a unique viewpoint; they are liberators who should ensure that issues pertaining to black people are not ignored by the government. Mangcu (2005:1) further states that “the public intellectual is somebody who promoted the idea of talk in the public domain”. Mangcu identified himself as a fearless and revolutionary intellectual and utilised the public domain to fight those who want to censure him.

Mangcu (2007:36) believes that “black public intellectuals represent a set of values and world experiences that have a historically been locked out of the knowledge-ideas complex in South Africa”. Black public intellectuals were silent observers whose government was intolerant of their criticism; their knowledge were restricted to be shared underground or published in foreign lands. Post-1994 black public intellectuals should be torch bearers who fought to be at the forefront of changing the knowledge sharing space. Mangcu and his fellow black public intellectuals have an important role to fulfil by ensuring that those in power are held accountable to the public.

Black public intellectuals unlike their white counterparts are faced with the harsh reality of their race, which comes with the burden of being discriminated. They cannot ignore their race and the oppressive historical and social realities that are interwoven with their race. Record (1954:232) stated that, “black intellectuals by contrast have a grievance that is specific and constant, his identification with an oppressed racial minority”. Black public intellectuals can speak out for black intellectuals because they have a shred experience of being oppressed, marginalised and ostracised because of their race. They would be able to fight for their justice and for their socio-political equality.

They have to confront their blackness and also all the burdens and discrimination that comes with the race they were born into. Black public intellectuals have to address and acknowledge their blackness in the public sphere which is are sensitive and often ignored issues, by addressing their blackness, difficulties that come with it and the stigmas attached to being black in order to create political awareness and hopefully lead to equality in post-1994 South African political and public discourse. As Dobrin (2006:114) indicated “the articulation of self through the narrative writing becomes a most important avenue for both revealing and reinventing the future of the race”. Black public intellectuals have to be at the forefront of their social group by fighting on behalf of them. They need to be the voice of those that are disadvantaged and to empower their social group. Black public intellectuals have to changing the narrative of the discourse and identity associated with blackness.

It is important to note that that black public intellectuals do not speak on behalf of all black people, nor do they claim to speak on behalf of all black people. Additionally, it is important to establish whether or not black public intellectuals defined themselves as a collective or Individuals; this will determine if they believed to speak on behalf of themselves or a collective group. When a person speaks for themselves, they do not have much at stake; if they speak on the behalf of a group they are more likely to fight

relentlessly for their people regardless of the consequences. By being part of a collective group, the public intellectual becomes accountable to the group within which they self-define with; also they are responsible for highlighting their issues in the public sphere.

In the South African context black public intellectuals defines themselves as collective intellectuals who should speak on behalf of their social group. As stated by Netupsky (2013:3) “for black public intellectuals recognising their social realities is the first step towards developing a critical mass of knowledge, this reservoir of knowledge is the first step towards a potent political awareness which creates political consciousness”. An understanding of the way black public intellectuals defined themselves is crucial, they may be part of a group that experienced similar hardships, but they are more than just their race and should be allowed to speak on other issues.

In a society that labels you according to your social group, defining one’s actual self is difficult to do as it involves a lot of self-actualisation and self-introspection. It is hard to define one’s self objectively. Society labels us according to our social groups. From the day we are born, we are reduced to the stereotypes tied to our social group. This is relevant to this study; because it is imperative to establish how black public intellectuals define themselves and how they have been defined by others in post-1994 South Africa.

Self-definition is a multifaceted and vital process; which is fundamental in the way we define ourselves. How we define ourselves is intrinsically linked to how we will act within our social group. Race and racial exclusion have been entrenched and institutionalised in the socio-political blueprint of the South African government. When black public intellectuals define themselves, their race more often than not would be part of it, because of their race and racial identity in the South African context awards you privilege or disfranchisement. Sometimes it is not interior that defines us but the exterior; or worse we can define ourselves by stereotypical chains that others have shackles us to. Verkuyten (1991:280) posits that “when it comes to self-definition what matters most is how we perceive and define ourselves”. Self-definition is a difficult process. In South Africa people are defined by the exterior, their race plays an important factor in how their lives shape up. Black people are often born into poverty and discrimination. On the other hand, white people are born into unfair privilege and awarded opportunities that are out of reach for black people.

Foucault believes that there are two kinds on public intellectuals the universal and the specific intellectual. Foucault (1980:67) defined “universal intellectual “[as] the spokesman of the universal, in the capacity of master of truth and justice”. The universal



intellectual spoke on behalf of everyone, they are the torch bearer of the truth and their ideas were not contested in the public sphere. The universal intellectual spoke on all topics at hand, he felt no emotional attachment to specific issues but was the spokesman for all information to the proletariats, and his words were the truth and were not contested in the public sphere. The universal intellectual dictated the discourse they were intolerant of criticism because they were the masters of the truth therefore their words were not supposed to be challenged.

The specific intellectual is the opposite of the universal intellectual. Foucault (1980:68) defined the “specific intellectual as one who has learned to combine theory and practice, the expert situated in specific contexts and therefore aware of specific struggles”. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed the narrative and shape of the public discourse shifted the mass were allowed to partake in the public discourse, it changed from the public being dictated by the selected noble few to ideas being contested in the public sphere. Public intellectuals were no longer speaking on behalf of those in power, but advocated for what was in the best interest of the public. The specific intellectuals played a crucial role in changing the public sphere they created it into a space where ideas can be contested and those in power were held accountable for their actions by public intellectuals. Specific intellectuals usually have a shared historical experience with the group they are fighting for; they focus on a specific subject which they feel passionate towards. As opposed to the universal intellectual the specific intellectual is not the master of the truth but one who lives by the truth. Specific intellectuals speak truth to power and encourage contestation of ideas in the public sphere, they are tolerant of criticism.

Said (1993:9) sums it up that, the role of a public intellectual is to be “someone whose place it is to publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma”. In post-1994 the new government has been accused of being sensitive to criticism especially during Mbeki’s tenure; he would often name call or attack his biggest critics using his weekly articles published in the ANC website called ANC today. Seepe (2004:23) posits that black public intellectuals “should rely largely on the resources that intellectuals embrace and champion throughout the world, ruthless criticism, intellectual honesty, logic and intellectual consistency”. Black public intellectuals should criticise those in power even if they try to silence them, they should be brave enough to challenge those in power event if they bully them in order to try to change their narrative.

Black public intellectuals’ role is to be bold truth tellers also to challenge the injustices that have been done to all social groups in the country. As posited by Dobrin (2006:1)

“the role of black public intellectuals in particular is to be a paid pest whose function is to disrupt and intervene upon conversations in the ways that are disturbing, that in their very disturbance forces people to ask why they frame their question in the way they did to analyses they do”. Black public intellectuals’ role is to make sure that issues that are experienced the marginalised black people is debated in the public sphere, they are not there to serve the interests of those who are in power their main concern is telling the truth even if it disturbs or offends those in power. They are like infant babies crying for attentions they need to throw tantrums until those in power take notice, acknowledge and address their complaints.

Gumede believes that the black public intellectuals should act as fearless referees who should bring to task those who transgress. Mbeki wrath was feared by black public intellectuals, many caved to his intolerance. Seepe (2004:24) observed that “the fear of retaliation and the tendency to ingratiate to those in power saw many so-called black public intellectuals withdraw from public debates”. Many black public intellectuals would cave into the bullying tactics and name calling by Mbeki and his allies, as a result of Mbeki’s intolerance to criticism. These were not true public intellectuals they were pseudo-intellectuals who could be silenced, authentic intellectuals should be ferocious and fearless critics; who are only loyal to the public. Authentic public intellectuals should be fighters whose passion for conquest of the truth should burn brighter than the fear of those in power.

Mbeki would directly engage with black public intellectuals in the public sphere. Mangcu (2009:47) noted that “Mbeki defining self-perspective in that of an intellectual leader; a philosopher king”. Mbeki identified himself as a public intellectual and took his role seriously he enjoyed contesting ideas with his opponents, he was an outspoken leader who would publicly defend himself against those who criticise him. When he came into power there was a fundamental contradiction between how Mbeki articulated the way in which black public intellectuals should be allowed to freely contest in the public sphere, as opposed to the way he treated black public intellectuals during his tenure. However, it can be argued that was this was an act of intolerance to criticism or just contesting his ideas in the public sphere. Whichever way you look at it Mbeki thrived and ultimately helped in shaping the in the post-1994 South Africa public discourse

### **2.3 The politics of tolerance**

Political tolerance is a fundamental element for a well-functioning public discourse. The public sphere should be open to everyone who want to contest their ideas and most

importantly there should be plurality of ideas. Tolerance should be present in order for all opponents to operate in the public domain. Moreno-Raino (2002:8) defines political tolerance as “the willingness to extend basic rights and civil liberties to persons whose viewpoints differ from one’s own”. Tolerance ensures that all social groups can coexist together, this is most important in a heterogeneous country such as South Africa, which has people from various social groups, religions, cultures etc. coexisting in one country. Tolerance entails respecting different viewpoints and allowing opponents to express them freely in the public sphere. Tolerance fundamentally is the action of actively acknowledging that your opponent’s viewpoints contradicts your own, and not taking actions to censure or attack them. Political tolerance does not mean that opponents will get along with their differences nor will they be opposite sides on all ideas.

Gouws (1993:17) posits that “tolerance is directly related to how willing people are to put up with their opponents. It entails the willingness to extend civil liberties to adversaries”. Tolerance is not about accepting opponent’s viewpoints but respecting them even when they differ from your own. Extending civil liberties to adversaries allows all social groups to be able to freely express their viewpoints in the public sphere without fear of being rebuked or censured. All social groups, irrespective of their constructed social ranking, strength or power, should respect civil liberties of their opponents as a fundamental right instead of thinking that they are doing them a favour.

Moreno-Riano (2002: 9) stressed that “the individual’s rights and freedom are encouraged, a wide array of ideas and beliefs, some which may offend segments of oppositions”. Opponents may have viewpoints which may offend each other; such differences should be encouraged in the public sphere but, as long as opponents understand that their right to freedom of speech is intrinsically linked to their obligation to tolerate the viewpoints of others. Sullivan et al. (1995:13) supports Gouws’ (1993) idea by adding that “tolerance refers to a willingness to put up with things that one rejects, the term presumes oppositions or disagreement”. The concept of tolerance does not allude to nor does it promote uniformity, instead it is about acknowledging the differences in opinions and allowing opponents to freely express their viewpoints. When there is uniformity tolerance is not essential.

It is necessary to add that the presence of tolerance does not mean that all social groups will agree or get along, but it means that they should respect each other’s viewpoints. Even if they reject them, tolerance should always prevail. Gouws (1993:20) reasons that “without safeguards for free expressions of divergent opinions, we risk tyranny of the

majority”. Those in power and public intellectuals need to ensure that they respect each other’s opinions when debating issues. Whenever one opponent feels more entitled for their ideas to be tolerated then they themselves will become intolerant.

The presence of tolerance is not measured nor is it determined by consensus between oppositions, however it is determined by how oppositions handle or react to viewpoints which contradict their own. Consensus does not require tolerance, Davids and Waghid (2017:1) advances that “if we were to all agree on what to think or how to act the need for tolerance would disappear”. Consensus of ideas is the antithesis of tolerance. Uniformity of viewpoints does not arouse debates in the public sphere; instead it creates a single narrative which is indicative of an undemocratic society. South Africa is a heterogeneous country that calls home to people from different social groups, the presence of tolerance ensures that people are able to express their viewpoints without the outright vilification from others who disagree with them.

Plurality of ideas and the presence of tolerance are critical in strengthening a democracy, different viewpoints challenges our ways of thinking and force us to continuously challenge our own viewpoints. Davids and Waghid (2017:1) contends that “when people disagree, they are in fact inciting each other to think anew and differently about established ideas or beliefs. It is through disagreement that we dislodge ourselves from rigid ways of thinking and being and refine our ideas and positions”. Plurality of ideas awards public intellectuals the chance to be able to learn from each other and gives the public a chance to create informed opinions on pertinent issues.

Tolerance in the context of deliberation in the public sphere is essential for a well-functioning state and to cultivate a culture of debate. Gouws (1993:25) postulates that “in a free and open society public deliberation exposes bad ideas instead of supressing them”. Ideas of opponents should be freely expressed; it is almost impossible for individuals to have the same ideas for everything. A culture of debate involves openly contesting and exchanging of ideas, and leaders should encourage and create an environment which nurtures and promotes a culture of free debates.

Tolerance should be actively practiced; one is not inherently born tolerant. Tolerance is a difficult concept to achieve, people acquire tolerance, or lack thereof, from the social groups which are they are born into. Tolerance should be promoted and practiced by all who participate in the public sphere. In the public sphere when public intellectuals and those in power are contesting ideas, both sides should allow their opponents to freely express their viewpoints.

Political tolerance lies at the heart of civil societies, civil liberties should be awarded to all. Vujcic (1996:55) observed that “the attitude towards civil liberties (the right to assemble, public speech, etc.) can present an important measure of the political tolerance of citizens”. It is only through the process of acceptance and respect of others’ civil liberties that political tolerance can be achieved. There are many public intellectuals from different civil societies with contrasting viewpoints who actively participate in the public sphere. However, if their criticism is not tolerated then their voices and the public sphere are meaningless. Those in power should accept public intellectuals as right-holders who are entitled to contest their ideas in the public sphere without encountering intimidation and censorship.

The functionality and conduciveness of public sphere is determined by how opponents receive criticism from each other. A well-functioning and healthy public sphere is comprised of opponents who allow and accept each other as right-holders to contest ideas. Opponents should not use their powers to intimidate or bully their adversary; instead those in power should create an environment whereby tolerance is practiced. De Vos (2014:1) outlines that “political leaders are duty-bound to play a crucial role in promoting this tolerance among their supporters”. Political leaders should practice and also encourage tolerance amongst citizens, especially in the public space. Political leaders due to their power they have access to the public domain to contest their ideas and it is indicative of them to tolerate the criticism they receive from public intellectuals similarly, public intellectuals should practice tolerance when political leader criticise them.

Public Intellectuals should be allowed to freely voice their viewpoints without fear of being censured. Kellner (1995:23) posits that “a policy of political tolerance involves leaving groups free to accept their identity and express their cultural values, the state role is negative it should not force minority groups to conform to the dominant culture, nor should it erect artificial barriers that make it border for minority culture to thrive”. In line with the Constitution, those in power needs to actively create an environment whereby everyone is equal and feels accepted regardless of their viewpoints. Those in power should act as an arbitrator and not as a dictator who wants to shape the public discourse. If those in power or the government openly favours one group’s viewpoints over the other, then it infringes of the independence of the public sphere.

Those in power should encourage tolerance of everyone’s ideas, this can be achieved by acting tolerantly and therefore create a culture of tolerance of contrasting views. Bohman (2003:758) stressed the point that political tolerance has a trickle-down effect, tolerance

should start from the top (those in power); and it will permeate to those at the bottom (the citizens). If those in power tolerate criticism by public intellectuals' citizens as well as scholars will also be tolerant of people with different viewpoints, beliefs and decisions to their own. According to Bohman (2003:758), "if we engage in deliberation with those whom we disagree as citizens, our deliberative procedures require a regime of tolerance". It is a social virtue for opponents to tolerate their opponents contrasting viewpoints. There needs to be a way for them to coexist peacefully even if they have different viewpoints. Tolerance is not linear; it needs to be reciprocated by both parties. All those who participate in the public sphere need to tolerate criticism levelled at them. One may conclude that it is fair to suggest that public intellectuals too need to tolerate the viewpoints of those in power, as they demand those in power to tolerate their criticism.

In modern times heterogeneity of social groups in countries is a given, inevitable and unavoidable. Consequently, tolerance is needed in order for all social groups to cohabit peacefully together. After the end of Cold War in 1989 there was a wave of countries selecting the democratic route; and South Africa also rode the democratic wave after the collapse of the apartheid regime during the same period. Bohman (2003:3) noted that "Any feasible ideal democracy must face the unavoidable social fact that the citizenry of a modern polity is heterogeneous along a number of intersecting dimensions, including race, class, religion and culture". People are more likely to be scared, sceptical and adverse towards things that are different to them, and also towards things they do not understand.

A heterogeneous society such as South Africa comprises of different social groups that are diverse in race, religion and beliefs. When unpacked to its fundamental component heterogeneity refers to elements that are different, such as differences in skin colour or race, culture and religion. It therefore accentuates the diversity amongst social groups. Gouws (1993:3) stated that "diversity is the essence of politics in deeply divided societies". Differences are usually reduced to race, and people oppose those who do not look like them. This has led to race being politicalised. Racism is based on discrimination, oppression and prejudices according to differences in visible traits. It should be taken into account that, even though two people may belong to the same social group, race, cultural system, gender etc. but they may also have different views, there are no two people who have the same views or agree on everything. Tolerance is therefore, essential in all societies even amongst homogenous societies.

Maimone (2004:1) defines heterogeneity in the following manner; “in political science, heterogeneity is most often measured as a function of the number and size of ethnic groups within a country.” Ethnic diversity has been the central reasoning for innumerable genocides, civil wars and slaughtering of oppositional groups. When a country has a large number of ethnic groups living within its border then tolerance is crucial, this is especially the case in transitional countries whereby visible traits are constant reminders of their differences. This is especially prevalent in South Africa, with its historical background which is central on racial discrimination. When South Africa became a democracy, it did not erase the centuries of racial oppression, with desegregation black people and white people who were raised to be intolerant of each other they had to live side by side. Tolerance was critical when it came to practicing democratic principles and extending civil liberties to social groups that were raised to abhor, this was when the notion of the rainbow nation came into existence, to ensure that all social groups would respect each other’s differences.

In transitional countries creating a culture of tolerance amongst a large number of ethnicities should be a priority, this would require everyone in order to eradicate intolerance but, this can be achieved under the guidance and demonstrated of those in power. Ojiambo (2010:5) noted that, “South Africa’s history has to a great extent been characterised by division between [racial] groups, as was seen during apartheid. Though the apartheid regime is no longer in power, division between groups remain”. Intolerance occurs when certain social groups are silenced, discriminated and denied the opportunity to freely express their views openly. All social groups should be allowed to freely participate in the public sphere, their viewpoints should be respected even if they are contradictory. Black public intellectuals under apartheid were denied the opportunity to freely express themselves, and also prohibited from participating in the public sphere. There were no visible black public intellectuals, black people who dared to voice out their criticism towards the government were pushed to operate underground or were likely to face serious punishment like imprisonment, banishment to exile and sometimes death. It made sense that the post-1994 government was required to create a tolerant society through laws and supporting institutions in order to facilitate an environment where all social groups the opportunity to coexist with its historical background of discrimination.

Gouws (1992:3) believes that “groups that oppose each other are often defined by inscriptive qualities or visible traits such as race, ethnicity or cultural characteristics which create a greater need for tolerance”. Heterogeneous countries require a larger amount of tolerance because visible traits are a constant reminder as to how different they

are from each other. In the South African context, visible traits laid groundwork for the hallmark of political intolerance. Tolerance thus needs to be encouraged and engineered in such a society so that the culture of acceptance can replace the one of intolerance.

Multifaceted concepts such as political tolerance have limitations. The basic limitation of tolerance is that it cannot be measured. Gouws (1993:5) stated “tolerance exists in degrees; tolerance therefore is not absolute value”. Political tolerance is a very difficult concept to measure or monitor. Given to the fact that it cannot be quantified, it is difficult to keep track of the levels of tolerance or intolerance in the country. This also causes difficulty when opponents accuse each other of intolerance. Tolerance is a very difficult and confusing concept to monitor as one may be confused as to what they are monitoring because they may not know how to distinguish between what can be viewed as tolerance and what is intolerance.

Gouws explored in detail the difficulty of measuring tolerance because it rather complicated to keep record of tolerance in a country. Furthermore, it is worth writing that tolerance is an abstract concept that cannot be measured, and this causes problems when trying to distinguish between what is tolerant and what is intolerant. Something that cannot be measured would be very difficult to keep track of and also to know when it exists or ceases to exist. Tolerance can be mutated and manipulated because one cannot properly measure it. This could be a problem for transitional countries because intolerance is deeply rooted in their socioeconomic and political culture. Nonetheless, attempts should be made to monitor political tolerance in such countries because with absence of tolerance the country will to revert to its previous intolerant system.

Moreno-Raino (2002:7) states “if peace, civility and democracy ultimately depend on the exercise of tolerance, it is crucial to determine just how tolerant a society is and is becoming”. What Moreno-Raino implies with this statement without properly monitoring and measuring the tolerance in society it will lead to lawlessness, tolerance being a difficult concept to measure how a society would be able to keep track of its success rate. A society will not be able to distinguish as to when the people are tolerant or intolerant, because if one cannot quantify tolerance therefore it would blur up the line between what is tolerant and an intolerant society.

Keeping track of the levels of tolerance is of utmost importance in transitional countries. This is done in order to establish if the government has succeeded or failed in creating a democratic country which treats all social groups as equally. Moreno-Raino (2002:8) reasons that “political tolerance itself must be accurately measured among the general



public and at various times with these findings serving as a benchmark of a society's democratic and civil progress". Moreno-Raino (2002) further raises a valid point that measuring political tolerance is important in any country because it gives indication of how successful the country's democracy is progressing. This is even more truer in a transitional democracy with a history of political intolerance the measuring of the tolerance levels in the country becomes imperative for the success of that country.

Paradoxically, tolerance cannot be accurately measured if it cannot be quantified or measured. Unfortunately, this is a contradiction which appears to have been overlooked. One cannot accurately monitor a concept which cannot be measured this would be the same as counting the stars in the sky one would not know where to begin. Despite this observation, different studies are in place that measures the levels of political tolerance amongst countries. For example, Peffley and Rohrschneider (2003) compared developed countries (e.g. the U.S.A., Western Europe, Japan, and Australia) and developing countries in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa to measure political tolerance levels. Other influential organisations like Amnesty International and Freedom House regularly release data on political tolerance in countries.

The second limitation of tolerance is that there is an assumption that tolerance should be embedded in society, in addition there is a misconception that tolerance is natural. Tolerance is learnt not innate in us. A person's definition of tolerance is defined by society in which one is born into and also the experiences a person goes through in life, when one is born into a prejudice and bigoted society one is likely to find the opposite intolerable. Researchers such as Stouffer (1955) and Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse and Wood (1995:7) hold the opinion that the "natural" state of citizens is to be intolerant, not to tolerate. If a person moves to or associates with more liberal people they are likely to change their perception of what is tolerable, the inverse could happen a person could move from being tolerant to intolerant". This illustrates that tolerance is a concept that is constantly evolving and never stagnant.

Those who participate in the country's political and public discourses are the ones who hold the value of tolerance. Therefore, public intellectuals and those in power hold the power to distinguish between what is tolerance and what is intolerant behaviour or rhetoric. Tolerance is defined, steered and monitored by a few key players who dominate the public discourse. Unfortunately, this can be detrimental to a liberal democracy whereby a few will determine the public discourse for the majority. Furthermore, they will define and manipulate tolerance in a way that will benefit them and cry intolerance

whenever their opponent contradicts or challenges their viewpoints. It is for this reason that Peffley and Rohrschneider (2003: 248) are of the view that democratic activism (i.e. using civil liberties) is critical in enhancing toleration of dissent by unpopular groups. It is inferred that stressing civil liberties ensures that no group can abuse the public intellectual space using its power and strengths. If tolerance is an abstract and elusive concept this could cause a problem, because the key players will manipulate tolerance to suit their own self-interest. Their opponents will be accused of intolerance if they contradict or challenge their viewpoints. There is no right or wrong in defining or measuring tolerance. Tolerance can be biased to the party which has the sympathy of the public and the media of their side. The opposition may base tolerance on morals another evolving and abstract concept which is also biased and defined by a group of people in a society. Taking leaf from Peffley and Rohrschneider (2003: 254), stressed “the need for citizens to develop a sense of appreciation for the rights of minorities by actually using civil liberties designed to voice dissent from majority policies.”

According to McClure (1990:363) “discussion of limits of tolerance in these terms centres principally on distinguishing between the tolerable and the intolerable”. The author has a valid point in declaring that to under the limits of tolerance there is a need to distinguish between tolerance and intolerance. McClure omits to mention that in order to successfully distinguish between the tolerable and the intolerable, tolerance needs to be accurately defined. The limits of tolerance have made it hard to distinguish between the two. Therefore, tolerance limitation has consequently created limitations in its study, and also it almost impossible to accurately define what is tolerable and intolerable in a societal context.

Many people have negative perceptions of tolerance, this could be due to the misconception that tolerance is one dimensional concept. This assumption legitimises the myopic thinking that those who are portrayed as tolerant are in the right and those who are portrayed as intolerant are in the wrong, which is not always the case. Political tolerance is not a cut and dry concept; it is non-binary and complex, it cannot be simplified. Political tolerance is multifaceted; knowledge of this concept is limited more especially in the post-1994 South African context due to the least liked group approach. In the light that political tolerance is an important component for a successful democracy more research needs to be done in order to understand it in its entirety. Nonetheless, Peffley and Rohrschneider (2003) concluded in their study that “political tolerance is greater in stable democracies”. Taking into consideration this information, it may not be surprising that individuals would complain about intolerance in emerging democracies

like South Africa, because this is a new and foreign concept which has recently been introduced. It is challenging to perfect a concept that is new and has been developed for political systems that were not tailored to suit your uniquely heterogeneous country.

## **2.4 The politics of criticism**

This section focuses on understanding the concept of political criticism as well as to how its presence and practice attributed to the restructuring the political discourse in post-1994 South Africa. Political criticism is a central component of a robust public discourse. Nelson (2016:1) defines criticism as follows “criticism of political ideas is the process of shaping and forming policies of compromise necessary to the governing of a society with a large population”. Criticism occurs when opponents contest their idea in order to get their points across, whether to justify their views on an issues or as an act to convince your opponent to change their views on issues. The public sphere is usually reserved for a selected few individuals, with this in mind those who exchange ideas or criticises their opponent’s views in the public domain, should do this in order to act in the best interest of the public who do not have access to it.

Haddadan et al. (2018:1) defines political criticism as a phenomenon whereby opponents “attempt to make their claims appealing, while discrediting the opponent by attacking the strength of his/her claims”. Criticism is critical in a robust public discourse, public intellectuals should be able to discredit and challenge the decisions made by those in power should their policies be detrimental to the public. Political criticism in the South African context is executed by public intellectuals who engage with those in power through various public platforms including but not limited to media publications, newspaper columns, books etc. Those in power and public intellectuals often have an antagonistic relationship, they are constantly criticising each other viewpoints, they are in constant state of disagreement.

The presence of political criticism upholds the system of checks and balances along with creating transparency in a democratic society. Amposh (2004:23) stresses that political criticism is “an indispensable value to a democratically informed public and the principle meaning of protecting the democracy itself”. Political criticism is an important concept and it ensures that when those in power transgress, public intellectual will inform the public. When those in power abuse their power, they should be exposed by public intellectuals in order to be reprimanded by the public. Political criticism makes those in power mindful of wrongdoing because they know that watchdogs are constantly seeking

to spot their faults. It can be deduced that the function of political criticism is to keep those in power honest and moral in fear of being exposed.

Political criticism like political tolerance is a complex concept to explain as it is to understand more especially in the South African context. In its true nature it encompasses public debates and arguments between opponents in order to discredit each other's viewpoints. Nelson (2016:1) defines criticism as the "disapproval of someone or something, supported by perceived faults or mistakes". Criticism if done constructively, can serve a tool for feedback and should not be viewed as a personal attack. Criticism, if taken positively can be utilised as a way to reflect on the decisions made and also to find alternative solutions. Political criticism empowers opponents to make better decisions by offering a second opinion and force the opponents to do what is best for the public.

Criticism is expressing disapproval or fault towards someone or something. Ackerly (2000:10) proposes that "criticism compliments and promotes democracy". Public intellectuals need to be able to openly critique the government without fear. According to this concept public intellectuals should be able to freely speak of transgressions committed by those in power. Informing the public on actions and decisions made by government has potential to assist in upholding a democratic system. Political criticism is particularly important to new democracies, this ensures that those in power are always accountable to those who elected them. South Africa being a young transitioning democracy needs to also ensure criticism is embedded in its political systems and practice.

As already mentioned earlier on in this chapter, tolerance is importance when criticism takes place. The public platform should be open to everyone, and no one therefore deserves to partake in it over another, also no one is more deserving to have their criticism tolerated. All sides who contest their ideas in it should be tolerant of the criticism they receive. This position is reinforced by Amponsah (2004:34) argues that "free speech promotes tolerance while tolerance encourages stability in self-governance". Again, it is important to stress that criticism should be accompanied by tolerance. As a result, these concepts are interwoven and complement each other, one without the other is detrimental for a robust public discourse

Political criticism is an important concept because it is fundamentally moral in nature. Walzer (1988:10) believes that "at its root criticism is always moral in character, whether it is focused in individuals or political and social structures. Its crucial terms are corruption and virtue, oppression and justice, selfishness and the common-will". Public

intellectuals should be devoted and committed to informing the public of any wrongdoings that is done by the government and or its agencies. Their role is to report on any misconduct(s) that takes place because in order for a democracy to be healthy misdeeds or contraventions need to be reported to the public. The same goes for corruption should be reported on and also uprooted to avoid wastage and breaking of the law; this applies to the presidents, ministers, officials and anyone who holds political office. Public intellectuals need to be bold, and fearless, they also need to ensure that no misdemeanour committed by anyone is above condemnation. Walzer (1988:19) concurs by stating “social critics are driven by passion for truth or anger at injustice or sympathy for the oppressed or fear of the masses”. The job of intellectuals is to be critical truth tellers who owe allegiance to the public.

Political criticism is considered in this study because it promotes contestation of ideas in the public space and also permits for all parties in society to actively participate in the decision making processes. As Amposh (2004: 33) puts it, “the society needs open discussions so that governors and the governed can reason through public discussion because government policy decisions cannot be intelligently made without discussion or criticism”. Political criticism therefore aims to keep the public informed and updated about what is considered important as far as governance is concerned. Criticism creates public narratives as well as ensures that the principles of democracy of accountability and transparency are maintained by those in power.

Political criticism legitimises the decision-making processes of those in power. Publics, through intellectuals, are given a chance to engage and deliberate directly with those in power. Ackerly (2000:6) argues that criticism is essential in “societies in which political power is unevenly disbursed and an argument that is more inclusive of public deliberation will enhance the legitimacy of political decision making even while those decisions remain largely in the hands of the representatives”. This ensures that accountability is upheld and that there is free flow of information in the public sphere. Put simply, public intellectuals uphold a system of transparency, which in turn also upholds the democratic system.

Public intellectuals as the middleman between the public and those in power should act as an overseer that they continuously inform the public of the decisions made by government. Criticism and contestation of ideas updates the public about what is happening in their society. Amponsah (2004:11) maintains that “although the people give their power to political rulers, the political rulers are agents because the people give them

authorisation”. The basics of a democracy are that those in power are elected by the public, and it is therefore important to ensure that they are always accountable to it. This is undertaken by public intellectuals who use their standing in society to expose the wrongdoings done by those in power.

Public intellectuals have to also be critical of themselves and each other; whenever public intellectuals err they have to admit it. Conversely, those in power have to admit when it is proven that they transgressed in order to right their wrongs. The process of self-criticism ensures that all participants in the public domain do not abuse their power and perform their duties accordingly. Nowicka (2015:1) writes “self-criticism is understood as a reckoning of one’s self and criticism directed at its own subject”. Self-criticism focuses on the ‘self’ as a central theme which needs to be criticized. It is thus an internal process which involves self-introspection Nowak (2015:1) further expands by stating that “Self-criticism is the examination of one’s self, as well as the deeds and opinions stemming from it. The subject of self-criticism performs it through introspection, defining their faults and the boundaries of their responsibility”. Self-criticism is an essential tool for public intellectuals since it creates a system of checks and balances, opponents should also hold themselves accountable.

Walzer (1987:33) provides an alternative view in comparison to Nowicka by defining self-criticism as “when I deliberately stand outside myself, detached removed looking on from a distance the stern inspector of my normal condition”. Walzer gives an enlightening definition, but the self-need not be completely detached from itself to be successful at self-criticism. Public intellectuals should be self-critical in spite of being attached to the self; one merely needs to be objective towards their own work. Public intellectuals and those in power should be impartial and relatively attached to their work.

Public intellectuals are also accountable to the public, they must be honest and unbiased and should be tolerant of criticism not only from those in power, but also from other public intellectuals as well as by the public itself. Self-criticism will lead to public intellectuals being better critics. Walzer (1987:39) reasons that “what starts as criticism ends in rationalisation”. Rational critics can be able to objectively look at their own actions or words, and this would allow them to not only accept should they find any error they may have made but, to publicly admit that they have erred.

Public intellectuals should not become intolerant of criticism because this goes against the fundamental beliefs of their critics, and in order to diminish the chances of a critic becoming intolerant they need to practice self-criticism. Nowicka (2015:1) insists “self-

criticism is also an element of public discourse of modern societies that affirms mechanisms of broad social participation but at the same time ascribes responsibility for failure towards the individuals". This would be ideal in modern times, but the opposite seems to be happening, because there seems to be very few public intellectuals who practice self-criticism. Many critics will engage in the public sphere but will only criticise outwardly and never criticise the self. The critics who believes that those in power criticises them because they may have morphed into a super ego, they may be blind to their own faults. Walzer (1987:15) postulated that "the intellectual achieves his guardianship by constantly criticizing and radicalizing himself". To be the best social critic self-criticism needs to be practiced, this will enable the critics to objectively assess their own work and critique themselves.

In transitional countries political criticism is enormously essential because speaking out against political leaders will reduce the chances of reverting back to their previous oppressive government. In agreement with this statement, Ackerly (2000:11) states that "public intellectuals offer criticism of society's previously opaque dimensions of social actions that perpetuate systematic domination". In the case of South African, political criticism is pivotal to strengthen democracy. During apartheid the government would silence public intellectuals criticised the oppressive regime and its leaders. The practice of political criticism in itself is a tool of ensuring that the government of South Africa has a healthy democracy.

In the post-1994 period, political criticism and contestation of ideas was expected to result in the inclusion of the public in decision making processes. This way would therefore legitimise the decision-making processes as well as tolerance of the decisions by all social groups. Walzer (1988:9-10) argues that "criticism is as a restless and hence a totalizing activity. At its root criticism is always moral in character whether it is focused on individual or political and social structures" Nevertheless, criticism by public intellectuals is not always moral or ethical in nature since there are public intellectuals who are malicious in character. There are public intellectuals who may use their positions to attack their opponents with ulterior motives and they might slander the name of those in their line of attack in order to achieve their self-serving goals. Public intellectuals are portrayed as beacons of truth and morality in society; However, reality shows that there are public intellectuals who may use their positions to lead the public into a skewed path by defaming and spreading unfounded misinformation.

Public intellectuals are fundamental to a well-functioning public discourse and should be allowed to act as critics. Said (1994:9) emphasises that “the public intellectual is an individual endowed with the faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to as well as for a public”. The public intellectual is portrayed as the anchor and vessel of giving information to the public. What the author seems to be failing to explore is that this information may not always be moral in nature. The public intellectual wields the power to shape the public’s viewpoints. So, if public intellectuals have an antagonistic relationship with their opponents, they may use the public sphere to viciously and recklessly attack them or to settle scores. The public intellectual will not always act in the interest of the public but might use their public platforms to vindictively attack and discredit their opponents.

In addition, public intellectuals may come together to enhance their own common interests. Chittister (2015:6) reasons that “intellectuals are like minded persons united around a set of ideas and passion who see to promote them. They do so through manifestoes”. Public intellectuals may join together to create a single narrative in an attempt to monopolise the public discourse. This is contrary to the premise that political criticism should always promote active participation by the public. Amposh (2004:23) alludes to the fact that “political participation in a democratic dispensation is not limited to voting or protests, but political criticism is an indispensable value to democratically informed public and the principal means of protecting democracy itself”.

Furthermore, it seems that public intellectuals and those who own the media have erected an impenetrable bulwark where they are able to dictate as to who is allowed in their inner circle as well as who is allowed to participate in the public discourse. This is further cemented by Chittister (2015:2) stated that “public intellectuals are the guardians of the marketplace”. The public sphere is a highly contested area whereby critic needs that platform in order to be heard by the public, it should be taken into account that only a few and selected public intellectuals are able to contest their ideas in the public sphere. Those who are denied this platform may not be able to voice their ideas to the public, their ideas and criticism will fall into obscurity. The public intellectual may participate in the public domain but the media is ultimately in charge of the public sphere and may attempt to shun and discredit those that contradict their ethos.

In recent times, it appears that there is uniformity of information that is spread in the media, they all sing to the same tune and those who are viewed as out of pitch may be isolated or even banished from their respective platforms. Those in power may be denied



the public platform to challenge the viewpoints of public intellectuals or labelled as intolerant when they want to challenge the public narrative. Hence, the peaceful coexistence between groups with contesting ideas and opposing views needs to be encouraged and promoted in order to create a vibrant and sustainable democracy.

Public intellectuals have an important role in society. Ackerly (2000:27) suggests that “the social critic must criticise the values, practices, and norms of a society. This may require being a critical voice as a representative of silent voices, facilitating the social criticism of others”. Public intellectuals should, therefore, position themselves as the voice for the voiceless since they part of a selected few who are able to operate in the public space. This enables them to directly challenge the government on behalf of the public. Public intellectuals should use their public platforms to act as a truth crusader for the public while at the same time exercising some responsibility to be tolerant whenever their own viewpoints are criticised.

Cowling and Hamilton (2008:83) maintain that “citizens must be convinced by reason in the exercise of public debate that public policies are just otherwise state loses its moral legitimacy”. The government needs to convince the public that the new policies they want to implement are in their best interest. Public intellectual will legitimise or discredit proposed policies to the public by putting forward arguments that are either in favour or against those policies. Their role therefore is not to dismiss everything government does, but it is to create active debate on important issues concerning society.

Public intellectuals should not be afraid to be persistent complainers. In this regard, Walzer (1988:3-4) states that “Complaint is one of the elementary forms of self-assertion and the response to complaint is one of the elementary forms of mutual recognition; the modern social critic is a specialist in complaint”. The argument is that a social critic must consistently complain in the public sphere about the government and its agencies in an attempt to create an open dialogue. Public intellectuals should be relentless and ensure that they complain publicly until those in power take notice.

Gumede (2005:1) believes that “the constructive impact of democracy depends on the quality of dialogue that citizens engage in among themselves and with the agencies of the state, and together form society’s values and priorities”. Open dialogue and the contestation of ideas in the public sphere is a fundamental principle of a healthy democracy. Gumede a public intellectual believes that the contestation of ideas in the public domain is imperative for a healthy democracy, the state of the public discourse serves as an indication to the state of government, in a healthy democracy the public

discourse is characterised by the deliberation of ideas and opponents are tolerant of the criticism.

**It is nevertheless essential to point out that public discourse is not static but it is a continuously changing and evolving space. As such, political criticism allows the public to be part of the evolving space. Through the exchanging of viewpoints in the public domain, the public can construct their political positions and stances on issues. Ackerly (2000:6) posits that “social critics might influence social decisions making sure that social change towards a more democratic society is possible”. Be that as it may there also need to people who are able to also hold the public intellectuals accountable for their conduct in the public space.**

Criticism promotes a healthy and transparent dispensation and without it the society would disintegrate. The public domain should be kept as an independent space where no one controls it. Barber (1984:117) surmises that, “a strong democracy is an on-going from of political life where people participate in public decision making as free citizens and who through self-legislation; together resolve conflict despite lack of common ground”. When public intellectuals are gagged or silenced this would lead to the country ceasing to be classified as a liberal democracy but would be an authoritative state. This is the fate that has been bestowed to many transitional countries whose leaders have reacted intolerantly towards criticism from public intellectuals. Political criticism ensures that the state is democratic and is held accountable to the public.

Tolerance of criticism should not be one dimensional. As previously mentioned, those in power and public intellectuals should both be tolerant of criticism they receive from each other. Political leaders should not use their power to silence the criticism from their opponents. Kleinberg (1991:37) notes that “what is required is that the state makes no attempt to preclude the expression of any opinion or to apply sanctions to someone who expresses an opinion because the content is politically sensitive”. However, Kleinberg (1991) fails to take to account that this is not a one-way street; and that the critics need to also tolerate the viewpoints expressed by the political leaders even if they contradict their own. It follows that a person like Mbeki should have exercised tolerance when it came to the criticism he received from black public intellectuals. Equally, black public intellectuals should also have been tolerant of the criticism they receive from Mbeki. Mbeki and black public intellectuals have the right contest their ideas in the public domain.

The narrative of public discourse should be created by everyone. Contestation of viewpoints in the public sphere should not be a place that only public intellectuals are allowed to occupy; but the state should also be able to counter the criticism levelled at them. Intellectuals should also acknowledge when those in power are doing good for the public. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right which the government should practice, by allowing public intellectuals to practice it through their intellectual work. No topic is off bounds. A well-informed public can be able to make their own inferences with regards to policy changes. Although the public sphere is occupied by critics, they need to conversely allow those in power to freely counter their criticism in instances where those in power feel that they were erroneously quoted or that their rhetoric was distorted. In many times, those in power are usually labelled as intolerant when they attempt to counter the criticism levelled against them.

Both Mbeki and black public intellectuals claimed to be defendants of the post-1994 South African public discourse. They often accused each other of being intolerant of criticism and using the public space for their own self-interest. Mbeki held that he was being vilified by black public intellectuals. He also did not believe he was intolerant of criticism but accused black public intellectuals of being intolerant when he criticised them. The two parties accused each other of being intolerant to criticism. Black public intellectuals believed that Mbeki wanted black public intellectuals to agree with him and when they criticised him, he would attack them. They often charged Mbeki of trying to silence their criticism towards him. Seepe (2004:23) alleged that during Mbeki's tenure "the past few years has seen the creeping in of the tendencies that make for bad governance: arrogance disdain for the people, corruption and intolerance of dissent". In any way, the political discourse was supposed to be filled with robust debates. Of course, it did not disappoint as intellectuals and those in power tussled to no end in their attempts to shape the public discourses in South Africa.

Mangcu (2014:57) echoes the same sentiment as Seepe by stating that "one often senses a creeping anti-intellectualism in broader South African society. During Mbeki's tenure there was less rigorous debate because of his intolerance to criticism." Mangcu (2014:57) adds that "many intellectuals will just not bother to engage with the president intellectually". Black public intellectuals felt under attack by Mbeki and his allies, they would attack them whenever they tried to criticise him. As a result, a number of black public intellectuals refrained from challenging Mbeki in the open because they feared of being rebuked, attacked or even ostracised. The public sphere was no longer independent but policed by those in power, in order to ensure they did not criticise Mbeki.

Tolerance of criticism from those in power should be encouraged and expected whenever contestation of ideas occurs. Black public intellectuals believed that Mbeki did not respect the independence of the public space. They were more than convinced that he and his allies wanted to tightly control it to the disadvantage of those attacked those who criticised him. Gumede (2005:61) argued that “the hallmark of Mbeki’s style is to stack up as much support as possible and to isolate or marginalise those who stubbornly refuse to toe the line”. Black public intellectuals are supposed to be relentless truth seekers who are not afraid to challenge those in power. Supposed that they backed down when Mbeki challenged them, and then it may be argued that they were no longer acting in the best interest of the public. Gumede (2005) believes that Mbeki wanted to control the narrative of the public sphere. Based on this, it was therefore concluded that he was intolerant of criticism and that he also bullied whoever dared challenge his ideas or decisions in public.

The absence of tolerance to criticism in the public space lead to the demise of a public discourse. Therefore, it is important to study these two concepts collectively more especially in the post-1994 South African public discourse, this is covered in the section below.

## **2.5 The politics of tolerance and criticism in post-1994 South Africa**

Political tolerance and political tolerance were ignored and their presence in the public space was punishable, with South Africa’s political background centred on discrimination as well as encouraging intolerance to criticism their importance needs to be discussed. Firstly, South Africa with its historical background of racial, social and political intolerance which were institutionalised by the apartheid government had come before it needs to discuss, implement and encourage political tolerance in order to achieve real freedom for all social groups. Gouws and Gibson (1997:15) mention that “South Africa has always been deeply divided society along ethnic, race and linguistic lines. Acts of violence and intolerance are part of the fabric of South African society”. Investigating the concept and presence or lack of tolerance is relevant in post-1994 South Africa, because it will establish whether after the fall of repressive Apartheid, did the democratic government create an environment that encourages the contestation of ideas, as well as to determine if those in power engaged in robust debates with their critics

Secondly, political tolerance is important for post-1994 South African public discourse because Crick (1971:83) has that the opinion “tolerance is the pre-condition for anything we could call a free society”. When someone’s civil liberties are denied by their opponents, then that person cannot be said to be truly free in their society. People are

truly free in their society if they are granted the same civil liberties as all social groups. In the public sphere the presence and inclusion of black public intellectuals would indicate the presence of political tolerance and would also illustrate that all social groups are starting to be free and equal in post-1994 South Africa

Thirdly, political criticism was close to non-existent, shunned and most of the time a punishable exercise prior-1994. With the advent of democracy, the study of political tolerance is relevant in post-1994 it will determine whether the democratic government created a public sphere which allowed everyone to be able to criticise the government in the public space. Lastly, black public intellectuals have a unique perspective to contribute, with their social and historical background, they are able to criticise the government from their unique point of view. As black men who have been ‘othered’ and marginalised they are in the perfect position to speak on behalf of the voiceless people who are experiencing grievances but do not have access to public platforms.

These two concepts are relevant because they are pertinent to shaping the post-1994 South African socio-political discourse. They highlight the importance of the public sphere and how all opponents are equally allowed to freely express their viewpoints. These two concepts are relatively new in the context of the South African socio-political discourse, and their usage or lack thereof needs to be monitored in order to guarantee the safeguarding of all opponents’ viewpoints especially the minorities partaking in the public sphere.

The concept of political tolerance has become and prevalent and pertinent topic in post-1994 South African political and social discourse. Political tolerance continues to be an important yet sometimes overlooked concept in post-1994 South Africa, given its political and social history of intolerance that was inherited by the current government from the apartheid regime. Gouws (1993:15) declared that, “with the demise of apartheid a debate has ensued in South African social science literature about the reconstruction of civil society”. Political tolerance is intrinsically intertwined to a well-functioning civil society, with the new democratic government coming into power, political tolerance and the culture of free debate needed to be created, fostered and promoted.

The presence of political tolerance and criticism is vital especially for transitioning countries such as South Africa. These two concepts are interlinked and there can never be a well-functioning or self-sustaining public sphere without these two concepts being practiced by opponents. Opponents have to tolerate the criticism directed against each other and that is a process of reciprocity. The criticism of black public intellectuals need

to be guaranteed and tolerated both in power, the monitoring if black public intellectuals' voices are liberated is important in post-1994 South Africa. It is for that reason that a number of local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Freedom under the Law can potentially play a unique role in the advancement of civil liberties.

The investigation of the presence of these concepts is very relevant especially more than twenty years since the dawn of democracy in South Africa. Leaders of the ANC during the struggle of liberation against the apartheid used to criticise the government for being intolerant of criticism, stifling the voices of black public intellectuals and for not creating a culture of open debate in the public sphere. It is imperative to reflect if the democratically elected ANC government practiced their previous sentiment and also if they did indeed liberate the voices of black public intellectuals is relevant in post-1994 South African socio-political discourse.

The inequality that was bred during apartheid still prevails in post-1994 South African political and public discourse. The apartheid government thrived by creating inequality and intolerance amongst social groups. The public sphere was used as a tool to spread racism, as a result of this robust debates were prohibited. The government was intolerant of criticism and above all black public intellectuals were not allowed to contest their ideas in the public sphere. The government and the selected public intellectuals did not act in the best interest of all social groups in South Africa. The government created, and also dictated the public discourse. The post-1994 South African government has been accused of being intolerant of criticism and not acting in the best interest of the public. Political intolerance resulted in an ungoverned country whereby those who were oppressed and censored fighting for their civil liberties. The examination of the concepts of tolerance and criticism could determine if this is true.

In the South African political context tolerance is a large task to undertake, given its culture of intolerance which was institutionalized. Political tolerance is a political necessity, and in order to achieve political tolerance in post-1994 South Africa there needs to be a political commitment. The commitment should be constructed by those in power and should be upheld by them and public intellectuals. The constitution and institutions have been created to deepen the democratic project. Notwithstanding these achievements, South Africa has a long history of political intolerance whereby social groups were discriminated, oppressed and disposed because of the social groups they

were born into. Therefore, it will take a massive political tolerance by the present government to convince all social groups to extend civil liberties to their opponents.

With the dawn of a new democratic regime in South Africa in 1994, with it came the freedom of expression which encouraged equality and respect for all in society, including civil bodies and other formations. Everyone was allowed to freely participate in the public sphere, and no civil society formation would be excluded, censured or rebuked should they criticise those in power. Post-1994 all criticism was expected to be welcomed and also tolerated by all who contest ideas within the public sphere. Gouws (1993:17) believes that numerous organisations may exist but without the tolerance that allows them to participate civil society becomes meaningless”. Political tolerance is a fundamental component for a successful and thriving civil society. Its total absence of tolerance would lead to anarchism. Political tolerance is an invisible social contract which allows all civil societies to express contrasting viewpoints, even if they offends their opponents.

In the South African context ethnic diversity has been a source of conflict in post-1994. The legacy of apartheid still haunts post-1994 South Africa and its institutionalized ethnic intolerance is still prevalent. Race is still a central component of discrimination, oppression and widespread separatist movements. Lines are drawn between black and white, us and them, inferior and perceived superior races. Blackness and its capability, competence and its legitimisation have often been questioned; their counterparts are not shackled by the stereotypes associated with their race. In the public sphere black public intellectuals are often undermined, their knowledge deemed inferior and their race is often in their title as a subtle way to warn the readers that their intellectual writing is inferior to their counterparts. Seepe (2004:27) maintains “white South African has never taken the intellectual capacity of black people seriously. Blacks were always found wanting, nothing of intellectual’s value was and is expected from them”.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the importance of the two concepts namely, political tolerance and political criticism. It also demonstrated that these two concepts are necessary for a healthy public sphere because they allow all opponents to freely express their viewpoints even if they contradict the own viewpoints. Furthermore, this chapter illustrated that the public sphere is important and needs to be constantly monitored in order to safeguard the voices of all social groups, especially those social groups whose voices were stifled. In post-1994 South Africa, black public intellectuals should be allowed to freely contest their ideas freely without fear and intimidation in the past, they were prohibited from partaking

in the public sphere. And by being allowed to freely partake in the public sphere this will lead to the freedom of the black voice at large. Black public intellectuals are important because they have a unique experience and perspective. They are also able to demand government to grant black people civil liberties that they were denied to them. This will lead to actual freedom of for all social groups. Black public intellectuals should unapologetically force leaders to be accountable for their actions. This will lead to leaders acting in the best interest of the public.

It is necessary to mention that there are many challenges faced by black public intellectuals in post-1994 public discourse. One biggest challenge is that they are deemed to be intellectually inferior compared to their white counterparts. This is a function of segregationist legacy of apartheid. Another challenge for black public intellectuals is that leaders try to control or censure their intellectual narrative. This is the reason the next chapter will focus on specifically on how black public intellectuals approach, debate and manoeuvre in the public discourse. The example of the AIDS controversy and the heated debated that ensued between Mbeki and black public intellectuals were selected for this purpose.



## **Chapter 3: The AIDS debate**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter debated the concepts of the politics of tolerance and the politics of criticism. The politics of tolerance and criticism found expression in what was termed the 'Aids debate'. Mbeki was at logger heads with black public intellectuals and the larger part of public opinion with his AIDS policy. This Chapter seeks to examine the position that asserted and defined the terms of the AIDS debate.

Never had a disease been as destructive, disruptive and contentious as AIDS in modern history. It permeated through all levels of society; no race, gender, region or social class were unaffected by AIDS. This disease was shoved into the public sphere and its consequences were far reaching and enormously devastating. The AIDS epidemic highlighted the economic and social inequalities that are still prevalent in post-1994 South Africa.

AIDS was a fiercely contested subject in post-1994 South Africa; it reached its peak during Mbeki's tenure. It grappled the political, economic and social aspects in post-1994 South African; AIDS also seeped into South African political and economic reality. No racial group was more affected by AIDS than the black majority, as a result of disproportions that still lingered because of apartheid in post-1994 South Africa. Furthermore, AIDS was used as a yardstick to determine the progress achieved by the government in post-1994 South African political and social discourses.

This current chapter aims to critically analyse the ways in which AIDS was contested in the public sphere in post-1994 South Africa, it will also focus on the antagonistic relationship between Mbeki and black public intellectuals when it came to the AIDS debacle. In doing so this research seeks to reconfigure the AIDS debate; by investigating the positionality of black public intellectuals and Mbeki in relation to their views on AIDS. This study also determines if opponents were tolerant of each other's criticism when they were contesting their viewpoints on AIDS in the public sphere.

### **3.2 AIDS dissident and denialism**

Establishing the differences between AIDS denialists and AIDS dissidents is critical when investigating the antagonistic relationship between Mbeki and black public intellectuals in the public sphere with regards to this issue. Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede labelled Mbeki an AIDS denialist; while others labelled him a dissident. It is imperative

to know the differences between these two concepts in order to conclude if Mbeki was an AIDS denialist who abused his power, or if he was a courageous dissident”. Mbeki’s legacy is tainted by his AIDS policies; this chapter will determine if Mbeki was unfairly criticised by black public intellectuals.

Mbeki was accused of being an AIDS denialist by many especially black public intellectuals; they accused him of being a tyrant who was killing his people instead of supplying antiretroviral (ARV) drugs that would prolong the lives of people living with AIDS. Mangcu (2008:49) highlights James Myburgh’s statement that “Mbeki’s utterances and actions in what is probably the most authoritative time-line of our president’s alliance with denialism”. Mangcu along with other black public intellectuals accused Mbeki of being an AIDS denialist who is intolerant to criticism. Seepe shares the same sentiment as Mangcu and accused Mbeki of being an intolerant AIDS denialist. Seepe (2004:66) states that “Mbeki’s stubborn pursuit of the eccentric ideas that HIV does not cause AIDS, while millions are dying has not only disgraced himself but the rest of his government”. Mangcu and Seepe believed that Mbeki was an intolerant AIDS denialist, who refused to roll out ARV’s because he did not want to admit he was wrong. Denialist is a label used on people whom the mainstream media disagrees with, when a viewpoint criticises the mainstream rhetoric then that person is label a denialist. They are put in a box and reduced to that label in order to trivialise their argument, their criticism is not tolerated.

Roberts (2007:180) disagrees with Seepe and Mangcu and states that, “Thabo Mbeki is not now nor has he ever been as AIDS dissident”. Roberts (2007) believes that Mbeki is right to criticise the AIDS narrative and should not be condemned for doing so, instead Robert’s believes that Mbeki’s criticism should be tolerated and thoroughly evaluated particularly by public intellectuals. Black public intellectuals should have constructively engaged with Mbeki on his viewpoints instead of labelling him as an intolerant dissident. Black public intellectuals attacked Roberts (2009:63) furthermore they accused him of being a puppet of Mbeki none more than Mangcu (2008:56) who stated “in his book Ronald Suresh Roberts tries to revise Mbeki’s denialism suggesting that the president had been ahead of everyone in the medical community in speaking out against the toxicity of antiretroviral drugs such as AZT”. Black public intellectuals should always challenge status quo but should refrain from criticising for the sake of criticising.

It is unfortunate that Mbeki was reduced to an AIDS dissident who killed millions of South African by refusing to roll out ARVs. Gevisser (2009:276) declares that, “unlike

some of the radical AIDS dissidents Mbeki never denied there was an AIDS epidemic, although he did believe its scale was over-exaggerated". Furthermore, in the crusade to vilify Mbeki's AIDS rhetoric Mbeki believed that the media along with black public intellectuals distorted what he said. They wanted to criticize him during the AIDS debacle by practicing selective criticism and debating. Mbeki told his biographer Gevisser (2009:291) that it is "very unfortunate that it was that his initiative had been drowned by vicious campaign, one that claimed that "I've said HIV does not cause AIDS, which I never did". Mbeki claims that he was misquoted by those who wanted to push their own agendas; he was accused of saying things which he claims he never said. Selective criticism leads to such problems whereby, a person's viewpoints are attacked instead of being listened to.

Mbeki was meticulous before making a decision he wanted to exhaust all angles by thoroughly understanding the topic and most importantly make sure there are no margins of error. This was a long process, which he undertook before making decisions during his tenure; the HIV/AIDS phenomenon was no exception. Gevisser (2009:279) believes that "one of Mbeki's weaknesses was that he often does not trust others to filter data for him. He liked to hear it directly from the source and make his own decision". Mbeki would often research on the internet until early hours of the morning, trying to find out more information about HIV/AIDS. He was not a man who liked to delegate tasks, as many pleaded with him he refused to 'leave AIDS to the scientists'.

Mbeki refused to blindly believe the narrative of AIDS addressed by the mainstream science; he wanted to hear both sides even if one side was rejected by mainstream science. Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede believe that Mbeki was being stubborn and backward when it came to his AIDS rhetoric and policies, he had denied rolling out ARVs to those who are infected and attempted to publicly engage black public intellectuals giving his reasons for not rolling them out. Mangcu (2008:51) stated that Mbeki "insisted that the government would never authorise the use of azidothymidine (AZT) to prevent mother-to-child transmission because the drug was toxic". Mangcu like other black public intellectuals believed that Mbeki was ignoring the calls of scientists to roll out AZTs. Mbeki was constantly criticised publicly by black public intellectuals for neglecting and therefore killing millions of black people by refusing to roll out ARVs and AZTs. Roberts (2007:184) does not believe that Mbeki is stubborn rather 'Mbeki is simply sought to consider all of these issues, including the appropriate scope and pace of anti-retroviral rollouts, in a methodological manner".

The mainstream media along with black public intellectuals have accepted the findings of big pharmaceutical companies, mainly without interrogating their findings or recommendations. Black public intellectuals have failed in their role as stipulated by Said (2002:10) that public intellectual's "need for critical intellectuals who are equipped to raise embarrassing questions and to confront orthodoxy and dogma". Black public intellectuals should not accept what they are told, they are supposed to question and stay in a permanent state of distrust. Black public intellectuals should always challenge, oppose and engage with those in power and they should never accept what they are being told as the absolute truth.

Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede refused to engage with Mbeki on his AIDS position and his decision-making process, they instead branded him an AIDS denialist without investing his viewpoints, and simply put they came across as intolerant of his policies. Seepe (2004:39) postulates that "his posture is very dangerous; the presidency should not be used to settle intellectual disputes". Numerous black public intellectuals shared the same sentiment; Mangcu posits (2008:51) Mbeki "had spent a great deal of time cultivating the image of an intellectual". Black public intellectuals did not engage Mbeki on his argument even when he had credible sources; they attacked him personally which is the antithesis of how to contest ideas in the public sphere.

Black public intellectuals have accepted the mainstream viewpoints and have not questioned it, they merely agreed and regurgitated what is fed to them. Such actions are dangerous given that public intellectuals play a crucial role in informing the citizens and exploring different viewpoints, more importantly to challenge the status quo. Seepe (2004:75) believes that "if there had been no scrutiny from those who can be critical, the stupefied might have been duped". By Seepe's own rhetoric there needs to be different viewpoints in the public sphere otherwise people will be duped into believing the mainstream instead of being given alternative information needed in order for them to make well informed decisions.

Said (1993: 4) asserts that public intellectuals are supposed "to in a state of almost permanent opposition to the status quo". Black public intellectuals during this period did not question the rhetoric of the mainstream pharmaceutical companies; instead they wholeheartedly sided with them by constantly criticising Mbeki through their intellectual work. Said highlights that the role of a public intellectual, black public intellectuals failed in their role by not questioning or challenging the status quo; therefore, consequently they failed the citizens by denying them alternative information which may have saved lives.

The public sphere is supposed to be a space where contestation of ideas takes place between opponents based on their intellectual work not guided by their personal feeling towards their opponents.

Black public intellectuals were selective whenever they engaged with Mbeki, even when Mbeki was backed up by reputable science. With the AIDS discourse they engaged in selective criticism, they criticised him on some issues and other issues they ignored especially when Mbeki had credible scientists to back up his rhetoric. Black public intellectuals pounced on him; Mangcu (2008:51) accused Mbeki of “refusing AIDS patients the possibility of mercy treatment”. Furthermore, Seepe (2004) predicates that Mbeki was tenacious in his denialism of AIDS while denying ARV’s to the dying citizens without investigating his claims and sources”. These sentiments are proven time and again that Mbeki was backed by credible and esteemed scientists, plenty had proved doubts with regards to ARVs being as effective as it is portrayed in the media, there are side effects which Mbeki highlighted that could be toxic to those suffering from AIDS. Also AIDS needs to be looked at holistically; it does not make sense to give ARVs to someone who does not have shelter not adequate food supply.

It is important to highlight that this section is not to lambast black public intellectuals and to side with Mbeki, its purpose is to emphasis the hypocrisy of public intellectuals and how they sometimes failed in their role. Mbeki was not without any fault when it came to his AIDS rhetoric, his stubborn nature came into full swing during this period. In the South African context with such a huge population that was infected and lived in abject poverty, Mbeki’s need for being right had catastrophic results and sometimes it is best to make decisions for now and then find sustainable solutions as time goes.

There were not sufficient and credible reasons as to why Mbeki did not hastily roll out ARV’s even when he was pressured to do so. Mbeki has, been called ‘insane’ for asking questions aimed at gaining a correct understanding of this Syndrome, which would enable us to adopt correct strategies to contain the epidemic Mbeki (2001:1). In order to make the correct decision Mbeki needs to know what the options are and also to get arguments from both sides even if one side is deemed inferior to the mainstream opinions, there are millions of people affected and infected by this disease the government cannot act hastily. The government should not act hastily but this is a fast spreading disease that did not award them the luxury to take their time.

There have been studies done by experts who have agreed with Mbeki’s arguments and justified why he was withholding ARVs from being consumed by those who have

HIV/AIDS. There were respected experts such as Fauci (2001) “who stated “the longer we treat; the more long-term toxicity we see”. Mbeki wanted to do right by his people he wanted to roll out ARVs if they were proved to be totally safe for the public. So far there had been no definite proof that ARVs are as safe as pharmaceutical companies have led the general public to believe. Another prominent scientist Dr Altman (2001) said this about ARVs “they offer no hope of eradicating the virus, and their side effects-which include heart disease and cancer are far worse than expected”.

Mbeki was against rolling out drugs that were not properly tested out also there was no conclusive evidence that they are miracle cures as portrayed by pharmaceutical companies. Epstein (2003:1) proposes that “there is yet little evidence that antiretroviral treatment programs run by governments automatically lead to reduced HIV infection rates on their own. Since the introduction of nearly universal HIV treatment in the US in 1996 and 1997, the annual number of new infections Mbeki refused to find a bandage cure whereby you cure symptoms instead of tackling the disease; this will strain the already strained health budget of South Africa. His stubbornness of being right and find the perfect solution was leading to people dying, he might have been justified in taking time to research but people were losing their lives at an a rapid rate.

Government should not and cannot cower nor should it succumb to the pressure from scientists and public intellectuals, sometimes it has to make tough decisions which may not be popular but are the best solution at that present time for its citizens. Mangcu (2008:58) predicated that “some of the greatest leaders of the twentieth century are those who went against the popular believe in their countries”. By his own admission Mangcu understood that Mbeki cannot succumb to pressure and do what is easy and popular at the time even if it will be a temporary cure which will be disastrous in future. Big pharmaceutical companies are shoving their medication down South Africa’s throat Mbeki is accused of being a denialist and a stubborn tyrant when he refuses to roll out their medications. Meanwhile, while black public intellectuals were participating in spreading the single narrative and practicing selective criticism, the same can be stated for Mbeki he also sought mainly scientists who would back up his viewpoints on AIDS. It can be seen that both were trying to get their point across and both were acting intolerantly to the criticism they received from each other.

There was a disproportion of information and selective debating practiced mainly by black public intellectuals along with Mbeki. Mangcu (2014:58) postulates that “the present debacle over whether HIV causes AIDS relives old debates about the relationship

between knowledge and action”. Knowledge and how much is shared are important in the public sphere, it can make people dislike you or make you favourable to them. Howell and Chaddick (1994:73) posit that, “the way in which data is interpreted subsequently influences the construction of discourse”. The selected black public intellectuals were given a platform by the media to contest their ideas, and the media platforms have the power to make a guilty person likeable and an innocent person vilified in order to ensure that they are found guilty in the court of public opinion.

In order to have an open and free public sphere all ideas should be contested by the media. By black public intellectuals’ refusing to acknowledge or their refusal to engage with Mbeki on his credible concerns which led to him withholding rolling out ARVs, creates the impression to the public that Mbeki was acting like an unreasonable or intolerant tyrant. The public can only interpret information that is given to them; the public cannot make an informed opinion if information is withheld from them. Henceforth, black public intellectuals are doing a disservice to the public which they have to keep informed. The following section explores how race was a crucial and complex dynamic which was interwoven in the AIDS discourse in post-1994 South African political and public discourse.

The highly antagonistic relationship between black public intellectuals and Mbeki was fuelled by the opponents labelling each other as intolerant to criticism, when contesting ideas in the public sphere criticism and tolerance should be practiced by both opponents. What should be considered when observing the HIV/AIDS crisis in the South Africa context before judging Mbeki too harshly is that he inherited this crisis from his predecessors who did little to control the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Gumede (2005:152) posits that “in the heady days following the ANC’s unbanning little attention was given to AIDS”. The fragile democracy was still finding its footing, whereby social, economic and political redistribution were prioritised. Seepe (2004:57) postulates that “one may simply refer to the deafening silence that followed Mbeki’s position on HIV/AIDS”. Seepe maintains that Mbeki could have been more vocal or done more when it came to the HIV pandemic that spread through the country like wildfire. Black public intellectuals wanted Mbeki to be more decisive act quicker instead of arguing with the facts that pharmaceutical companies were churning out. This is a justifiable stance, sometimes there is not time to weigh options but to make tough decisions and deal with the repercussion later.

The apartheid regime believed that AIDS affected homosexuals and black people only, therefore did very little or if anything to help fight the spread of AIDS epidemic. When the beginning of democracy occurred in 1994 AIDS was still not a priority for the government, they had to prioritise policies which would eradicate the grotesque economic and social inequalities created by the apartheid regime. Mangcu (2008:50) stated that “by the time Mandela handed over to Mbeki in 1999 about 7% of the population was HIV positive. Undoubtedly, then Mbeki inherited an increasingly serious situation”. When Mbeki came into power, the HIV/AIDS pandemic was a ticking time bomb that was on the verge of exploding. Mbeki was regularly criticised by black public intellectuals on the way he chose to act after inheriting the HIV/AIDS problem; and Mbeki would criticise black public intellectuals for being intolerant towards his AIDS policies.

Shah (2005:101) writes “when the apartheid regime finally fell to the ANC in 1994, the problem of AIDS remained off the official agenda. The ANC loyalist suspected that racial Western researchers had exaggerated the problem.” There has been mistrust by Africans towards Western pharmaceutical companies which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. When the ANC came into power in 1994 its main focus was to create social, economic and political equality for all South Africans AIDS was not seen as a priority at that time. This pandemic was a ticking keg powder that would explode and leave no one unaffected by it.

After being elected as president black public intellectuals were critical of Mbeki’s AIDS policy. Mbeki’s political allies were also against his AIDS policies as highlighted by Seepe (2004:123) “COSATU argued that the government’s unwillingness to provide anti-retroviral drugs particularly to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and the denial of treatment for millions of victims is tantamount to condemning HIC/AIDS patients to early deaths”. Mbeki’s allies were on the same side as black public intellectuals, they believed that Mbeki should hastily roll out ARVs without knowing the side effects of the drugs. This could also be viewed as political tug of war, yet lives were lost decisions needed to be made fast. The AIDS debates were the focus for black public intellectuals, and it shaped the political discourse in post-1994 South Africa.

Not all black public intellectuals were critical of Mbeki. Gumede (2005:159) believed that “Mbeki was sincere in challenging mainstream science and his support of AIDS dissident”. During the AIDS debate the public sphere was divided into two parts those who believed the mainstream argument (the rights ones) and those who challenged the mainstream (the insane conspirators). There was no contestation of ideas nor tolerance to



criticism, which are important concepts when contesting ideas in the public sphere. Different viewpoints should be tolerated and not ridiculed. There was a lot of debating for the sake of being right between Mbeki and the three public intellectuals, were involved in an intellectual tug of war and the citizens were casualty in this fight.

The AIDS debate illustrated that public intellectuals do not have to agree with each other or have a uniform idea. Public intellectuals should have a plurality of ideas amongst each other and should be able to criticise each other as well as be tolerant of the criticism they receive from their colleagues. This creates a competitive and healthy public discourse. When public intellectuals have the same opinions on all matters then the public are disadvantaged because they do not have a well-rounded information needed to make informed political opinions. Mangcu (2008:35) predicts that “the development of any national consensus would have to recognise the pluralistic nature of our society”. Gumede although he did not completely agree with Mbeki’s AIDS policies he was not as critical as others, but he did credit Mbeki where he did right. Mangcu (2008:35) further adds that “public intellectuals could play a leading role in the articulation of such consensus and at times they could be supportive and at times critical of the national leadership”. Black public intellectuals should not be critical for the sake of being critical they should acknowledge when the government is doing good. The AIDS discourse showed that those in power should also be tolerated and not unjustly vilified.

Kalichman (2009: 8) defined AIDS denialism “as the outright rejection of science and medicine; it involves actively contradicting and disregarding medical advice”. AIDS Denialists are people who refuse to accept the consensus of people in a field; they look for alternative views to what is being narrated to them by the mainstream media. Denialists are perceived as being destructive to the vulnerable and potentially lead to the increase of mortality of people who are infected with AIDS. Kalichman further argues that (2009: 8) “denialism actively propagates myths, misconceptions and misinformation to distort and refute realist”. AIDS denialists are accused of using out-dated sources and ignore new science that contradicts their viewpoints. Denialists are thought to be detrimental to the study of AIDS; they prey on the vulnerable by spreading fallacies that endanger their lives; however they consider themselves martyrs or lone wolves who are not afraid to speak truth to power.

Nattrass (2007:23) conjectures that “what unites denialists is the unshakable belief that the existing canon of AIDS is wrong”. They publicly reject the narrative of the mainstream science; they challenge the status quo and are treated as outsiders in the realm

of science. Many scientists who subscribe to the mainstream ideology believe that denialists are toxic to their field and hinder the progress in the AIDS research. In short AIDS denialists are annoyances who are harmful in the study of AIDS; their viewpoints are dangerous and delude people living with AIDS. There are extremist groups which are dangerous to people living with AIDS, they discourage those infected with AIDS from taking precaution to prevent spreading the disease or from taking care of their health in order to live longer, but majority of those labelled as denialists are genuine people who want to explore the alternative views on AIDS.

Denialists are distrustful of the mainstream AIDS narrative; they believe that AIDS is exaggerated by the big pharmaceutical companies in order to exploit the vulnerable and to coerce governments into buying their expensive medication. Natrass (2007:23) postulates that AIDS denialists believe that “AIDS deaths are caused by malnutrition narcotics and ARV drugs themselves”. Denialists have a viewpoint that AIDS should not be studied in isolation; it is a disease which mostly affects the poor who cannot afford suitable nutritious food, housing and medication. Fighting AIDS cannot be dissociated from the harsh realities of those who are poverty stricken; therefore, AIDS needs to be looked at holistically. The underprivileged need to have proper housing and be well nourished before they are given medication, giving people medication without taking into consideration other factors will result in an expensive temporary solution.

Many denialists are dismissed as conspiracy theorists who want to spread their delusions to the world. They are reduced to people who are paranoid and irrational with no credible arguments by the big pharmaceutical companies with support of mainstream media. Denialists is a title which is bestowed to people who contradict the status quo, they are punished for criticising the mainstream media. Denialists are ostracised and criticised in the media; they are punished for contesting their opposing viewpoints in the public sphere. Diethelm and McKee (2009:3) posit that “denialism exploits genuine concerns, such as the rejection of evidence on the nature of AIDS by African-Americans who perceive them as a manifestation of racist agendas”. Diethelm and McKee 2009 posits that black people who question the consensus of the AIDS narrative they are accused of wanting to incite racial violence by questioning the big pharmaceutical companies.

Dissidents, on the other hand are acknowledged as necessary in the fight of HIV/AIDS. Natrass (2007:24) stresses that “dissidents and critique are of course central to science but so too is the respect for evidence and peer review”. The criticism of those branded dissidents are tolerated and their ideas are contested in the public space. Dissidents are

critiques of the status quo and they are the ones who will challenge and find new ways of looking at the disease ultimately altering the study of AIDS. Kalichman (2009: 6) views dissident scientists as “scientists who hold views outside of their mainstream play an important role in truth seeking, dissident scientists do not agree with the prevailing theory or do not accept the body of accumulation observation as facts”. Dissidents challenge what is widely accepted to be fact, they play an important role in creating plurality of ideas and keeping the public informed on alternative facts.

Kalichman (2009: 6) highlights the importance of dissidents in science “dissident scientists turn into revolutionaries when their thinking causes science to shift course. Science values diverse thinkers, criticism and vigorous debate”. Science is not stagnant field, it is continuous and forever evolving; in order to find solutions to make mankind’s lives easier. Scientists encourage debate amongst scientists; along with tolerance of criticism. This chapter accordingly focuses on determining how the AIDS discourse in post-1994 South Africa was a reflection on the blatant and lingering effect of apartheid on the political, economic and social discourse.

There are denialists who disguise themselves as dissidents, and there are dissidents who are branded as denialists, the former are people who are regarded as wolves in sheep clothing, and they pretend to be truth seekers but are out to hinder the study of HIV/AIDS. Natrass (2007:25) asserts that “dissidents choose to continue their defiance of the mainstream AIDS science has become more popularly known as AIDS denialists”. There is confusion between these two concepts along with who falls into which category. One is favoured over the other, those who are labelled denialists are criticised, chastened and ostracised because they are deemed to be troublemakers who want to challenge the status quo. Meanwhile those who are labelled as dissidents, they are hailed as thought leaders who are contributing in the study of AIDS by asking pertinent question. There is a huge double standard between these two terms, and these terms can be weaponised and used to exclude or ridicule people in the public sphere.

### **3.3 Racialisation of AIDS**

This section explores how the AIDS discourse became intertwined with race. The stark racial inequality created in South Africa during apartheid has lingered in post-1994 South African political, social and economic discourse. This section seeks to illustrate how in a democratic South Africa the past still displays its grotesque head. Negative racial stereotypes and cultural prejudices were dominant during the AIDS discourse; black people were subjected to harsh condemnation during the AIDS discourse. AIDS has

always had racist connotations, this is evident from the bigoted AIDS origin story, which hypothesises that AIDS came from monkeys and was passed on to humans in Africa or Haiti from then it was spread around the world by “them”. The origin of AIDS “discovery” story propagated stark racial stereotypes; this narrative was validated and spread by the western media. The AIDS discourse in the South African context created a system of othering, it created a mind-set of us ‘pure whites’ against them ‘diseased blacks’ these negative stereotypes were entrenched within the AIDS discourse in post-1994 South Africa.

Mbeki was passionate about eradicating economic and social inequality that were created during the apartheid regime; he was a man who grew up fighting to have his blackness be treated as equal to white people. Growing up under apartheid black people were stigmatised and labelled as inferior to the white man. Mbeki maintains that race is a pertinent topic which should be publicly examined; he strongly believes that racism is still prevalent in post-1994 South Africa. As Mbeki (1998:112) mention in his speech “we have to battle with and against the legacy of racial division and conflict which has characterised South African society almost from the beginning of the period of our country’s settlement by European people”. Race and racism have been deeply entrenched in the South Africa discourse for centuries, it would be impossible to eradicate it in a decade. When Mbeki came into power, he knew that in order to tackle this issue it needed to be dealt with head on.

The public sphere in South Africa has been racially divided, black public intellectuals were considered inferior to their white counter parts. Such atrocities cannot be erased in a decade nor should it be swept under the rug. Mbeki wanted to disrupt the status quo and illustrate that black people are equal to white people. These negative stereotypes cannot be dismantled by ignoring them but should be deliberated in the public space. Mbeki (1998:112) argues that “some among others will complain about why we thus continue to recall the past. After all it is sometimes said have, we not ended the system of apartheid”. There are people who want to bury their heads in the sand and pretend that racism ended with apartheid, meanwhile black people are still burdened by the effects of apartheid socially, economically and politically. The end of apartheid did not end the racism that accompanied it, nor did it automatically result in the redistribution of economic and social resources; which is needed for the majority of the population.

Mbeki addressed race often and refused to back down whenever he was branded as practicing reverse racism or trying to use race as a scapegoat. Mbeki would relentlessly

and continuously remind white people that they are privileged as a result of the apartheid system and that black people still carry the burden that came with it. The media would attack Mbeki, but he had a vision and refused to stop talking about race and racial issues. He believed that the two concepts were interlinked with black poverty and white privilege. This was evident in his public addresses, such as his two nations speech in 1998 which; which took place at the opening of the debate in the National Assembly Mbeki (1998:113) declared that “[the] reality of two nations [is] underwritten by the perpetuation of the racial, gender and spatial disparities born of a very long period of colonial and apartheid white minority domination, constitutes the material base which reinforces the notion that, indeed, we are not one nation, but two nations”. Mbeki in his two nation’s speech stressed that with institutionalized racial and economic segregation that happened in South Africa over centuries; it is impossible to ignore its effect in post-1994 South Africa. South Africa is still racially fragmented and will continue to be so until black public intellectuals and leaders challenge this phenomenon and publicly address these stark disparities until all races are economically and socially equal.

Racialisation of AIDS delegitimises the predominantly black post-1994 government; in post-1994 black people have been in power primarily black men. Black leaders are also affected by the negative racial stereotypes and cultural prejudices that are associated with black people during the AIDS discourse; black leaders are ridiculed and reduced to these bigoted stereotypes. Nduna and Mendes (2010:26) highlights that the “underlying comments about the government were assumptions of black stupefy, fuelling a racist ideology that blacks were not running the country competently or were stupid”. Racialisation of the AIDS discourse hinders the success of the post-1994 government; leaders are reduced to their skin colour not to the merit of their work. Mbeki (1996:1) during his speech at the 120th anniversary of the Cape Times he stated that; “we have to battle with and against the legacy of racial division and conflict which was characterised South African society almost from the beginning of period of our country’s settlement by European peoples”. Challenging the status quo and dismantling the stereotypes enforced on black men would be a step towards legitimatising the rule of black men over white people. It is the role of the black public intellectuals need to be at the forefront of legitimising the black voice and illustrating that black people are indeed equal to white people. Although, this is a mammoth task and it should be taken into account that black public intellectuals should not only address racial issues.

Black public intellectuals should fight to dismantle the racial stigma attached to AIDS. They had to fight the label of the other that whites had bestowed on them. Black people

had become fetishized and dehumanized by white people; black people were objectified and viewed as a source of entertainment not as humans. Black public intellectuals have to use the public sphere to enlighten white people of the misconceptions they had about black people. Black public intellectuals during apartheid were excluded from contesting their viewpoints in the public sphere; the white government was intolerant of black public intellectuals' criticism towards them. The black voice was deemed intellectually mediocre to their white counterparts. When the advent of democracy came it was assumed that black public intellectuals would fight vigorously to destroy all racial stigma attached to black people. The racialisation that was attached to the AIDS discourse should have been contested by black public intellectuals; their role was to use the public sphere to contest the AIDS racial undertones which were spread in the media during apartheid.

Gumede (2005:163) posits that "Mbeki's attitude towards the AIDS problem was almost certainly strongly influenced by his great personal distaste for the stereotypical Western portrayal of black sexuality, which he condemned as racist and neo-colonial, this viewpoint extended to scientific postulations that AIDS originated in the African jungle". Mbeki was a man who was fixated with eradicating the stereotypes and prejudices that has haunted black people for centuries, black people were objectified and treated as objects for the entertainment of white people. These stigmas have fed to the superiority of white people and the complex "white messiah/saviour" mentality black people have subconsciously attached to white people.

Mbeki was accused of being obsessed when it came to race and discussing racial issues, his critics claim that every issue was reduced to race. Mangcu (2008) believed that Mbeki used race as a weapon. There were many black public intellectuals who were critical of Mbeki for constantly bringing up race especially during the AIDS discourse debate, they believed he was using race as a scapegoat to divert from his failure as the president. Mangcu (2008:61) was a black public intellectual who was critical of Mbeki posits that "as the controversy raged, the presidents ratcheted up his rhetoric on the racial motivations of his critics. Suddenly what had started out as the president's questioning of technical aspects of the disease increasingly turned into racial diatribe". Mangcu believed that Mbeki focused too much on race and not enough on the pandemic and how the government can assist those that are affected by the disease.

Mangcu just like many black public intellectuals did not view the AIDS discourse as a social as well as health issue, these two issues cannot be separated because black people are the ones predominantly infected with the disease. On the other hand Nduna and

Mendes (2010:22) posit that “unpacking racism is critical for understanding the social determinants of health that predict higher risk for HIV and other poor health outcomes, as the country moves towards equal access to society’s resources between blacks and whites”. Unpacking racism and publicly discussing racial issues is imperative in post-1994 South African political and social discourse, it serves as a measurement of the progresses that has been done by the post-1994 South African government, as well as finding sustainable solutions in equalising the economic, social and racial inequalities in the devour of black people that were created during the oppressive apartheid regime.

Black public intellectuals’ role is to disrupt the status quo by asking uncomfortable decisions, they should fight ferociously for people who are being subjected to injustice and in South Africa context the marginalised are black people. The historical realities of black people and their oppression by white government over centuries cannot be overlooked nor should it be ignored. According to Mbeki (1998:112), “we have to do battle with and against the legacy of racial division and conflict which has characterised South Africa in society almost from the beginning of the period of our country’s settlement by European peoples”. This part of history which cannot and should not be ignored but it should be continuously deliberated in the public sphere. Debating contentious issues there needs to be tolerance of criticism from opponents, no opponent should be tolerated whilst they are intolerant of the other’s opposing viewpoints. Stereotypes of AIDS and it being labelled a “black people’s disease” should be contested and fought headfirst by black public intellectual through their intellectual work and public spheres they have access to.

Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede believe that race has to be contested in the public sphere, but millions of people were dying because of AIDS regardless of their race. Millions of people are infected and affected by AIDS and they need immediate assistance from the government. Mbeki as the head of state needed to make decisions quickly, saving people’s lives comes first and decisive decisions need to be made quickly. Gumede (2005:149) posits that Mbeki’s “folly in re-opening the debate on what causes AIDS rather than focusing on practical ways to curb the pandemic sweeping Africa”. The height of the AIDS pandemic happened during Mbeki’s tenure as highlighted by his biographer Gevisser (2009), “Mbeki wanted to go through all sources and refused to decide on policies unless he believed there was little room for error”. This was not a practical approach when it came to the AIDS discourse, it needed research but also a decisive leader who delegated to people who were experts in that field to help make the tough decision.

What is faulted about Mbeki is the pace at which he acted in solving the AIDS discourse, Mbeki should have decided before Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) took him to court to force him to act on their demands. Being a quick and decisive leader who delegated tasks is not Mbeki's strongest attribute. AIDS infected and affected poverty-stricken people he was trying to protect in making such a lengthy decision, at the end of the day this was a difficult decision which needed to be made and steps towards curbing the spread of AIDS needed to be done sooner. Seepe (2004) strongly criticised Mbeki for being arrogant because he had "never been in a laboratory and yet he did not have the decency to say, I don't know". Mbeki with his obsession of wanting to know every detail of issues before acting on them was a strong mistake during his tenure. Black public intellectuals kept critiquing Mbeki for wanting to be right and clinging on to tittle of philosopher king even if many died in his country due to his slow action of tackling the AIDS pandemic.

Seepe was too harsh in his criticism and did not consider the extent of the decision Mbeki had to make; millions of lives were at stake. Although Mbeki had to be quick and decisive, this is a big decision to make rolling out ARVs was a temporary and expensive quick fix and looking at AIDS holistically was how Mbeki preferred to tackle the AIDS discourse. He wanted to eradicate the political, social and economic inequalities which were created under apartheid, by tackling those black people will no longer be the most vulnerable to the AIDS pandemic. Black people were the hardest hit, to fight AIDS holistically this was a long-term project, rolling our ARV's without fixing other aspects is like bandaging a gaping wound with a plaster instead of healing it from the inside.

It is imperative to discuss and dispel the racial stigmas in post-1994 South African more especially when it came to the AIDS discourse. Gevisser (2009: 277) supposes that "what made AIDS even more difficult to deal with was the particular that stigma around it had been rooted in South Africa... As black people began to get ill and die the "gay plaque" turned into a "black death". AIDS was believed to be a disease that affected predominantly black people; phrases such as *swartgevaar* were used to warn white people against the "black" pandemic during the 1980's. The narrative of the AIDS discourse was concluded that the pandemic was a problem that affected the 'other', white people were not infected therefore it was a disease that affected black people. Such stereotype reinforces and promotes division between races.

The concept of race is constructed, narrated and controlled by social groups which are superior in order to justify the othering of the other social groups that are considered



inferior. Race is a binary concept, the self and the other could not be equal they had to be on opposite sides, black and white, good and bad, innocent and guilty and never the twain shall meet. Viewing race as binary concept has been an effective tool in keeping races segregated, in post-1994 races may not be legally segregated but social races are still keeping to their own, AIDS was used as a tool to divide the self from other, white people could justify being separated from the diseased black people.

Making race a binary concept creates a system whereby black and whites cannot be equal and this feeds into the psyche that black people cannot be on the same level be it economic or socially as black people. This is the antithesis of the racially inclusive nation that the ANC government wanted to build in post-1994 South Africa. If the self and the other are seen as equal this would be a step in equalizing the economic, social and political inequalities that black people were subjected to during apartheid. Roberts (2007:189) asserts that “the apartheid association of black people with dirt, disease, ignorance and an animal-like promiscuity made it almost inevitable that black people would be associated with AIDS origin and transmission”. Black men were perceived to be barbaric and could not be tamed; they behaved like animals and needed the white man to control them. Black men could not control his sexual urges nor were they educated this is the reason why they were spreading the pandemic. Such stereotypes still exist today, they may not be publically displayed but they are displayed through acts of microaggression.

The government with the assistance of the media spread negative racial stereotypes during apartheid; thus, in post-1994 South Africa the media has a duty to eradicate the harmful stereotypes they assisted in creating as well as maintaining. Nduna and Mendes (2010:25) add that “stereotypes about the character of a black man as distinguished by promiscuity, unprotected sex, germ carrying, sexual prowess, carelessness, ignorance, sexual permissiveness, violence and avarice”. These stereotypes are not scientifically proven and are extremely racist, yet they still persist in post-1994 South Africa. This keeps the self and other separated. Black men in particular are portrayed as the ones who are spreading this pandemic.

The media created a narrative which portrayed black people as diseased and dangerous for whites. Such narratives served to widen the racial divisions. White people had to protect themselves against black diseased people. Gevisser (2009: 277) states that “popular magazines and newspapers carried articles about “maids with AIDS”: They were coming to get you, if not with their AK47’s then with their virus. And into this cesspit of stigma the ANC’s heroes returned”. White media were in control of the

narrative, and even in post-1994 South Africa, white people still have a majority ownership of media outlets. Even publications that are perceived to be for black people are still owned by white men and they create and shape the narrative and portrayal of the black man.

Negative racial stereotypes and cultural prejudices create deep division between races in post-1994 South Africa. White media was shaping the AIDS discourse and as a result black people were treated as the other. The definition of self and other is important when contesting your views in the public sphere, the self is allowed to freely voice their viewpoints in the public sphere; meanwhile the other is prohibited from contesting their viewpoints this will create an imbalance and breeding ground of negative stereotypes. The self will be portrayed as privileged and superior as opposed to the other, who will be defined as an incompetent inferior being. The self will be in control of information; this will result in dictating what information is shared in the public sphere and ultimately shape the AIDS discourse.

The group that is dominant will be in control of shaping the narrative in the public sphere, in the South Africa context with its convoluted history the othering is embedded in its fabric. According to Moosavinia et al (2011:105), “by the process of othering the colonizers treat the colonized as not fully human and as a result it dehumanizes the natives, othering codifies and fixes the self as the true human and the other as other than human”. The post-1994 South Africa canon is characterised with othering black people this was the most prevalent during the AIDS discourse; this phenomenon permeates all power structures and creates a disproportionate racist society as it happened during the AIDS discourse. The process of othering will result in South Africa reverting back to a racially segregated country, this may not be legal segregation but societal segregation. HIV was used as a mechanism for reinforcing the negative stereotypes about black people and justifies treating them as subhuman.

Chirambo (2008:144) observed that “the virus is most prevalent among Africans (black) population, which in some instances is almost six times the infection rate of the second worst affected group”. This statement illustrates how race is important when discussing the AIDS discourse, black people are by far the racial group that is the worst affected by AIDS epidemic this makes them the most vulnerable group. Black people account for over 70% of the population this is no longer an issue which affects only one racial group this issue infiltrates and affects all races because above all things the expenditure government will incur when trying to fight this pandemic.

Nduna and Mendes (2010:26) states that “that a constructive dialogue around leadership would benefit efforts to both building South Africa around non-racial lines and strengthening HIV prevention”. The issue of race has a domino effect which needs to be discussed in the public sphere in order to attempt to dismantled it.

### **3.4 Political economy of AIDS**

AIDS became a socioeconomic disease, which affected people from all races, religion, genders and social classes. No disease had had such a catastrophic effect on the political, economic and social aspects in modern era. AIDS in post-1994 South Africa had posed a great threat on the country’s political and economic security. Ostergard (2004:105): writes “from a short-term perspective, the pandemic poses the greatest threat to political and military institutions; from a long-term perspective, the pandemic’s threat is centred on entire populations and state economic performances”. AIDS became entwined into the South African political and economic reality and as such it entangled and affected all aspects of society. Equally this disease was very lucrative this drove pharmaceutical companies from the West to treat people who were infected with AIDS in South Africa as commodities. Instead of providing cheaper medication which developing countries could afford, pharmaceutical companies decided to charge exorbitant prices which resulted in a lot of deaths and high profit margins

Mbeki was an avid AIDS lobbyist, whose goal was to establish an affordable practical, long-term and sustainable solutions to the AIDS epidemic. With a background in economics, Mbeki knew that if a solution was too expensive then it would strain the economy and lead to the public suffering in the long-term. Fighting for a cheaper generic drug was a solution that would be beneficial for all parties, Mbeki was disheartened and angered by pharmaceutical companies who were too greedy to put the lives of people as a priority instead of profits. Shah (2005: 103) observed that “by the time Mbeki took the helm of the South African government hid antipathy toward the Western AIDS establishment had gone rigid”. Mbeki felt that the pharmaceutical companies from the West were acting in a predatory manner, the lives of Africans were not treated with the dignity that it deserved. They would rather let people die instead of allowing developing countries to produce generic medication and the western government did nothing to discourage them.

Mbeki (2006:3) stressed what the G8 had concluded about infectious diseases “major diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and measles continue to exact a heavy toll on economies and societies around the world, particularly in developing countries.

Developing countries had limited money at their disposal and diseases such as HIV/AIDS were too costly for their meagre budgets. Pharmaceutical companies defied the studies done by the G8 and were after a profit, instead of prolonging the lives of those who were affected. South Africa was more vulnerable because the government had to tackle and restore social and historical injustices before it could focus on the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

AIDS was associated with poverty ravaged black people. Mbeki had fought to economically and politically emancipate black people from white oppressive rule. The AIDS pandemic was a reminder of how disadvantaged and vulnerable black people are. These issues caused Mbeki to ferociously fight western pharmaceutical companies to lowering the prices of their antiretroviral (ARV) drugs in order to save lives of those who have AIDS. Mbeki knew that the pharmaceutical companies were not acting in the best interest of the people in South Africa but wanted to make profits even if it caused millions of deaths.

Mbeki also realised that fighting the AIDS pandemic was not only limited to getting antiretroviral drugs, this was only one part of fighting the AIDS disease. Spending exorbitant amount of money on ARV's was not a good and sustainable plan. The government needed to have campaigns of prevention and other policies which would assist in fighting this disease holistically. According to Roberts (2007:195), "Mbeki's sin was to reject a drug-based intellectual protectionism in favour of a free exchange of ideas on the proper solution to the AIDS pandemic". Mbeki was criticised for not accepting a temporary solution for a long-term disease, this disease was too complicated to have thrown drugs at it. It would be impractical to spend a lot of money on drugs if people were not provided with adequate housing or social grants in order to afford money for a nutritious diet. Lowering the prices of the antiretroviral drugs would allow the government to focus on fighting AIDS holistically.

Mbeki was a man who wanted to weigh all his options and to make sure that the decision is making has little chance of failing. He took a long time to make decisions no matter how complex or time constraint the situation was he wanted to outweigh the good from the bad, this led to a lot of delayed critical decisions from the government. According Gumedede (2005: 149), "his folly in reopening the debate on what causes AIDS rather than focusing on practical ways to curb the pandemic sweeping Africa was roundly condemned, stop fiddling while Rome is burning". Gumedede and other black public intellectuals believed that Mbeki was not being a decisive leader, he had to act quickly if he wanted to prevent deaths from people with AIDS.

It is understandable that being responsible for the health of millions of people comes with a lot of pressure, but sometimes a leader needs to act quickly in order to save lives of the people now. Mangcu (2008:59) “theorised and infinitum about something that was affecting people on a daily basis”. Public intellectuals believed that Mbeki should roll out the mercy pills (ARV’s) in order to save lives of million. Short-term fixes sometimes need to be made in order to prolong the lives of those ravaged with the catastrophic disease. People were dying and when you have to survive long term effects are irrelevant, people wanted to live and at that time it was thought that these drugs would prolong their lives even though there were side effects.

Black people were justified in blasting Mbeki for denying the lifesaving drugs to the public, Mbeki may have had the best intention at heart but people needed a decisive leader who made quick decisions. It is also worth noting that Mbeki may have erred but, black public intellectuals also failed the public by pushing one single narrative which is a dangerous practice in the public sphere. Black public intellectuals failed to objectively investigate the AIDS phenomenon, it is impossible to be objective when a disease is spreading like wild fire. Many people were dying at an alarming rate, yet government wanted to debate on issues that did not benefit the people in the immediate future, being right is of no use when people are dying.

With the above mentioned black public intellectuals should always remain impartial and their role is to challenge the status quo, of fighting pharmaceuticals instead of attacking the government with legitimate reasons for delaying rolling out of ARVs. Public intellectuals painted Mbeki as an intolerant paranoid AIDS denialist. They did not investigate his AIDS rhetoric or the logic behind his reluctance to roll out ARV’s even when he was under public pressure to do so. Mbeki had credible scientific sources that were highly respected in their fields, but these sources were overlooked by black public intellectuals. As reported by Shah (2006: 107) “Gileads a consulting scientist of the University of the Witwatersrand’s Ian Sanne, the liver failures that contributed to some of the deathbed stemmed from the nevirapine, a conclusion Sanne and other Gilead scientists later published in the Journal of infectious diseases”. Mbeki had credible sources when he protested that the ARV’s were not proven to be safe for long-term use for those living with AID’s. Black public intellectuals were selective when it came to criticising Mbeki’s viewpoints. When he had credible sources, they did not engage with him publicly. Black public intellectuals had created an extremely antagonistic relationship with Mbeki; to a point that they refused to side with him even when he was

right. They pounced and criticised his decisions through their intellectual work especially when it came to his policies on AIDS

Black public intellectuals criticised Mbeki for not rolling out ARV's immediately to the public. They accused Mbeki of stalling instead of giving out medication that could save the lives of the people in South Africa. Mangcu (2008: 51) stated that "Mbeki insisted that the government would never authorise the use of AZT to prevent mother-to-child transmission because the drug was too toxic". Mangcu did not investigate Mbeki's claims instead he attacked Mbeki and labelled him an intolerant AIDS denialist. Black public intellectuals were supposed to speak truth to power by challenging the pharmaceutical companies in order to save millions of lives, instead of mercilessly attacking and demeaning Mbeki's decisions without investigating their legitimacy. On the other hand Mbeki as a leader was supposed to heed to the criticism he received from black public intellectuals to roll out the drugs, a leader should not spend time weighing options when his people are dying at an alarming rate.

Mangcu (2008:51) adds that "Mbeki had found his ammunition in these debates". Once again, Mangcu (2008) characterises Mbeki as an intolerant AIDS denialist who wanted to be right all the time. This often-unfair vilification of Mbeki was an unwarranted personal attack on Mbeki instead of determining if his intellectual rhetoric could hold water. Black public intellectuals were supposed to use their public platforms to fight the western pharmaceutical companies for charging high prices of ARV's and not allowing production of generics.

Black public intellectuals were advocates for short-term solutions which would have long-term effects. Seepe (2004: 22) postulates "Mbeki's response undermines the very concept of democracy. Fear of political reprisals, none of the ANC public representatives was prepared to challenge Mbeki on his nonsensical medical ideas". Seepe and other black public intellectuals labelled Mbeki as intolerant and refused to verify his sources, he had credible sources which justified his reluctance into rolling out ARV's immediately. Black public intellectuals were supposed to assist Mbeki with fighting for lower prices for the life-saving drugs, they did fail in lobbying for pharmaceuticals to produce cheaper drugs. Conversely, Mbeki did fail his people by acting as a pseudo scientist, he may have been an intellectual leaders but he had limited knowledge in the disease.

Both Mangcu and Seepe did not publicly advocate for cheaper antiretroviral drug through their intellectual work, nor did they publicly support Mbeki in criticising the western

pharmaceutical companies which charged exorbitant prices for these life-saving drugs. They pounced on Mbeki and held him responsible for the deaths of those infected by AIDS, instead of working together with Mbeki to get western pharmaceutical companies to lower the prices in order for the government to afford to roll out ARV's or find cheaper generic drugs. Black public intellectuals are supposed to use their voice to help those that are disadvantaged; it can be argued that they did fight for the public through advocating for government to roll out drugs and that pharmaceutical companies should be left for the government to sort out.

Gumede was the only black public intellectual amongst the three who understood Mbeki's reluctance in rolling out ARV's in this instance. Gumede publicly advocated for cheaper AIDS drugs in order to prolong the lives of those who are infected with the disease. Gumede acknowledges and supports the fight government for challenging the high prices for ARV's. According to Gumede (2005: 155), "in 1995 the South African government launched a battle against international tobacco companies by instituting stringent anti-smoking laws and with the pharmaceutical companies over the high prices of essential medication". Gumede was in support of the South African government to fight western pharmaceutical companies in lowering their costs or allowing for cheaper generic drugs to be made in order to save lives. Seepe and Mangcu advocated for Mbeki to roll out ARVs and Gumede went after the pharmaceutical companies, their views should be tolerated, not all black public intellectuals should criticise the government over the same issues, both can coexist and those in power should be tolerant of both forms of criticism.

The ANC government since it came into power in 1994 had been proactive in fighting the pandemic, they believed that antiretroviral drugs would save a lot of lives and should be distributed to their citizens, but they could not afford them. Gevisser (2009: 281) stated that "since it had come into office the ANC government had been attempting to lower cost of medicines through 'parallel importation': the purchasing of brand-name drugs from third parties at the cheapest rates possible. But with active help from the US government, Big Pharma claimed that this violated international copyright". When the ANC government came into power in 1994 it signed the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement. TRIPS was an agreement between all the member nations of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). According to Hoen (2003:39) "TRIPS it sets down minimum standards for the regulation by national governments of many forms of intellectual property (IP)". TRIPS was an agreement which favoured companies from the West and disadvantaged developing countries. This

agreement enabled pharmaceutical companies brazenly to charge outrageous prices to developing countries; and to prohibit developing countries who signed the TRIPS agreement from producing cheaper generic drugs.

The South African government could not afford to supply the expensive ARV drugs, yet the western pharmaceutical companies refused to decrease their prices, nor did they allow for cheaper generic drugs to be manufactured; they justified their greed by citing the TRIPS act put in place by the World Trade Organisation. Ostergard (2004:115) noted that “in 1994 the Marrakesh agreement established by the World Trade Organisation was signed by over 100 states. In that agreement a global trade regime for the protection of intellectual property rights (IPR) was included as a result strong lobbying effort by the United States and private companies”. These agreements were in favour of western pharmaceutical companies and disadvantaged developing countries. This was a political and economic problem had horrible consequences for the poor African countries in the long-term.

AIDS was a burden to an already overstrained health budget. The health care during apartheid predominantly catered for the white minority social group who had state of the art medical facilities, whereas the black majority were given inadequate health care. In post-1994 South Africa black people were no longer restricted to hospitals in the townships or rural areas; this created a huge influx of patients to a healthcare that was created to accommodate to 20% of the population. The ANC government not only had to improve healthcare systems, but they had to deal with the HIV/AIDS epidemic which ravaged its population, thus causing a threat to the economic development of the country. Chirambo (2008:149) noted that “all the UNAIDS global reports on the epidemic unequivocally point to AIDS being a developmental catastrophe”. The pandemic had weakened the country’s economy and placed strain on the resources and human capital of the South African government. This was what Mbeki had highlighted in the fight to get cheaper ARV drugs.

Human capital is vital for developing countries; AIDS does not only affect those infected with the disease but society as a whole, it has a trickle-down effect. AIDS had a catastrophic effect on the South Africa economy, which was already in a fragile state. AIDS had permeated to all levels of society in South Africa. Many people who were infected with AIDS had families, when they succumbed to the disease their families became a burden to the economy. AIDS had a far-reaching effect on the country as a whole not just the person, who is affected with the disease. Mugenyi (2008:155)



postulates that “AIDS was not only a devastating health and socio-economic problem, but it had also impacted disastrously on individuals, households, the community, governments and the region as a whole”. AIDS had a trickle-down effect it was a problem on societies, and the health care system were overburdened by sick people and ultimately this affected the economy because the government has to take care of those who contracted the disease by taking care of their medical needs as well as providing social grants. All these factors hindered the development of a country.

AIDS was a lucrative disease which Western pharmaceutical companies wanted to take full advantage of it, they treated people infected as cash cows instead of trying to help prolong their lives. Western pharmaceutical companies created and reinforced the narrative that the disease could only be controlled by their medications. Pharmaceutical companies bullied developing countries particular those who had signed the TRIPS agreement to buy their expensive medications and refused to lower their prices. The western pharmaceutical companies were charging exorbitant prices which most developing countries cannot afford as a long-term sustainable plan to fighting the AIDS pandemic. Gumede (2005:150) hypothesizes that “in South Africa two critical barriers remain to the widespread availability of these life-saving medicines and a possible net saving on the health budget in the long run; lack of political will and resistance on the part of patent to generic competition”. The western pharmaceutical companies resisted and fought against the distribution of generic ARV’s; they demanded that countries should respect their patents by buying their expensive drugs.

Gumede (2005:150) argues that “pharmaceutical companies are protected by international property rights policed by the World Trade Organisation from the manufacture or import of cheaper version of their drug”. This is an unjust agreement which would result in developing countries being at the mercy of western pharmaceutical companies’ products. Western pharmaceutical companies’ monopolised and capitalised off of this disease, at the expense of the millions of people infected with AIDS.

Pharmaceutical companies were intolerant of the criticism they received and they fought with the political support of the US government refused to lower the prices of antiretroviral drugs or allow them to produce affordable generic drugs. Gevisser (2009: 281) mentions that “from 1997 onward the matter had bedevilled the binational commission Mbeki ran with Al Gore then the US vice president. In mid-1999 Gore proposed a deal: he used his leverage with pharmaceutical companies to get them to make cost-reduction deal for antiretroviral drugs with South Africa”. Mbeki had taken the fight

with pharmaceutical companies' even before he became president of South Africa. Mbeki went to acquire political support from the US government in order to ensure that a practical and sustainable solution would be reached when it came to distribute ARVs in South Africa.

Brazil and India both did not sign the TRIPs agreement; they could not be legally pressured by pharmaceutical companies to uphold their patents. These two countries manufactured cheaper generic antiretroviral drugs which had significantly reduced the number of deaths caused by AIDS. Shah (2005: 111) writes "In early 2001 the generic drug manufacturers in India had produced a triple antiretroviral drug therapy for \$1 a day 3 % of the average cost in the United States". South Africa was prohibited under the TRIPs agreement to manufacture generics or to buy the drugs produced in Brazil or India, as a result of the TRIPs agreement they had to roll out expensive retroviral drugs manufactured by western pharmaceutical companies.

Gumede (2005:150) pointed out that "generic anti-AIDS drugs are sold in India for a quarter of the price charged by big pharmaceutical companies and have the added advantage of combining three in a single pill that has to be taken twice a day. The western ARV protocol requires patients to take up to twelve pills all produced by different companies", The South African government investigated the success of generics in Brazil and India and wanted to follow in their successful path. The large success in India the South African government decided to challenge the TRIPs agreement by amending their laws in order manufacture generics. Gumede did not criticise the government for the sake of criticising them, with this disease public intellectuals had to highlight how inhumane the pharmaceutical companies were towards South Africa, they were intolerant of the criticism they received.

Shah (2006: 104) argues that "they claimed that the disease could only be tamed by expensive Western-made antiretroviral drugs, despite what he called a large volume of scientific literature that deemed the drugs "a danger to health". Mbeki had credible argument to support his reluctance to roll out ARV's to those who are infected with AIDS, the drugs were not sufficiently proven long-term to be harmless to people who consumed them. The drugs did not only have economic implications but were also detrimental to people's health. Such facts were conveniently swept under the rug by the media platforms. Black public intellectuals did not properly defend the government against the western medications, more importantly the media platform did not give access

prominent to public intellectuals who went against pharmaceuticals. They spread and created a single narrative that benefitted them.

Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede were not acting objectively look at both sides and be equally critical of the western companies as they were persistently critical of Mbeki. Seepe and Mangcu failed in their roles by not being objective when contesting viewpoints in the public sphere, they blatantly sided with western medication instead of analysing Mbeki's decision-making process. The selective criticism that was practiced by black public intellectuals towards Mbeki's rhetoric created a single narrative in the public domain.

The single narrative is a dangerous practice in the public sphere. The public space should be filled with contestation of arguments from people with opposing viewpoints, and all criticism should be tolerated. Black public intellectuals through their media platforms persistently narrated their own single story. They reduced a complex man such as Mbeki who was dealing with a complicated and nuanced situation into an oversimplified label. Mbeki being labelled an AIDS denialist reduced and restricted him into a small box which many black public intellectuals had refused to relinquish him from. Whenever Mbeki wanted to criticise black public intellectual's viewpoints, they would accuse him of being an AIDS denialist who was also intolerant of criticism. Black public intellectuals refused to investigate the legitimacy behind his claims. Mbeki was dealing with a disease which was complex and could not make any hasty decisions without weighing his options; he had to do what was right for the millions of people of were infected with AIDS.

Conversely, AIDS should be faced head on, and drastic policies needed to be put into place in order to curb the spread of AIDS and also to prolong the lives of those who were infected with AIDS. According to Chirambo (2008:145), "a democratic government at the very least needs to be responsive and react to the frustration and devastation in society caused by increasing numbers of people falling ill and dying from AIDS-related disease". Mbeki took too long to react to the AIDS epidemic; this disease needed a decisive leader who would hastily do what was in the best interest of its people. The numbers of people getting infected with the disease was rapidly rising so was the mortality rate because of lack of adequate medication to fight this disease.

The South African government challenged the western pharmaceutical companies by violating the TRIPS agreement, in order to manufacture cheaper generic drugs which, the government could afford to roll out. Shah (2005:102) argues "when at last in 1997 South African legislators amended the country's Medicines Act to allow the health minister to

make HIV medication affordable by breaking patents and buying cheap generics, Western interest appeared once again committed to blocking Africans from accessing lifesaving meds”. The big pharmaceutical companies wanted to make profits at the expense of people’s lives, they did not care about saving people’s lives but only wanted to make money. Shah (2005:102) adds that “the Clinton administration promptly placed South Africa on its “watch list” of patent pirates”. The AIDS issue became a political and economic fight when the US government endorsing the greedy pharmaceutical companies; developing countries were bullied into distributing the expensive antiretroviral drugs which were not sustainable long-term for their health budget.

Thirty-nine pharmaceutical companies laid charges against the South African government for wanting cheaper generics which violated the TRIPs agreement they signed in 1994. Ostergard (2004:116) stated that “the PhRMA sought assistance of the United States government under section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 in confronting South Africa’s government. In 1998 and 1999 the USTE placed South Africa on special 301 watch list, based partly on the new revisions to South Africa’s pharmaceutical law”. The pharmaceutical companies wanted political support in order to persuade the US government to place sanctions on the South African government or use their political muscles to bully the South African government to succumb to distributing the expensive antiretroviral drugs they manufactured.

Heywood (2017:115) posits that “the pharmaceutical manufacturers association (PMA) probably initiated the litigation as a stick to keep the Mandela government immobile. At the same time, it commissioned its allies in the Clinton government to put South Africa on a trade “watch list”. But this tactic failed”. The Clinton government sided with South African government the matter did not go to court, saving lives is more important than profit. The pharmaceutical companies under mounting pressure from activities and countries from around the world they dropped their charges. The AIDS debate illustrated the intolerance of black public intellectuals towards Mbeki, as well as the intolerance of pharmaceuticals towards developing countries that criticise them. Both parties dug their heels in and would not contest their ideas in the public sphere but would accuse each other of being intolerant to criticism.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the importance of the AIDS and Mbeki’s AIDS policy. This chapter attempted to change the way the AIDS debate was undertaken in post-1994 South Africa. Furthermore, this chapter analysed the intellectual work of Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede

and their positionality in relation to the AIDS debate. These three black public intellectuals accused Mbeki of being intolerant to criticism when it came to the AIDS debate.

This chapter illustrated that the AIDS debate is more nuanced as opposed to the way that the media has tried to simplify it and mercilessly vilifying Mbeki. Mbeki appears to have wanted to act in the best interest of the public, by not hastily rolling out the ARVs when he was under pressure to do so. Instead he wanted to find the best and sustainable solution. Although more focus was placed on Mbeki's refusal to roll out ARV, Seepe and Mangcu failed by refraining from acting in the best interest of the public by speaking truth to power to international pharmaceutical companies. This might be so because it appears that the AIDS debate was denied it's a critique of its proper socio-economic and political context as one of the challenges in a young democracy.

## **Chapter 4: On the race debate**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter focused on the AIDS debate. It argued that Mbeki and the three public intellectuals had opposing viewpoints on the politics of AIDS. Like the AIDS debate it is imperative to discuss race and the race discourse in post-1994 South Africa. Race has been interwoven into the fabric of South Africa's reality for centuries, Mbeki and black public intellectuals agreed on the importance of discussing race and racial issues in the public domain, but they mostly differed on how to tackle this issues.

This chapter aims to define and critically distil how black public intellectuals identified race in relation to the role as black public intellectuals in the post-1994 South Africa public discourse, also if they were tolerant of each other's criticism whenever they differed in opinions. The argument advanced in this chapter is to understand the context and reasoning behind Mbeki's passion for tackling racial issues.

Again, this chapter will also focus on three black public intellectuals Mangcu, Seepe and Gumede who were in the forefront in public debates with Mbeki even on matters pertaining to race. They were not afraid to directly criticised Mbeki on his race narrative and accused him of using the race card for his political advancement. Overall, an attempt will be made to determine if black public intellectuals and Mbeki were tolerant of each other's racial positionality in the South African public discourse.

This chapter also sought to analyse the ways in which race was contested in the public sphere in post-1994 South Africa, it will focus on the antagonistic relationship between Mbeki and black public intellectuals when it came to the race debacle. More importantly, this chapter will highlight that although black public intellectuals and Mbeki had differences on their viewpoints of race but they did share the same sentiments on racial issues and the lack of black voices and black issues being overlooked. This study seeks to reconfigure the race debate; which will be done by unpacking the nuances of the race debate in the post-1994 public domain and determine if the black voice was indeed allowed a prominent space in the public sphere.

### **4.2 On race**

To understand Mbeki's rational and supposed focus on race and racial issues, it is imperative to understand what drove apartheid and why it is important to reverse its horrific effect on black people. South Africa is an inherently racist country, from its

inception race has always been weaponised and used to divide people. Black people lived in abject poverty and faced harsh living conditions. On the other hand, white people had better standard of living, better education systems and also got better jobs because of the colour of their skin.

It is of importance to take into account that Mbeki was born six years after the apartheid system came into law. According to Blakemore (2019:1) “the segregation began in 1948 after the National Party came to power. The nationalist political party instituted policies of white supremacy, which empowered white South Africans who descended from both Dutch and British settlers in South Africa while further disenfranchising black Africans”. Mbeki grew up during apartheid but in 1962 he was forced to go to exile at a young age Gevisser (2007:165). Given Mbeki’s historical background and experiences under the oppressive and racially segregated South Africa, race was entrenched into his psyche. The racial segregation was a constant reminder of his blackness and it served as a constant reminder of the inferiority of black people.

Mbeki considered race and eradicating the horrendous effects of apartheid important issues and in order for true unity to occur, racial issues needed to be publicly addressed. During the first national conference on racism in Johannesburg Mbeki (2001:1) that “the racial divisions still ingrained in South Africa had to be tackled now lest they descend into social instability”. As a result of growing up in a system that oppressed black people, his public rhetoric served as a reminder of the injustice of the past still haunts the post-1994 South Africa, this was most present in his 1998 two nations speech. According to Mbeki (1998:114) “a major component part of the issue of reconciliation and nation building is defined by and derives from the material conditions in our society which have divided our country into two nations, the one black and the other white. Additionally in another speech he delivered on the occasion of the first national conference on racism held in Johannesburg on 30 August 2000, Mbeki (2001:1) stated that “the racial divisions still ingrained in South Africa had to be tackled now lest they descend into social instability”.

Race is still pertinent issue in post-1994 South African public discourse, and it needs to be continuously deliberated in the public sphere. The racial segregation is self-imposed; races are still living in parallel worlds. Gumede (2005:97) highlighted that “the degree of racial segregation in residential areas, school, lifestyles, clubs, and the workplace, even something as mundane as music preferences is disturbing”. In post-1994 South Africa, the continuation of segregation of race still continue and this is happening in all facets of

life. Seepe an academic also noted that effects of apartheid still linger in the education sphere. As Seepe (2004: 83) 'too often our response to race indicate either that we have not fully understood the implications of our commitment to non-racialism or that we seriously underestimate the distance we still have to travel before we realise a non-racial society'. Mangcu (2008: 113) believes that "for as long as both black and whites are locked in their respective domain of denial- the black denial of the experience of HIV/AIDS, crime, corruption and Zimbabwe, and the white denial of racism in their midst – then for that in the goal of a truly non – racial society will remain elusive.

Both black public intellectuals and Mbeki have the same views, that race and racial issues should not be ignored and by ignoring them we are doomed to remain two nations. Seepe (2004: 56) believes that "it remains necessary to challenge the intellectual edifice that sustained apartheid". They were tolerant of each other's view on race. They believed that to ignore racial inequalities caused by apartheid does not mean that they will miraculously disappear. Instead, this will cause a political powder keg which could result in widespread societal breakdown. White economic and social privileges as a result of apartheid are blatantly obvious. Gumede (2005: 99) stressed that "the rich are still predominantly white, though a small percentage of blacks have been elevated to this level, while the poor remain almost exclusively black". White people still retain economic power whereas black people have political power. This study hypothesises that the two can be used to complement each other rather than breeding intolerance.

Mbeki believed that the effects of apartheid still lingered in post-1994 South Africa and that there was no quick fix but that the road to true unity will be a long and treacherous. According to Mbeki (1998:114) "I would like to reaffirm this position. The abolition of the apartheid legacy will require considerable effort over a considerable period of time. We are neither impressed nor moved by self-serving arguments which seek to suggest that four or five years are long enough to remove from our national life the inheritance of a country of two nations which is as old as the arrival of European colonists in our country, almost 350 years ago".

Seepe, Mangu and Gumede did agree on Mbeki's views on race, as well as the importance of racial equality in post-1994 South Africa. However, they differed on the way Mbeki executed his racial views. They believed that he was obsessed with the race issues and intolerant to criticism, more especially from black public intellectuals. Seepe (2004: 124) wrote that "the challenge to Mbeki's intellectual standing coincides ironically with his consistent attacks on black public intellectuals. He accused them of being an



embarrassment to the black community; that they do not read and / or some of them are no better than the branch leaders of his organisation”. Black public intellectuals who criticised Mbeki were attacked by either Mbeki or his allies, their criticism of him were taken as a personal attack as well as betrayal of their race.

There was a sense that Mbeki expected a camaraderie between himself and black public intellectuals, as was the case when they were both fighting the intolerant apartheid regime. However, Mbeki is in power and public intellectuals are supposed to hold him accountable to the public. Mangcu (2008:38) emphasised that “Mbeki started calling on black public intellectuals to come to his defence on a number of public policy controversies. “Where are the black public intellectuals? He would ask”. It is not the role of public intellectuals to have allegiance with those in power based on their race but, they should be able to criticize his decisions and those in power should be tolerant of the tolerance they receive.

Mbeki’s continuous focus on race and speaking on racial issues led to many accusing him of being intolerant to criticism and pulling out the race card when someone disagreed with him. Ngesi (2016:37) observed that “it has become commonplace, especially from the opposition parties, to accuse Mbeki of “playing the race card”. This was, so it was argued, a strategy on Mbeki’s part to mask the incompetence of his presidency”. Black public intellectuals believed that Mbeki weaponised race for his political gain, this did cause a division in the public discourse. Mangcu (2008:115) stated that “Mbeki has been able to utilise the language of black victimhood and has been able to mobilise some black public intellectuals to varying degrees on that basis”.

To criticise the government was tantamount to being racist, the criticism of the government was not tolerated during the era of Mbeki, this was most evident when he was criticised by the leader of the opposition party who happened to be white. As Gumede (2005: 249) “Mbeki and the ANC leadership believed that Leon’s aggressive criticism of the government has racist undertones, and that he personifies the condescending viewpoint that blacks cannot govern”. During Mbeki’s era criticising the government was seen as a racial attack, it can be argued that Leon did have racial undertone, but as the leader of the opposition party his position is to be critical of the government. Those in power should be tolerant of criticism they receive from their opponents without using the race card. Additionally, to criticise Mbeki’s government was not only deemed a betrayal to the government but was treated as a betrayal to one’s race, as well as unpatriotic. According to Mangcu (2008:39) “to criticise government was not only

described as unpatriotic but was portrayed as an act of collusion with the enemies of the revolution”.

Mbeki’s relentless focus on racial issues was criticized by black public intellectuals, they accused him of being intolerant of criticism and pulled the race card he was criticized. After reading Mangu’s book *To the Brink* Nalini Naidoo, put forwards Mangu’s ideas by inferring that “he acknowledges that the recent power outages, crime and a government that has come to use the race card to thwart criticism. Mbeki was accused of using the race card when he wanted to deflect criticism”. Race was used a political tool and it utilised whenever Mbeki wanted to deflect from his political failures or mistakes, whenever Mbeki was accused of any wrong doing he would pull out the race card. This could also be interpreted as Mbeki being intolerant to criticism, more especially from black public intellectuals.

Mangu, Seepe and Gumede agreed that Mbeki had to confront racial issues when he came into power. Mangu (2008:135) stated that “when Mandela left office it would indeed be left to his young successor Thabo Mbeki to tackle the issues that were uncomfortable to raise in the early period of the transition and in a sense bring a honeymoon to a close”. Mbeki had to take the reins and tackle racial issues which would cause the white privileged minority uncomfortable, in order to uplift the disadvantaged black majority. Mangu believed that Mbeki had to tackle uncomfortable racial issues in order to ensure that South Africa is truly economically, politically and racially equal. The race debate needed to be openly contested and those who are uncomfortable with the deliberation of racial issues need to practice tolerance. The media should award its platform and be tolerant when black public intellectuals debate racial issues.

Mbeki and black public intellectuals openly opposed the fallacy of a rainbow nation which was created as a smoke screen for avoiding discussing the grotesque effects of apartheid. Race and racism should not be overlooked and pretend that democracy resulted in all social groups being equal. Mangu (2008:135) was convinced that “the imbalances that our country had inherited could not merely be wished away by romantic appeals to a harmonious ‘rainbow nation’. Race was a fundamental aspect for South African discourse for centuries it would be unrealistic to think that the collapse of apartheid would result in the end of racism. Seepe (2004:21) advances that “the political naivety and arrogance arising out of this exceptionalism, a consequence of the ‘miracle notion’ concept, has handicapped South African from appreciating the challenges that lie ahead”. To move forward as a nation is it imperative to learn from the mistakes of the past no

matter how uncomfortable they may seem, once these issues are publicly deliberated it would be possible to move forward as a united nation.

Race and economic disparities are intertwined in the South African context, in order to dismantle the racial issues, the economy needs to be distributed to the previously marginalised social groups. Contesting racial issues in the public domain may be unsettling to most but these are essential in post-1994 South Africa. Diko (2016:1) concedes that Mbeki's discussion about race "does not lead to the national feel-good atmosphere we all experience whenever our national sports teams score a victory over a foreign competitor or when other benign events occur that help us to forget the persisting racial divisions in our society". Debating on race and racial issues is painful and will highlight the adversities of South Africa's past. Confronting racial issues would also bring to light that black people were worse off but were not the only social group that was negatively impacted by apartheid. White people were also affected by apartheid.

Seepe (2004:2) noted that "Whites were victims of dehumanisation in as much as were black South African, albeit in different ways and varying degrees". White people were also disadvantaged by the apartheid system, these were perpetuated by negative stereotypes; white people were kept prisoners in their own country, they lived in fear over fear of the black people. Such racial issues although overlooked it needs to be publicly discussed, in order for mind-sets to changed honest conversations should take place between all social groups and it is the role of the black public intellectual to facilitate such discussions, in order to ensure that tolerance is practiced when there are criticism between social groups. These stereotypes can only be dismantled when they are addressed publicly. All parties should tolerant of the criticism they receive.

Mbeki was a president who would respond to his critics, through his speeches and his weekly articles he wrote. Mbeki (2000:1) stated "that it might very well encourage racial conflict, destroying the progress we have achieved towards national reconciliation, towards the birth of a happy rainbow nation". In order to build a steady foundation, it is important that the post-1994 South African discourse be and built up again. In order to move forward uncomfortable discussions needed to be had in the public domain. Race was often the central theme to Mbeki's rhetoric; he highlighted it and berated the media for vilifying him when he talked about race instead of exchanging viewpoints with him on race.

Apartheid was not a new concept in South Africa but one which legally enforced racially segregation that was done to black people; it cemented and perpetuated the inferiority of

blackness. Post-1994 South Africa did not miraculously end the inferiority of black people; it merely created a façade of equality. The effect of apartheid trickled through all facets of black people's lives. According to Seepe (2009:13), "oppression does not have only physical and mental dimensions, but also psychological and cultural dimensions which are part of socio-political discourse". Apartheid effected black people on all levels socially, politically and economically. In order to try and close the effect of apartheid black people have to get the same privileges that white people have been receiving for centuries.

Race was entrenched in black public intellectual's life's they were not public intellectuals but black public intellectuals their race was used a prefix to warn people. Being labelled a black public intellectual was used to warn people not take their intellectual work too seriously or that it would be of inferior standards to their white counterparts. They were not seen as equal to their white counterparts. Seepe would often discuss how black people are still considered inferior to white people. As Seepe (2004:27) posits "white South African has never taken the intellectual capacity of black people seriously. Blacks were always found wanting, nothing of intellectual's value was and is expected from them". Seepe similarly to Mbeki believed that black people were not revered by white people; they had to work ten times harder before they could have a seat at the table. Seepe as a black public intellectual was duty-bound to challenge the status quo, in order to have black people to be treated the same as their white counter parts. For Seepe and his fellow black public intellectuals, rejecting the racially biases subjected to black people would lead to black people fighting to be treated equally to their white counterparts in all levels of society.

Black public intellectuals are important in the public discourse. They are supposed to create a narrative for black people who were denied access to one. They are supposed to act in the best interest of those who were marginalized during apartheid. Race and the privileges or disadvantages that were a result of it during apartheid need to be contested in the public sphere. In order to move forward as a country white people should acknowledge that they were privileged during apartheid; and should share their prosperous dividends that they are still enjoying because of a system that was engineered to ensure the suffering of black people. Black public intellectuals have a role to highlight the injustices still faced by black people because of the effect of this oppressive system. If all races are equal, then race will no longer be a focal point in the political and public discourse in post-1994 South Africa.

Black public intellectuals were initially excited when Mbeki took office, because he was one of their own, a man who fought for the freedom of the black voice during apartheid. He was not afraid to talk about racial issues even when it made white people uncomfortable. His fight for racial inclusion of black voice in the public sphere was well illustrated in Mbeki (1978:1) when he stated that “post-apartheid freedom couldn’t effectively be imagined except by deciding in a rigorous way through open debate, what was precisely bad about apartheid and about South African earlier forms of colonialism”. Mbeki was a public intellectual of sorts during apartheid he challenged the status quo and spoke truth to power, even if the apartheid government tried to silence him. Mbeki used various public platforms to oppose the apartheid regime and to critic it for oppressing black people in South Africa.

When Mbeki came into power in 1999 a lot of black public intellectuals were very excited for him to be president. Mangcu (2008:33) stated “I was for Thabo Mbeki there was something about his cultural nationalism that made me proud”. Mangcu was one of the many black public intellectuals who were jubilant when Mbeki became president in 1994. They believed that the issues facing black people would be pushed by those in power. Mbeki had always challenged the apartheid regime and fought for black public intellectuals to be allowed to contest their ideas in the public sphere. The structure of apartheid muzzled, ostracised and rebuked public intellectuals who publicly challenged the apartheid regime. People who publicly opposed the government were jailed for treason or were forced to flee into exile.

Mangcu was initially happy when Mbeki came into power. He thought he would eradicate the inequalities that black people experienced in post-1994 South Africa. He changed his viewpoint later and would often state that Mbeki was obsessed with race. As Mangcu (2008:41) asserted “blacks because of their very blackness are reversing the legacy of apartheid. Anyone who disputes that is against blacks and therefore against the reversal of apartheid”. Mangcu when it was no longer comfortable was against Mbeki and accused him of being intolerant to criticism and obsessed with race. Mangcu was supposed to be an advocate for black people and a voice for those who were affected by apartheid. Race should not be contested on a part time basis but should be a continuous struggle that black public intellectuals are supposed to fight for.

#### **4.3 On racial nativism**

The importance of a nuanced understanding of “racial nativism” is imperative when attempting to understand Mbeki and black public intellectual’s positionality on race.

Debate on race and racial issues peaked during Mbeki's tenure especially in 2007, and this was a period where black public intellectuals also cemented their role by making their views more pronounced in the public sphere. Race was a central theme to Mbeki, and he would often reference it, in almost all his public addresses and writings.

Torok (1996: 61-62) defines racial nativism as "an intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign connections." In the context of this document, the concept is used to primarily denote the hostility of 'African nationalists' towards individuals of European descent and attack on them. Mbeki's "I Am an African" speech in 1996 and other similar public pronouncements were as his embrace for racial nativism. This section therefore seeks to establish a broader understanding of the term racial nativism in the South Africa context. It will further assist in determining if Mbeki was intolerant to criticism from black public intellectuals especially on matters concerning race, or if he was merely attempting to create open dialogue about race in a racially divided country.

In the South African political context, racial nativism was referred to as the race card. It is important to highlight that Mbeki did not directly talk about racial nativism, but he was accused of practicing it by black public intellectuals. The underlying view was that Mbeki's talk on race leaned towards racial nativism, and his supposed obsession with race and racial issues. Mbeki (1998:113) addressed his critics during a speech "some will say that all I did was to make racist remarks. Others will ask: what did you expect from an Africanist?" Mbeki believed that being pro-black and pro-African was weaponised against him and was used a tool to diminish his legitimate concern on post-1994 South African racial issues. Mbeki (2016:1) noted that "it would seem to me that over the years, certainly in our public discourse, we have spoken less and less about the fact of the racist legacy whose eradication must surely constitute the heart and focal point of the struggle to create the non-racial society visualised in our constitution". It is irrefutable that Mbeki did heavily focus on race, this is unavoidable and a necessity for a racially fragmented country such as South Africa. It is impossible to eradicate the effects of apartheid, which advocated for segregation of race without confronting or speaking about race and racial issues. We can only correct the grotesque effects of a racially divisive regime by publicly deliberating about race.

It can be argued that Mbeki's persistent dialogue on racial issues was his mechanism of empowering black people and trying to achieve a truly inclusive country. During his African renaissance speech Mbeki (1998:297) pronounced that "we are our own

liberators is the epitaph on the gravestone of every African who dared to carry the vision in his or her heart of Africa reborn". As to be expected racial issues were always going to be complex for a young and transitioning country such as South Africa, but alas it is pertinent to openly deliberate about them in order to restore the dignity of the previously marginalized social groups. It is important to move on, but this can only be done if black people demand what was denied to them during apartheid.

It is also relevant that in post-1994 South African discourse that racial issues are highlighted. Racial nativism creates racial exclusivity, it alludes that one race is preferred over the other. In the South African social context racial nativism can be detrimental to the sensitive political eco-system that was created by Mandela. Mbeki wanted to take on racial issues and he did so without any tact. Mbeki (1998:143) declared "when we talk of improving the quality of life of all out people, we surely mean this: that we will close this gap to end the situation which poverty and wealth so easily translate into black and white". Mbeki wanted to uplift black people and wanted assistance from white people, because they have majority of the wealth. Post-1994 South Africa needs to close the economic inequality gap by enriching black people. Racial issues could not be solved without the participation of white businesspeople.

Racial nativism is seen as a black-white binary concept. However, the reality is that it is much more complicated and nuanced than that in the South African political, historical and public discourse. The effects of apartheid linger on, white privilege and black poverty is irrefutably obvious. According to Mbeki (1998:113) "we have to do battle with and against the legacy of racial division and conflict which has characterised South African society almost from the beginning of the period of our country's settlement by European people". In a country that is built on a foundation of racial exclusion, demanding inclusion of another race can be distorted into intolerance or 'reverse racism'. Mbeki believed that to move forward in post-1994 from the racial injustices and privileges that were and are still reserved for whites. Confronting racial issues is fundamental when trying to equalize the political and public discourse in post-1994 South Africa.

It is for the abovementioned reasons that racial nativism in the South African context should be looked at differently compared to other parts of the world. The racial debate from Mbeki's perspective took place within the realms of attaining social justice. It is obligatory to stress that racial nativism can be distorted but it should not be confused with national patriotism. Former French president Charles de Gaulle once said, "Patriotism is when love of your own people comes first; nationalism, when hate for people other than

your own comes first." As such, Mbeki's race discourse polarised the South African society, as whites saw him as racist while blacks supported his persistent call for change in their favour. Mbeki's viewpoints on race polarised the South African public discourse. Public intellectuals and politicians alike would often debate on his race narrative, some would accuse him of constantly pulling out the race card and other lauded him for publicly tackling pertinent issues.

During his two nations speech Mbeki (1998:68) has the opinion that "South Africa is a country with two nations. One nation is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographical dispersal. It has ready access to developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure... the second larger nation of South Africa is black and poor... this nation lives under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, and educational, communication and other infrastructure". Mbeki hypothesized that true emancipation in South Africa can only be achieved if black people gain the same privilege that is enjoyed by white people.

Mbeki spoke about racial issues from the perspective of a black man who experienced the effect of a racially divided nation. As previously mentioned, the notion of race was consistently referenced in Mbeki's public narrative. He was passionate about highlighting racial issues. He did acknowledge that he did talk about race often. As Mbeki (2006:5) mentioned "I have in the past made the point that a central and permanent feature of the racism experienced by black people over many centuries has been the stereotype that as black people we are inherently amoral and corrupt". Mbeki admitted that he would often use the race card, if a public intellectual criticised his rhetoric, he would pull it out. Daniels (2007:20) believed that Mbeki had a "passionate attachment to race"; he was obsessive about racial issues and would often refer to it even if it was not the core principle of the topic at hand.

In his speeches Mbeki would often refer to, when he criticised white intellectuals that they were racist, he would dissect and deconstruct all information and would be seen to be oversimplifying it and reducing it to a racial matter. Mangcu (2009:1) declared that "racial nativism, in this discourse [was] if your ideas are not in agreement with government then you are either a white racist or a black sell-out. All matters were racialized, there was no robust engagement with Mbeki especially from white intellectuals, who were all branded as racists should they dare criticise Mbeki, he would engage with them or warrant their criticism as legit but would antagonise them. The



public space was racially divided, black public intellectuals were emotionally blackmailed into supporting the black government.

Mbeki due to his positionality on race received criticism from both sides of the racial divide, more especially from black public intellectuals. They accused Mbeki of seeking unchallengeable power and control over the ruling ANC and the government. Seepe stated that the origins for this could be traced from the ANC's decision in 1997 when it gave the power to its president to appoint premiers, directors-general of departments and the mayors of major municipalities won by the party Khumalo (2006:1). And Mbeki was not going to disappoint as he used both government and the ANC to flex his muscles, not only through action but he also strived to shape national debate using these two platforms.

Quintal (2000:1) wrote that: When closing the ANC's 2000 national general council (NGC) in Port Elizabeth, Mbeki "attacked certain black intellectuals who are critical of his ruling African National Congress, saying they masquerade as political commentators." This was informed by his belief that black public intellectuals should not criticise the black government otherwise they were agents of the "white enemy". Black public intellectuals were not supposed to be too critical of the black leader; this would be contradictory to the role of the public intellectual. Black public intellectuals are not loyal to anyone expect the truth, they must hold those in power accountable for their actions; regardless of their race.

Mangu initially supported Mbeki through his vision of uplifting and empowering black people. Mangu (2008:33) stated that "I was for Thabo Mbeki; there was something about his cultural nationalism that made me proud". He was one of the many black public intellectuals who were jubilant when Mbeki became President in 1999; he was a man who although modern with his European tertiary and mannerism such as constantly smoking his pipe, he was also proud of his heritage. He reasoned that Mbeki's voracious ambition of creating an independent Africa portrayed him as a tyrant who's intolerant of criticism.

Nonetheless, Mangu (2008:25) believed that "Mbeki stance of nativism portrayed members of the indigenous racial group as more South African and African". Mbeki took upon himself to correct these gross inequalities, in order for such equalities to be achieved white people needed to relinquish some of their privileges and open dialogues needed to be done between all social groups. Mbeki would often talk about race in order to highlight the inequalities that still linger in post-1994 South Africa, he wanted to illustrate that political freedom is inadequate without economic freedom. As stated, his intentions were

good, but his execution was not good. His solution was to remove, ridicule or attack all who disagreed with his vision. Many black public intellectuals did not criticize his vision, but it was his execution that many disagreed with.

Many attacked Mbeki's consistent persistent focus on race and racial issues. Daniels (2007:44) who stated that "it emerges as theme in many if not most of Mbeki's discourse as the president, shows a rather stubborn attachment to race to apartheid and its residues". Such sentiments were shared by many who believed that Mbeki was obsessed with race, instead of trying to listen to his message. There were public intellectuals who trivialised the historical, social and political injustices that were experienced by black people during apartheid, these public intellectuals choose to ignore racial issues which are still pertinent issues in a racially divided post-1994 South Africa. Mbeki could have been trying to create honest dialogues about the consequences of apartheid to black people, his execution could have been better by giving public intellectuals space to contest his ideas instead of trying to enforce his ideas on others. This led to his good intentions being lost in translation.

Mbeki's African Renaissance idea was about the emergence of the black race and its space in global affairs. The criticism was not about Mbeki's fixation with race but rather the merits of the idea itself and his focus. Although Mbeki was often praised for re-awakening the debate on African unity, his implementation of his stance was widely frowned upon by black public intellectuals. Black public intellectuals like Mangcu, criticized Mbeki's execution of trying to liberate Africans. Mangcu (2014:13) stated that "there was a time when Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance promised to provide an inspirational public philosophy for transforming our society". Mbeki did portray himself as a man who put issues of black people at the forefront of the people, he would often state that African issues should be fixed by Africans; and he undertook the role as the captain who would solely steer that ship.

Mbeki's obsession with the role of being the martyr for the whole black race; he acted as a one man show and centralised power to himself. Gumede (2005: 128) asserted that "Mbeki's presidency and cabinet have been based on the three Cs: control, coordination and centralisation". It may be argued that he was doing this with good intentions but it is undemocratic and shows signs of a leader who is intolerant to criticism by making all key decisions or choosing leaders who never question his decisions. Seepe (2004:56) gathered that "since taking office a less appealing portrait was beginning to emerge. Political project an image of a president with a propensity to accumulate and centralised power, a

man prepared to sacrifice his comrades to realize his ambitions”. Mbeki was so obsessed in his leadership position that he centralised all power to himself in order to oversee his missions come to reality. In order to have a legitimate democracy there needs to be plurality of ideas, when there is no spirit of debate or there is intolerance to criticism, then this is undemocratic.

Mbeki did start with good intentions of uplifting black people, but Daniels (2007:41) argues that “the transformation project in Mbeki’s discursive structure has taken other turns”. Mbeki had such a passion for his project of racial transformation that whoever spoke against these projects were attacked by Mbeki or his allies. Mangcu surmised that “taking their cue from their leader, government spokes people started openly insulting black public intellectuals who were critical of Mbeki. Mbeki centralised power to himself and in order to gain favour with him or as a displacement of loyalty those in government attacked black public intellectuals who were critical of Mbeki.

Mbeki was consistently tackling racial issues publicly, but his execution was lacking. His stance was that black public intellectuals should focus on racial issues and only speak for black people. By black public intellectuals refusing to exclusively focus on racial issues Mbeki saw this as a betrayal to their blackness. Gumede and Dikeni (2009: 2) established that “criticism were assessed on the extent of one’s blackness, on whether one was on ‘our side’. Mbeki would publicly bully black public intellectuals he thought were traitors to their social group. He was portrayed as intolerant of criticism from black public intellectuals especially when it came to racial issues. As a black leader he demanded total support from black public intellectuals and those who did not abide by his rules were bullied mercilessly. Mangcu urged Mbeki to be more open to criticism. Mangcu (2007:5) argued that in his article in the Sowetan newspaper that “it is the very nature of human beings to want to have a voice on anything and everything, and the vehicle they use for such expression is the networks we call civil society”. Mangcu was accurate in stating that the public sphere should be open and free to all who contest in it, but nonetheless race is intrinsically tied down to fabric of the South African history. Black public intellectuals should focus on racial issues.

The black voice was denied access to the public platform for too long and yearned to be free from the confinement of the current ‘liberal’ public sphere. To understand the importance of black public intellectuals it is essential to understand their historical context and background. Edwards (2015:1) reported that “the social origins of black intellectuals in sub-Saharan Africa lie in the colonial period, most particularly in the later

decades of the 19th century. Originally incorporated into the colonial enterprise, they at first sought greater spaces, particularly social and political, for a wider emancipatory vision within colonialism". Black public intellectuals wanted to reclaim their blackness and speak truth to power. Conversely, being pro-black publicly does not equate to being anti-white. The public sphere should not be binary. Black public intellectuals can be proud of their race and tolerant to white people at the same time, and without necessarily yearning for acceptance to explain their blackness. Being one does not mean you reject the other nor does it imply being subservient to their white counterparts. Addition, being a black intellectual does not mean you have to be loyal or being overly protective of a black leaders, no matter the race of the public intellectual, their role is to hold those in power accountable.

The race card was used by Mbeki and the ANC as a tool to blackmail black public intellectuals into being loyal to black leaders. According to Mangcu (2008:4) "what Mbeki coaxed to the surface of SA's political culture was an anxious man's nationalism and a paranoid's nativism" Race card promoted the racial segregation of the public domain. Black public intellectuals were forced to pick a side; if they criticised the government, they were traitors if they agreed with the government, they were good black people. It appeared that black leaders were not supposed to be held accountable by black public intellectuals. This is the antithesis of a democratic public sphere. Those in power should not have any control of the media nor should they use their power to muzzle public intellectuals who openly disagree with them.

Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede were the most critical of Mbeki's positionality of race and dedicated their intellectual work into criticising it. Seepe was more extreme of the three, he would name call Mbeki this in itself is a displaying intolerance to criticism from Mbeki. Gumede dedicated a chapter in his book about Mbeki's intolerance of criticism from black public intellectuals. Mangcu was the only one amongst the three who spoke in depth about racial nativism in relation to Mbeki. Nalini Naidoo, put forwards Mangu's ideas (2008:23) surmises that Mangcu "sets out a powerful argument showing that black consciousness and even black intellectual thinking going right back to the 19th century never displayed the type of racial exclusivity that has come into play under Mbeki's rule".

Mbeki was accused of diverting from Mandela's race democracy especially his stance of South Africa being a rainbow nation. Mbeki was also criticised for moving away from Nelson Mandela's politics of non-racialism by maintaining that "the post-apartheid government is a black government". On top of that Mbeki was accused of starting the

native club, a group of exclusively black public intellectuals who primarily focused on racial issues. Mbeki was seen as the master mind of the native club and it was accused of racially segregating the public sphere. The climax of racial nativism in the South African context was the establishment of the native club in May 2006. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009:72) noted that “The proponents of Native Club described the club as a public initiative whose main objective was to mobilise and consolidate South African black intelligentsia into a vibrant social force able to shape national discourse and influence government policy direction, particularly the democratic transformation agenda”. Black public intellectuals were critical of the club and accused it of being a lobbying group pushing Mbeki’s ideologies.

Mbeki denied that he started the native club or had any ties to the organisation. Carroll (2006:1) noted that “President Thabo Mbeki denied in parliament that the organisation was his brainchild, but observers note that its chairman, Titus Mafolo, is an adviser to the president, and that a founder, Sandile Memela, is a government spokesman”. Mbeki had close ties to the chairman of the native club, but this does not mean that he was the brains behind the club. The club was accused of spreading reverse-racism. Carroll (2006:1) further adds that, the native club critics say promoting racial exclusivity will undermine the country's multi-racial ethos. Some have compared the group to the Broederbond, a secretive and influential Afrikaner association in the apartheid era. The public sphere should be open to all and the native club was fighting to be included in a space that was limited for black public intellectuals. The South African media is owned and largely caters to white liberals who do not understand the racialisation of the media or the struggle of black people.

Seepe was not critical of the native club According to Seepe (2007:15) “the formation of the Native Club was a sharp relief for black [public] intellectuals who had withdrawn from public engagement. He adds that its formation created a meaningful dialogue between and among black intellectuals”. Seepe like other black public intellectuals stressed that the native club created an intellectual space for black public intellectuals to engage on racial issues without being sensitive to white readers. Black public intellectuals can reclaim their blackness and the intellectual space without being apologetic about it. Black public intellectuals have the responsibility to highlight the inequality and experiences faced by black people. The media is run and often caters to white people a native club offered a platform for black public intellectuals who are denied the public platform because they are too “radical”. Mbeki was supportive of the native club, but that does not mean that he was the puppet master. Those in power can work in unison with

public commentators, they should not be critical for the sake of being critical. Mbeki to a certain degree did have the same views on racial issues as Seepe and Mangcu who had a historical background as a black conscious member. Racial issues are pertinent in post-1994 South Africa both those in power and black public intellectuals should be tolerant on how they choose to exercise their blackness and how they choose to approach the race issue.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the notion of race. This chapter attempted to understand how Mbeki and black public intellectuals identified themselves and their roles as black people contesting their ideas in the public domain. Black people were denied access to the public platform during apartheid, their criticism was not tolerated by the apartheid government. This chapter wanted to determine if black public intellectual's criticism were tolerated by Mbeki when he came into power also whether, Mbeki encouraged the independence of the media from those in power.

Furthermore, the positionality of black public intellectuals and Mbeki were analysed in relation to race and whether they used the public domain to uplift previously marginalised black people. This chapter delved into the façade of the concept of rainbow nation and highlighted the importance of black public intellectuals in post-1994 South African public discourse. This chapter illustrated how Mbeki and black public intellectuals conducted their blackness in the public domain differently and how they were intolerant of the different ways they used their black voice in the media.

## **Chapter 5: The media debate**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will focus on the antagonistic relationship between Mbeki and black public intellectuals in relation to the media. This chapter seeks to explore their ideas and positionality about the media. It examines the two spectrums of media and democracy as well as media and repression in post-1994 South Africa. These two spectrums are examined in order to articulate the nexus between politics of tolerance and politics of criticism especially in the public sphere. This chapter will focus on print media and how these two opponents addresses each other in this medium.

The problem this chapter is the misconception that, it is often assumed, when those in power are critical of the media that this is an act of being intolerant of criticism and that public intellectuals are in favour of the media therefore they are tolerant of criticism. This argument is one dimensional and simplistic, this it is criticised. Furthermore, this chapter will also investigate the nuances of the media is seen as tolerant and those who are critical of it are intolerant. There is a need to interrogate the consensus that media is always truthful and immune to criticism. Similarly, there is also a need to interrogate the notion that the government is always against the media and therefore intolerant. Additionally, it is vital to acknowledge that there are numerous forms of media and in this study when I refer to the media, I am referring to broadcasting and newspaper.

This chapter will observe if tolerance and criticism were practised in the media as an aspect of the public sphere in post-1994 South Africa. This will be tested by scrutinising the viewpoints of three black public intellectuals namely; Mangcu, Seepe and Gumede. These three black public intellectuals, operated in the media and were heavily critical of those in power. By going through their intellectual work and how they engaged with Mbeki in the public domain it is possible to determine, whether the media was independent from those in power in post-1994 South Africa. Equally, those who operate in the media should also be tolerant of the criticism from Mbeki, this will also be looked at in this chapter.

### **5.2 Media and democracy**

Mbeki, along with black public intellectuals, would continuously challenge the intolerant apartheid government to allow black public intellectuals to contest their viewpoints in the media platforms. These media platforms were tightly controlled by the government. The public domain was earmarked for white conservative public intellectuals who only

praised the government and overlooked the injustices that were experienced by black people. Coetzee (2016:1) noted that “there was severe state censorship of the media during Apartheid, with the Government of the time fully understanding the power of The Fourth Estate, they deliberately hid what was really going on in South Africa from the public and many editors and journalists were imprisoned and beaten for ‘telling it as it was’”. Under the oppressive of the then government the media was instructed to create a single narrative and was used as a toll to spread propaganda in order to justify all the terrible things that was done by the government of that time. A single narrative is detrimental in a public domain, those in power should not control the media. Mbeki advocated for the independence of the media and argued that in order for a democracy to be sustainable. There must be diversity of views.

This section examines whether or not when Mbeki came into power in the democratic South Africa, he tolerant of the criticism he received from public intellectuals, more especially black public intellectuals because they were denied access to the media platform during apartheid. The media plays a crucial role in a democratic society. Daniels (2010:99) stated that “democracy centres on investigative and fearless reporting, and independent media that are truly free from any interference”. It is imperative for the media to be independent from the state, those in power should not interfere with the media nor should they use it as a toll to settle their personal vendettas. Van Cuilenburg and van der Wurff (2000: 30) posit that “modern democratic society cannot exist without communication media which make available information necessary for citizens to make informed choices about their lives and their communities”.

Mbeki would often publicly stress the importance of an independent media in a democracy. He believed that it is important for rigorous debates to take place in the public sphere. Mbeki (200:6) postulated that, “a free, diverse and vibrant media is essential to a democracy. Nobody wants a timid media that merely represents press statements to government”. Mbeki acknowledged that the media played a critical role in strengthening a democracy; this can be achieved on the condition that the media is independent from those in power. Mbeki (2006:6) adds that the “media institutions therefore have an obligation to play an important role in the national life of any country on wider issues of reconstruction and development”. Mbeki admitted that the media has a critical role to fulfil by speaking on behalf the marginalised. It is the duty of those who operate in the public sphere to persistently pursue those in power to act in the best interest of everyone especially those who are disregarded.



A legitimate democracy and media are entangled; these two arguably cannot exist without the other. Media therefore legitimizes the democracy. According to Norris (2012:1), “liberal theorists have long argued that the existence of an unfettered and independent press within each nation is essential in the process of democratisation”. The press should not be an extension of those in power nor should it report to them. Media and those who contest their ideas in the public space will not be able to freely criticise those in power if they work for them. The independence of the media in a democracy can be insured when it is treated as the fourth estate.

In a democracy the media should be treated as the fourth estate. In the South African context by treating the media as the fourth estate it can be utilized as a tool that is used to strengthen the transitioning young democracy. The media as fourth estate is the extension of trias politica coined by French philosopher Charles de Montesquieu, who believed that there should be separation between three independent powers namely the executive, legislature and judiciary. This is done in order not to centralize power in the arms of those in power and to hold them accountable to each other. Coetzee D (2016:1) stated that, “the Fourth Estate keeps government, legislators and big business in check by keeping society or the public informed. Investigative journalism plays a big part in uncovering bribery and corruption and in uncovering human rights violations”. By having four estates independent entities acts as a system of checks and balances in a democratic society. By having the media operate independently from the state, it will hold leaders accountable should they act in a manner that is not in the best interest of the public.

Black public intellectuals are vital in maintaining the independence of the media. They hold those in power accountable for their actions therefore they should be able to freely critique those in power through independent media. Those in power should encourage the following as stated by Wasserman (2018:1) “high-quality, independent journalism that supports democratic culture, transparency and development areas of government”. The media should create a platform which encourages contestation of viewpoints by black public intellectuals and those in power. The media is supposed to be impartial and independent. The media is only able to do the above mentioned by being independent of the state and those in power. The media is supposed to remain neutral and aims to promote and strengthening democracy.

Mbeki recognised that, in order to change the narrative of the public sphere, rigorous debates needed to take place in public. The media is a platform which debates takes place and for contestation of ideas to take place the media should be independent. This is

advanced by Mbeki's (1996:1) statement that, the role of the media is that of an "engine which must pull us forward towards the truly non-racial, non-sexist, prosperous and peaceful South Africa we all desire". Mbeki outlined that in order for South Africa to be truly free, black public intellectuals need to tackle race and racial issues in the public sphere. The media needs to be independent and tolerant of the new narratives that will be created in democratic South Africa.

Mbeki's acknowledgment of the important of media independence without actions is ineffective. As a political leader he needs to ensure that he creates an environment whereby, tolerance of criticism is practiced. Harvey (2006:7) expressed that, "President Thabo Mbeki's call for the increased participation of black intellectuals in national discourses was very important. Not, however, to sing the praises of the ANC or rationalise and sanitise its policies and their negative social effects, but to critically engage". Mbeki's rhetoric indicated that he was aware that black public intellectuals should not be loyal to him; but should keep those in power accountable to the public. Mbeki was accused of being intolerant to criticism, Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede accused him of interfering in the media. Such sentiments are contractor to his public narrative.

Mbeki believed that the media was trying to vilify him and would in turn accuse black public intellectuals of being intolerant of his criticism. Mbeki (1998:255) stated: "Barely a week goes by without a newspaper depending on an anonymous source for an account of a closed meeting of the ANC or its silence partners, and barely a week goes by without those anonymous sources getting their facts wrong". Mbeki felt that the media was used in an undemocratic manner by spreading the notion that he is intolerant of criticism. Whenever he would defend himself, the media would label him intolerant of criticism instead of engaging in debates with Mbeki. In as much as Mbeki as was supposed to be tolerant of criticism from public intellectuals, in turn similarly, public intellectuals should be tolerant of the criticism they receive from Mbeki.

Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede were jubilant when Mbeki came into power; they expected him to respect the independence of the media in the democratic South Africa. Black public intellectuals were denied access to deliberate their ideas by the in the media for a long. When Mbeki came into power they thought as a champion for the independence of the media, he would not use is power to suppress debate. Mangcu (2008:35) disclosed that, "I celebrated the dawning of a new nationalist era under Mbeki... Mbeki was well placed to articulate a set of national values that would guide a new process of public

purpose building”. Mangcu like other black public intellectuals assumed that the public discourse would be free and fair with the advent of democracy.

Gumede (2010:13) outlines that, “deliberation, discussion and debate are crucial for citizens to be able to evaluate government policies and actions. Discussing public issues helps citizens to form opinions where they might otherwise have none”. The media in a democracy provide a platform which keeps those in power accountable to the public. This can only be successfully executed, when those in power are tolerant of the criticism they receive from public intellectuals. Mbeki agrees with Gumede’s sentiment, of the importance of the media criticizing those in power; should they transgress. Mbeki (1996:1) mentioned that we should “not fear to criticise ourselves, to change ourselves from what we were and not be satisfied merely to repeat by rote or that is the nature of the media”. When black public intellectuals criticise those in power, this is done in order to challenge those in power to always act in the best interest of the public.

In post-1994 South Africa the media is struggling with transformation and the acceptance of racial issues that black public intellectuals advance. White public intellectuals are still dominant in the media, the lack of transformation in the media in post-1994 South Africa needs to be addressed. The media is supposed to change the status quo; it should start by cleaning house. Muirhead (2016:1) asserts that, “given the role that certain news organisations played in supporting the apartheid government, the need to transform the media was crucial”. The media must be a true reflection of the South African racial demographic, black people account for 70% of South Africa’s population and the media should a reflection of that. Mbeki (2006: 5) asserted that “the constitution guarantees the right of every South African to freedom of expression, which explicitly includes the freedom of the press and other media. The dark days of state censorship, blacklisting, harassment and imprisonment have been empathetically and unequivocally consigned to the past”. Mbeki as a leader understood the importance of an independent media, he was also in support of the media speaking truth to power. Such rhetoric portrayed Mbeki as a leader who was tolerant to criticism, as a matter of fact it seemed as if he was encouraging public intellectuals to critic him should it be warranted.

The media is a powerful tool, which can create transformation. The media can also be used as a tool to misinform the public, in order to push hidden agendas forward. Mangcu (2014:13) suggests that “the media do a better in generating discussions of values, but this indirectly though exposes of the corruption and malfeasance in the corridors of power”. The media should not be biased by being selective on who it will report on or

who has access to the public domain. By denying access to certain people, the media is intolerant and acting against the best interest of the public. Seepe (2004:53) states that, “our public submission has aimed at promoting the culture of democratic debate which does not result in violence and to give material expression to freedoms of expression, thought and opinion”. Black public intellectuals should have as much access to the media as their white counter parts. The media provides them a platform where they can change the economic and social injustices black people experience. The media in a liberal democracy should be a platform for all to contest their ideas and should be tolerant of all public intellectuals.

Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede accused Mbeki of stifling the voice of critical black public intellectuals. Seepe (2004:56) stated that Mbeki was “associated with this image of a president who was ultra-sensitive, unable to accommodate others and who is impatient with differing opinions”. Mangcu (2008:40) stated that, “a culture of fear and conformity began to grow within the black community in response to Mbeki’s increasingly vituperative language”. Black public intellectuals felt that the media was under attack and many were scared to speak truth, because they feared Mbeki’s wrath.. Public intellectuals should be loyal to the truth and should be fearless to report transgression by those in power, practicing selective criticism is the antithesis of the role of a public intellectual.

Mbeki was not only accused of being intolerant to criticism but he was also accused of encouraging his allies to publically attack black public intellectuals who criticised Mbeki. Chief amongst his allies was Essop Pahad who was Minister in the Presidency and was seen as Mbeki’s henchman. Mangcu (2008:42) advances that, “taking cue from their leader, government spokespeople started openly insulting black intellectuals who were critical of Mbeki’s government”. The media during Mbeki was accused of being utilized as a platform to stifle robust debate, therefore denying black public intellectuals from exercising their democratic right of freedom of expression. During Mbeki’s tenure black public intellectuals believed that the media was used as a platform to spread only the good things about Mbeki, this is detrimental to a young democratic country. Black public intellectuals play a vital role in using the media to hold those in power accountable for their transgressions therefore upholding the system of checks and balances in a country.

Plurality of ideas should be welcomed and tolerated in the public by the media. Wasserman (2018: 1) posits that “there should be many different voices in a democratic public sphere, including disagreeable ones”. Media is a platform whereby plurality of ideas is encouraged. Those who participate in the public sphere should be tolerant of

criticism from those who have opposing viewpoints. All viewpoints are important and should be freely contested in public spaces, those in power should not use their power to intimidate or gag their opponents. Centralisation of information and or the source that it comes from is undemocratic and deprives the public from formulating an informed political viewpoint. Duncan (2000:3) stated that “a centralized information service has no place in a democracy, as it would be perceived widely as a propaganda outfit”. Information should not be centralized to one source or media outlet this will cause information to be inaccurate or slanted. Information should come from different sources that have opposing viewpoints for the public to formulate their own viewpoint.

It is of importance to note that the media is not homogenous, the media is heterogeneous, but this study will focus on print media and broadcasting. Black public intellectuals and Mbeki use different modes of media to contest ideas with each other. Mbeki would often address black public intellectuals through his electronic weekly article ANC today and black public intellectuals would often use print media to express their viewpoints. These modes of media are different, Mbeki is free to express his viewpoints but black public intellectuals are constrained by the mode of the media they have chosen. Black public intellectuals work for media houses which has certain ethos and want to create a certain narrative. Black public intellectuals have a duty to disrupt the status quo even if it means challenging the ethos of their respective media house. Wasserman (2007: 32) outlines that the media has “to dare view the news from different perspectives, also giving the viewpoints of those sections of society whose voices are seldom heard because they are not an attractive market segment”. The media is not allowing black public intellectuals to create new discourses instead the same news is reported throughout most news publications. Media needs to have alternative voices that do not advocate mainstream media and are not awarded platforms to express themselves.

As stated by Whitten-Woodring et al (2015: 1048) “media function as “watchdogs,” keeping government honest and watching out for citizens’ interests, through investigative reporting and challenging government frames”. The media is supposed to act as a watchdog which ferociously hunts for the truth in order to inform the public whenever those in power cease to act in their best interest. In a democratic country, those in power are elected by the public on the basis that those in power will act in the best interest of the public, when this is no longer the case media will hold them accountable. Public intellectuals are the ones’ who will expose the corruption by the state.

Conversely, it is important to hold the media accountable for what they choose to publish on their platform. Tripathy (2018:1) sums it up that “one of the most self-perpetuating platitudes of our contemporary intellectual life is the truism that intellectuals speak truth to power. Not that there is any scientific evidence to it; in fact, subjected to scrutiny, this truism will betray itself as a self-congratulatory job-description to advance the interest of intellectuals who believe in a particular ideology rather than an objective template to know the ways of the world”.

The media is not above criticism. The media should be tolerant when those in power criticise them or decide challenge their criticism. Public intellectuals have a false sense of being above criticism and whoever criticises them is accused of being intolerant to criticism. Those in power should be allowed to freely express their viewpoints without being labelled as intolerant. Tripathy (2018:1) inferences that “the intellectuals try too hard to convince themselves that they indeed are the conscience keepers of the world, particularly at a time when intellectualism as a profession and a gateway for material/cultural benefits has been questioned”. There is a false sense of entitlement amongst public intellectuals, they do regard themselves as the keepers of the truth and those who oppose them are intolerant to criticism. The media platform is open to all and everyone who operates on this platform should be tolerant of the criticism they receive from their opponents.

There has been some instances whereby Mbeki accused the media of providing a platform to black public intellectuals who vilify him and falsely accuse him of things that were inaccurate but these accusations drove the narrative that Mbeki was intolerant of criticism therefore they were not addressed. Mbeki (2004:12) stated that “like many others, we have in the past expressed serious concern as the quality of some of the journalism in our country seemingly to no avail. The media has often ignored Mbeki’s criticism of the black public intellectuals who making inaccurate accusations on his government. Mbeki (2005: 5) surmised that “barely a week goes by without a newspaper depending on anonymous sources for an account of a closed meeting of the ANC or the alliance partners. And barely a week goes by without those anonymous sources getting the facts wrong”. The media should give space on their platform to those who have been wronged by public intellectuals who operate on their platform. Tolerance of criticism is a two way street and if those in power should not be denied access to the media, even if it is to call out the media’s hypocrisy.

Print is the original fourth estate and is still pertinent today, most public intellectuals utilise this form of media. Public intellectuals who operate in the public sphere should be allowed to freely criticise those in power; stifling their viewpoints is the antithesis of a healthy democracy. Norris (2012:1) stated, “democratic consolidation is strengthened where journalists in independent newspapers, radio and television stations facilities greater transparency and accountability in governance by serving in their watch-dog roles to deter corruption and malfeasance, as well as providing a civic forum from multiple voices in public debate and highlighting problems to inform the policy agenda”.

Media can only be considered a fourth estate if it is truly independent of the state. This is the ideal situation. However, when the media is answerable to those in power, whether in government or in the private sector, or in academia then it can never truly be independent because it must appease its owners. Public intellectuals have to constantly be on the lookout for those in power in case they violate the interest of the public. Public intellectuals are supposed to be relentless in their truth seeking. If they report to the state, then they will not be as truthful as they are required to be. Public intellectuals should always act in the best interest of the public and never serve those in power.

It is the role of public intellectuals to act as watch dogs who uses the media to expose those in power are no longer serving the interest of the public. Norris (2012:1) postulates that “if we accept the premise of the fourth estate, we also have to ask ourselves if the national and public interest are the same thing. It might be easy to think that they are but it would be a mistake”. Black public intellectuals should be blood hounds who relentlessly interrogate the wrongdoings of those in power. Once the interest of those in power and those of the public ceases to be the same; then it is the duty of the public intellectuals to inform the public about this.

Black public intellectuals should use the media to be the voice for the unrepresented and force the government to close the inequality gap that was created by the apartheid regime. They should challenge the status quo and consistently raise uncomfortable issues in order to bring the plight of the misfortunate to the attention of those in power. Black public intellectuals play a role in post-1994 South African public discourse by continuously fighting for the underprivileged. Black public intellectuals which will be focused on primarily used print media to engage with Mbeki during his tenure. Their antagonistic relationship in the media was central to media during his tenure, they were always on opposing sides. The antagonistic relationship between black public intellectuals and

Mbeki reached its peak in 2007 and their interactions in the media during this time will be examined in this section.

### **5.3 Media and repression**

In a democracy the state and the media often have an antagonistic relationship. In an undemocratic country media repression is a common occurrence, but in a democratic the media should be independent. South Africa has the accolade of one of the world's most progressive constitution yet, there have been many incidents of political repression. Mbeki was accused by black public intellectuals of repressing the media. Black public intellectuals would often accuse Mbeki of being intolerant of their criticism, which led to him using his power to intimidate those who criticized him.

In the South African context, media has often played a significant role in both democratic post-1994 South Africa and during apartheid. During apartheid, the government was blatantly intolerant of criticism. Public intellectuals who criticised the government in public were silenced, exiled or imprisoned. Duncan (2000:1) noted that, "South Africa comes from a sorry history of censorship and repression. Literature and films that were critical of the regime were routinely banned, and the media were subjected to tough restrictions". The apartheid regime was intolerant of criticism, the media was under strict control, and whoever dared to speak truth to power would face the hard wrath of the state. There was no contestation of ideas in the media. State agents guarded the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and other media outlets to ensure that they did not challenge the state. The apartheid government controlled the narrative of the public discourse. This is evident as stated by Bird and Garda (1997:3) "In 1976, whilst newspapers questioned how the government had allowed this to happen and the competency of Botha and Treurnicht, constant attempts were made to depoliticise the events, saying that they were purely language based and that they were not related to the broader political movement against apartheid".

It is often agreed upon that the media played a vital role in fighting for end of the oppressive apartheid regime; public intellectuals used the international media to highlight the harsh injustices that the majority black populations were subjected to during the apartheid regime. The South African public sphere was controlled by those in power, the state broadcaster was utilized as a platform for spreading propaganda. Coetzee (2016:1) declared that, "there was severe state censorship of the media during Apartheid, with the government of the time fully understanding the power of the Fourth Estate, they deliberately hid what was really going on in South Africa from the public and many



editors and journalists were imprisoned and beaten for telling it like it as it was”. The tenacity of public intellectuals played a critical role in ending the oppressive apartheid regime. Which the international ultimately led to the demise of the Apartheid regime ushering in a democratic regime in 1994.

The media is important for transitional or young democracies such as South Africa. As stated by Norris (2012:1) “the presence of independent media was one of the key components of successful transitions from post-communist states, for instance their role in highlighting news about rigged votes and publicizing popular protests and dissent expressed against authorities, encouraging opposition movements onto the streets”. When oppressive regimes fall the media is vital in order to keep all parties on the right track and to make sure that the country does not regress to the previous oppressive regime that was dismantled. Public intellectuals play a big part in uncovering the wrongdoings that the government are engaging in.

The juxtaposition of the public discourse pre and post-1994 is colossal. The media is encouraged to be independent from the state and black public intellectuals are supposed to be express their viewpoints in the public sphere without the distress of being silenced. Contestation of ideas is vital to a healthy democracy. Black public intellectuals play an important because they represent social groups that were oppressed and were not accommodated during apartheid. The social groups that were previously excluded from the public sphere their grievances need to be highlighted in order to attempt to bring about equality for all social groups. Wassermann (2008: 3), “for young democracy a wide variety of voices is vitally important”. The media need to highlight the historical inequalities that were faced by previously oppressed social groups in order to force the government to help uplift them.

Immediately after 1994, South African public discourse was marred with accusations of intolerance of the media by the state. Public intellectuals were constantly harassed and lambasted when they tried to challenge those in power. Lowen (2007:1) mentions that “an example of these attacks on the media appeared in the presidential website ANC Today after referencing to a claimed inaccurate press report, Mbeki stated, “it confirmed the message that the readers of our newspapers are well advised to treat everything that is published with the greatest scepticism, because, in all likelihood, it might be false”. Mbeki would use his articles to attack black public intellectuals who were too critical of him in the media.

There is a notion that the media in a democracy should not be subjected to government censorship because this is prohibited by the laws enshrined in the constitution. The common fallacy that freedom of expression should be respected by those who operate in the public discourse and this would allow public intellectuals to be able to freely condemn the state. Black public intellectuals who operated in the post-1994 South African public discourse contradicted this notion; they would often accuse those in power of being intolerant of their criticism, particularly during Mbeki's tenure. This is evident when the SABC cancelled a documentary which was highly critical of Mbeki. Ncube (2006:1) observed that "the withdrawal came after one of its producers had an informal meeting with a senior official from Mbeki's communications department. She was allegedly told it would be better to stop the screening because the presidency was opposed to it".

There were numerous worrying incidences whereby Mbeki and his allies, were accused of trying to silence black public intellectuals who would publicly challenge Mbeki's viewpoints or his decision-making process. As reported by Gumede (2005:238) "some ANC leaders, especially those in Mbeki's inner circle have displayed cocky and sneering dismissal of critics and there have been inexcusable instances of inefficiency and ineptitude". Either critics were forced into retracting their stories or some would refrain from criticising Mbeki in fear of being intimidated. Media was repressed during the tenure of Mbeki; black public intellectuals lived under constant threat of being tormented, should their criticism of Mbeki be deemed too critical. As a method to silence them, black public intellectuals were hauled to court over the criticism they made about Mbeki. Wolmarans (2007:1) reports that "The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has postponed a court interdict that would have prevented a screening of the controversial documentary *Unauthorised: Thabo Mbeki* by the Mail & Guardian in Johannesburg on Wednesday evening". Mbeki's allies went to extreme lengths to make sure that his opponents were silenced and that the public platform was denied to them. Mbeki took criticism of his viewpoints extremely personally, and those who dared to criticise Mbeki publicly would feel his wrath.

As specified by Wesserman (2018:1) "press freedom is often thought of in relation to political pressure. There is more than enough evidence that threats, intimidation and imprisonment of journalists remains a serious cause for concern in Africa". Africa is a continent with young transitioning democracies, which are still navigating the public discourse. During apartheid, the public discourse was divided racially; black public intellectuals along with freedom fighters were excluded from participating in the public discourse. When Mbeki came into power, he was under the assumption that they

deserved continued loyalty or leniency from black public intellectuals. However, black public intellectuals should not be loyal to those in power. As detailed by Mangcu (2008:38) “Mbeki started calling black intellectuals to come to his defence on a number of public policy controversies. “Where are black intellectuals”? He would ask”. The role of black public intellectuals is not to defend the decisions of those in power but to question them if they are infringing on the public’s interest. Mbeki had to accept that he was in power now and the black public intellectuals are acting in the best interest of the public when they criticize his decisions or his government. Mbeki should be tolerant of the criticism he received from black public intellectuals.

Tolerance and criticism are important concepts in the public discourse and serve as fundamental markers, which give an indication to a success and legitimacy of a democratic government. According to Daniels (2010: 9), “the deepening of South Africa’s democracy will depend upon the acceptance and tolerance by the ANC and the government of the scrutiny by the media of its performance”. The ANC have the responsibility to ensure that the tenants of freedom of expressions are upheld as demanded by the constitution. Tolerance towards criticisms received by opponents is an important benchmark of a healthy young democracy such as South Africa. The ANC government should ensure that freedom of expression is preserved in the public discourse, in order to keep rigorous debates alive in the public domain.

Ideally, the media should be treated as an independent entity that the government strives to nurture. Those in power should not control the media nor should they use their power to interfere with the public discourse. The media has a role as a watchdog but with the inference of the media, they will not be able to fulfil their vital role. The state can repress the media through various means either by muzzling the public intellectuals, taking the media to court in order to stop running stories they feel will embarrass them or by using intimidation to get the media to look the other way. Said emphasised that the public intellectuals play an important role when the state attempts to repress the media. Said (1993: 9) concluded that public intellectuals should be “someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d’être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug”. Public intellectuals should be constantly speaking truth to power even if the state is intolerant towards their criticism. Attempts made by those in power to repress the media should not succeed in silencing their voices.

Media repression infringes on the human's rights of the public. When the state controls the media or uses its power to interfere/intimidate or silence black public intellectuals, it is acting in a manner that is undemocratic. The role of public intellectuals is furnishing information to the public; if the state constantly interferes then they cannot perform their role. Whitten-Woodring and James (2015: 10148) hypothesizes that "media provide information, and information shapes both opportunity and willingness in repression and dissent". If the media is repressed the public will suffer because, they are deprived of their basic human right of information.

Section 16 in the constitution protects and encourages freedom of expression in section 19. However, there have been incidents of the state attempting to repress the media. Those in power have tried to block individuals who are persist in their attempts to act as a watchdog from publishing stories they feel would be embarrassing for those in power. as posited by Lowen (2007:1) states that "Government officials and especially high-ranking politicians demonstrate great sensitivity to press criticism and from the president downwards have on occasion resorted to denigrating critical journalists for "lack of responsibility", racism and besmirching South Africa's good name". Those in power would constantly lambast black public intellectuals, who would inform the public of their wrongdoings.

The media has not always been welcoming of the viewpoints of black public intellectuals. The viewpoints of black public intellectuals were disregarded during apartheid. Post-1994 South African public discourse was supposed to be welcoming of all intellectuals' voices, irrespective of their race. The exhilaration that followed the dawn of democracy in South Africa; black public intellectuals assumed that the public sphere would be allowed to receive the equality and independence they had fought for during apartheid. The exhilaration by public intellectuals was short lived. When Mbeki came into power black public intellectuals believed that the repression of the media started to increase. Mangcu (2014:57) stated that "one often senses a creeping anti-intellectualism in broader South African society". Black public intellectual believed that the media was repressed by the state. Those in power would use various means in order to ensure that the criticism of Mbeki was blocked. Gumede (2005:295) infers that, "no one dared to criticize Mbeki or the ANC government's policies will escape the wrath of Luthuli House or the West Wing of the Union Buildings". Hearty debate was muffled during the tenure of Mbeki, black public intellectuals were fearful of speaking truth to power.

The real victims when media is repressed are the public; by muzzling black public intellectuals, the public are deprived of critical information about the abuse of power. Gumede (2005:306) reasons that “if critics in a free society are portrayed as disloyal, unpatriotic or enemies of the state, there is great cause of concern. Freedom of speech is a meaningless right if group pressure demands conformity, but the real victims are those who are deprived of information and views they need.” The public will be the ones who suffer when the media is repressed by the state. Black public intellectuals have the duty to inform the public about the transgressions committed by those in power. Freedom of expression can only be effective if those in power acknowledge and encourage the independence of the media. The public will be disadvantaged, and their human rights violated if those in power deny them access to information.

The media houses may also be an agent that suppresses the voices of black public intellectuals. Media houses thrust narratives that should be endorsed by those who operate in their public platform. Media houses create a uniformity of narratives in order to push their own agendas. Uniformity of ideas kills debates; if public intellectuals report on the same issues in the same manner then the public is deprived of forming informed viewpoints. As stated by Wesserman (2018:3) “It is not enough that South Africa’s constitution guarantees freedom of expression if there are not enough opportunities available to express that freedom. The fact that a single platform has the power to decide what gets said in the public sphere is therefore a problem”. Freedom of expression is a worthless notion if there is nowhere to practice it. The media houses in South Africa need to an impartial platform whereby ideas are contested without those that contradict the ethos of the media houses being excluded.

There has been a trend of uniformity of ideas in the media, most headlines are similar. Plurality of ideas should be encouraged by the media; uniformity of ideas leads to misinforming the public. Public intellectuals should criticise each other; tolerance of criticism should be present even amongst public intellectuals. Mbeki (2005:6) highlighted “the concentration of ownership and control is then aggravated by a tendency within many of these groups to share copy between different titles... and there is very little in terms of news content, to tell the country’s main newspapers apart”.

Media houses are entities that have a mandate to turn over a profit. They require public intellectual’s that will fulfil this role, public intellectuals who challenge the narrative of the media houses risk being fired from those media houses. The media houses should create plurality of ideas. Black public intellectuals should be able to contest their

viewpoints event if it goes against the ethos of the media house that employs them. As observed by Wesserman (2018:3) “South Africa has one of the most concentrated media markets in the world dominated by only four companies”. The media platform being owned by four companies is not conducive for debate, knowledge sharing should be spread across different entities not a few. Black public intellectuals are limited to choosing employment from only four media houses. They wield a lot of power and if public intellectuals are, too radical they can find themselves ostracised from participating in the media platforms. However, as stipulated by Seepe (2004:23) stated, “For my armour I have relied largely on the resources that intellectuals embrace and champion throughout the world-ruthless criticism, intellectual honesty, logic and intellectual consistency”. Black public intellectuals should be fearless and not cower to the power of the media house, even if they find themselves unemployed. Being public intellectuals is not about enriching oneself but informing the public on wrongdoings that those in power commit. Media houses should be tolerant of black public intellectuals who criticise them or is brave enough to contradict their ethos.

The ANC under the leadership of Mbeki wanted to control the media by establishing the Media Appeals Tribunal. It is a complex concept to define which has no clear definition, but many agree that it is a form on censoring the media. Daniels (2011:1) postulates that Media Appeals Tribunal “can mean registration of newspapers. At present, any newspaper can exist. You do not have to register with government. During apartheid days, all newspapers had to be registered. A tribunal can also mean registration of journalists”. Under this law, the media platforms and public intellectuals would have to register and account to those in power. Black public intellectuals would be forced to report to those in power should they believe that they are being unfairly criticised.

Mbeki believed that the media should be accountable to a higher board and that freedom of speech should be limited to public intellectuals. The law would see the media being accountable to the Media Appeals Tribunal, which will be established in parliament. Mbeki (2007c) during his speech in Polokwane was under the illusion that the Media Appeals Tribunal “has been much progress in engagement with the Media much still needs to be done as some fractions of the media continue to adopt an anti-transformation, anti-ANC stance”. The ANC is trying to enforce a law that will force black public intellectuals to be accountable to those in parliament. Mbeki by endorsing the Media Appeals Tribunal he would be promoting false sunshine journalism and forcing public intellectuals to water down their criticism towards those in power.

The media should be independent and treated as the fourth estate. The media should be able to self-regulate; the state should not interfere in how the media operate. Those who operate in the public platform are aware that they need to be accountable to the public and there should be a board, which holds the public intellectuals accountable. The press ombudsman was established as a board that will hold public intellectual accountable. As written on its website “the Press Ombud and the Appeals Panel are an independent co-regulatory mechanism set up by the print and online media to provide impartial, expeditious and cost-effective adjudication to settle disputes between newspapers, magazines and online publications, on the one hand, and members of the public, on the other, over the editorial content of publications”. The Press Ombud along with the media to serve as co-regulatory mechanisms. The media realised that they needed to be accountable to the public but needed a co-regulatory in order to put them in line should they transgress against the public. With the Press Ombud there is no need to enforce the Media Appeals Tribunal. However as then ANC Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe (2010:1) mentioned during his speech “the media should be given the chance to review its self-regulation mechanism before any tribunal would be imposed”. With this statement Motlanthe (2010:1) the government thinks that the Press Ombud is not an effective regulatory mechanism for the public.

Those in power believe that the Press Ombud favours the media and that the government is vilified by it. Those in power believe that the Media Appeals Tribunal would serve as an impartial regulatory mechanism, which will hold the media accountable. The Media Appeals Tribunal would be presided by ministers within parliament; those in power cannot be objective if they are the target of the criticism by public intellectuals. By forcing public intellectuals to be accountable to parliament then the independence of the media will be threatened. If those in power have the power to control the public narrative, then this would lead to black public intellectuals having their voice contaminated. The public platform under a democracy is supposed to be independent; this will not be the case if public intellectuals must account to parliament.

Public intellectuals who operated in the public domain believed that the Media Appeals Tribunal was bad and would threaten the public intellectual’s freedom of speech. Bird (2015:1) argues that the “call for a Media Appeals Tribunal is bad because, aside from the potential limitations to freedom of expression, it simply won’t address the core concerns over the quality of news content, diversity”. The media appeals tribunal will be a mechanism to silence critics and allow those in power to dictate the narrative of the public discourse. The Media Appeals Tribunal will lead to the public domain reverting

back to when it was apartheid. Public intellectuals will be vetted and will be accountable to those in power.

#### **5.4 SABC blacklisting**

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is the national broadcaster is the main source of information gathering for millions of people in South Africa. Majority of people access their information from various SABC platforms. The SABC has a responsibility and duty to the public to be impartial. The SABC should extend their public platform to journalists with different viewpoints who also represent people across all social groups. Public intellectuals are important in making the public aware of current news in their country, and it is their role to make the public well informed in order to equip the public to create well informed perception of the post-1994 political discourse in South Africa. The SABC is a public entity that is guided by laws; which are stipulated in the Broadcasting Act 4 of 1994 as stated in section 2 of the act; the SABC has to “ensure plurality of news, views and information and provide a wide range of entertainment and education programmes”. The SABC has to provide a platform whereby plurality of viewpoints is encouraged, and criticism is tolerated from opponents. Black public intellectuals should be encouraged to speak truth to power when contesting their viewpoints on the SABC public platforms.

The SABC under the leadership of Snuki Zikalala as its head of news was accused of being pro-Mbeki. Zikalala was labelled as a mouthpiece of Mbeki and those who were thought to be too critical of Mbeki was blacklisted from contesting their ideas on the public broadcaster. Van Zyl (2017:1) stated, “Zikalala worked tirelessly to fulfil his Mbeki-faction”. Zikalala as head of news he was the gate keeping of information, he determined what information the public received, how it was told and would approve of public intellectuals why sympathized with Mbeki. Qwelane (2006:1) posits that Zikalala “has reportedly banned a number of commentators from the air, their common denominator being that they are very often critical of Mbeki's policies and methods”. Zikalala ruled under the iron fist and by his actions, he was contravening the laws that guided the SABC. He was intolerant of those who were critical of Mbeki; this would result in the public discourse obsolete and misinforming the public.

Mbeki was accused of being Zikalala's puppet master and his intolerance towards criticism stretched to the SABC. Zikalala allegiance towards Mbeki was evident when he banned the unflattering document about Mbeki. Carrol (2006:1) highlights that the “South Africa's public broadcaster was embroiled in a censorship row yesterday after it



cancelled a TV documentary critical of Thabo Mbeki. The ditching of the show, shortly before it was due to be aired, prompted accusations that the corporation was intimidated by the government". It is widely believed that Zikalala acted on Mbeki's command to pull the highly critical documentary of him. This in power should not use their influence to threaten the independence of the media. Those in power should create an environment that allows those who participate in the media to criticise them.

SABC was accused of censoring stories that were too critical of Mbeki. This was brought to light in 2006 when John Perlman a SAFM journalist accused the SABC of blacklisting certain black public intellectuals from commenting on their platforms which was met with great criticism. The aforementioned information is the opposite of the mandated public services which the SABC is supposed to provide. As stated in the Broadcasting Act 4 of section 10 "public service provided by the corporation must provide significant news and public affairs programming which meets the highest standards of journalism as well as fair and unbiased coverage, impartiality, balance of independence from government, commercial and other interests". The three public intellectuals would unapologetically criticised Mbeki and held those in power accountable for their actions. Their criticism of Mbeki led to the SABC being instructed to blacklist these black public intellectuals from commenting at the SABC.

In the SABC report Sisulu asserted that several commentators mostly black public intellectuals were blacklisted from contesting their ideas on all SABC platforms, they included Siphon Seepe, William Gumede, Xolela Mangcu, Karima Brown, Aubrey Matshiqi, Paula Silver, Vukani Mde. These were the most critical towards Mbeki and often accused him of being intolerant of criticism. These three public intellectuals accused Mbeki of using his power to silence his biggest critics through using his weekly articles or by silencing black public intellectuals who criticised him. Mbeki was accused of using his allies such as Zikalala to censure political commentators who were considered too critical of Mbeki. Zikalala stated that in the SABC report Sisulu and Marcus (2006:42) reason for blacklisting Seepe was because "he considered Mr Seepe's articles as not articles that were building the nation but articles that were undermining the President". Implied in this comment is that the nation is mistaken for the president under Mbeki, By Zikalala's reasoning black public intellectuals should not be too critical of Mbeki. He wanted Seepe along with other public intellectuals to practice developmental journalism also known as sunshine journalism. Developmental journalism stipulates that public intellectuals should only report on the good things that the government is doing. Sunshine journalism will hinder the public discourse and misinform the public. Public

intellectuals have to report on facts and be critical of the government in order to ensure it acts in the best interest of the public.

Da Silva (2012:1) stated that “sunshine journalism which consists of only telling positive stories”. Sunshine journalism dictates that public commentators only report on the positive things that the government is doing. Criticism from public intellectuals is not tolerated. Therefore, sunshine journalism is a form of spreading propaganda to the public. Sunshine journalism contradicts the ethos of a democracy. The public in a democracy need to be informed about both the good and the bad that those in power are doing. In a democracy the public discourse is supposed to be impartial in order to keep the public informed and to ensure the public hold those in power accountable for their actions.

According to Sisulu and Marcus (2006:38) Zikalala defended himself by stating that “I never said don’t use William Gumede. I said to, I think to one editor, I have a problem with William Gumede. I have not read his book because his book is based on sources; and for information, I was about to employ William Gumede as one of my column editors. But immediately when he wrote Thabo Mbeki and the soul of the ANC. I said this man is not reliable because he does not mention (his) sources”. Another black public intellectual who was too critical of Mbeki was blacklisted from contesting their ideas in the public sphere. These examples contradict the objective of the SABC that was mandated to accept plurality of viewpoints, and not to stifle that were too critical of those who are in power. The SABC blacklisting black public intellectuals, who were too critical of Mbeki, delegitimizes the function of the SABC and the political commentary they cover.

Black public intellectuals should not cower when they are intimidated, nor should they be afraid to speak truth to power even if they are censured by their opponents. Said (1993:5) emphasizes that “real intellectuals are never more themselves than when moved by metaphysical passion and disinterested principles of justice and truth, they denounce corruption, defend the weak or oppressive government”. Black public intellectuals should stand their ground and speak truth to power, even if those in power are tolerant of their criticism. Public intellectuals should outsiders who shamelessly challenge the status quo, they do not accept what they are told but scrutinise how decisions were made, and they constantly ask questions even if it makes those in power uncomfortable. Black public intellectuals are there to hold those in power accountable for their actions by informing the public who elected them should they act erroneously.

Access to information is imperative in a democracy. People from all races, religions, cultures etc. should have access to information. Media plays an important role in a democracy; it is the platform that people use to access information. It is imperative that the media remain impartial, inclusive and a reflection of all groups in the general public. The media should create a space where public intellectuals can publicly engage in robust contestation of ideas. The role of those in power is to be tolerant of the criticism directed at them and not use their power to silence them. Carpentier and Cammaerts (2006: 974) stated that “ideally, the role of the media should precisely be to contribute to the creation of agonistic public spaces in which there is the possibility for dissensus to be expressed or alternatives to be put forward”. The media should encourage plurality of ideas to be contested in the public sphere, all viewpoints should be contested in the public sphere, tolerance should be practiced when an opponent criticises your viewpoint.

The SABC should be held in a higher esteem and should be highly scrutinized because it plays a vital role to the public and they reach the general public. Lepere (2007: 62) argues that “the SABC for many South Africans is the only source of news and therefore considered to have special responsibility to its audiences of 19-million radio listeners and 18-million television viewers”. The SABC plays a crucial role in which information is given to the public. The SABC is the main source of information for millions of South Africans therefore they should be held to a higher standard than independent media outlets. Rossouw (2007:64) infers that “there is a general agreement that public broadcasters should account on a regular basis to the people they serve”. There should be some sort of criteria on who should be chosen to speak in order to appease such a large audience. The criteria should be made public, so to refrain from using it as an excuse to exclude public intellectuals who are seen as too critical.

Freedom of expression, transparency and accountability are the cornerstone of a successful democracy. The SABC should remain impartial and tolerate criticism by black public intellectuals towards those in power. The SABC was accused of being openly pro Mbeki and those who heavily criticised him would be banned from commenting on SABC platforms, this was denied multiple times by the SABC. Mangcu (2008:44) posits that “Zikalala has made it no bones about his ANC loyalties and his intention to tell the governments story. News bulletins are thus literally a nightly parade of cabinet ministers”. The SABC under the broadcast act was mandated to be independent of political power, their role is to broadcast stories even if they criticise those in power. The SABC should encourage its commentators to speak truth to power.

The SABC was under scrutiny; its legitimacy was constantly questioned. As stated by Qwelane (2006:3) “the SABC is embroiled in another controversy after recently being widely criticised for cancelling a documentary film about the rise to power in the ANC of President Thabo Mbeki. The film was considered to be too critical of Mbeki. The latest furore concerns the reported banning of four top black political commentators and analysts”. SABC cracked the whip on black public intellectuals who criticised Mbeki too much; tolerance of tolerance was not practiced at the SABC. Qwelane (2006:3) further adds “the broadcaster, head of news Snuki Zikalala has advised some producers that Business Day political editor Karima Brown and political correspondent Vukani Mde, political analyst Aubrey Matshiqi and controversial author William Mervin Gumede are no longer to be used as commentators. It is understood that former SABC political editor Vuyo Mvoko and commentators Xolela Mangcu and Sipho Seepe are also on Zikalala’s list”. Banning of certain black public intellectuals does not align with the objectives of a national broadcaster, it is supposed to encourage plurality of ideas should not stifle the voices of black public intellectuals.

The SABC should be allowed to choose which commentators they want under guidelines that have been set, but they should not use these guidelines as an excuse to justify their wrong doings. There was a commission created to investigate the alleged blacklisting of certain individuals by the SABC. According to Cowling (2007:62), “The controversy intensified when the final report of the commission, set up by the SABC to look into the allegations was not released to the public”. The findings were kept away from the public, this is erroneous because the SABC is accountable to the public; restricting information from the public is the antithesis of the objectives of the national public broadcaster. The public has the right to access this information; restricting access to such contentious issues create distrust between the public and the SABC therefore making the public distrust information that is provided by the SABC.

The blacklisting of black public intellectuals by the SABC allegedly as instructed by Zikalala contravened against the SABC editorial policies, which Zikalala was supposed to follow. As a result of these accusations the then CEO of the SABC Dali Mpofo appointed a commission of enquiry to probe the blacklisting accusations. The commission of enquiry took place in 2006 and was conducted in eight days with 39 witnesses. The commissioners who presided over this enquiry were Gilbert Marcus and Zwelakhe Sisulu.

Zikalala as the head of news was supposed to follow the SABC editorial policies. The editorial policies were pro-independence of public intellectuals. The national broadcaster was supposed to be a platform that allows black public intellectuals to criticise those in power. The editorial policy is “a central tenet of the SABC's Charter is that it enjoys freedom of expression and journalistic, creative and programming independence. The SABC Board, which is appointed by the President on the advice of the National Assembly, controls the affairs of the SABC and is mandated explicitly to protect the above freedom and independence”. The SABC board they are chosen by the President, but they are accountable to the public not to those in power. The President should allow the broadcaster and public intellectuals who contest their ideas using the SABC platforms be independent.

Zikalala was accused of being intolerant of black public intellectuals who were too critical of Mbeki. If Zikalala intolerance towards black public intellectuals were proven, then he would have failed to comply with the SABC editorial policies. The Sisulu commission was established to determine if Zikalala had overstepped his role, by infringing on the freedom of expression and independence of black public intellectuals. As stated in the SABC editorial policy one of the core editorial values is editorial independence. As stated in the SABC editorial policy “The SABC is governed by the Charter of the Corporation, which enshrines the journalistic, creative and programming independence of the staff of the corporation, and the constitutionally protected freedom of expression”. Under one of its cores, value the SABC must allow public intellectuals to have independence to express their viewpoints on its public platforms. Zikalala was supposed to allow all black public intellectuals to express their viewpoint, even if they were critical of Mbeki.

Should Zikalala be found guilty of blacklisting these black public intellectuals then the SABC would have violated their licensing conditions along with contravening their own editorial policy. After the conclusion of the enquiry, the SABC board decided to keep the report of the enquiry away from the public. Groenewald (2006:1) revealed that “the South African Broadcasting Corporation has violated the recommendations of the commission it appointed to probe a blacklist by releasing only a sanitised summary of its findings”. This was done despite the commissioners recommending that the full report be made public. By the SABC refusing to make the full report public they are displaying actions that would have been done by the apartheid government. The apartheid government would filter the information that the public received and would only allow distorted and

positive information to be given to the public. The apartheid regime would often silence their opponents and was highly intolerant of criticism.

The Sisulu report by the admission of the commissioners was supposed to be made public. It is the right of the public to be informed if the national broadcaster violates its own mandates. Groenewald (2006:1) wrote that the “commissioners Gilbert Marcus and Zwelakhe Sisulu said that “it would indeed be abhorrent, and at gross variance with the SABC mandate and policies, if practices of the old order were being repeated in the new, with the effect of again disqualifying South Africans from democratic discourse and debate. “For this reason, we are firmly of the view that this report should be released to the public after consideration by the board”. The commissioners believed that denying the public access to the report would be a gross violation of their right. Transparency is an important element in a liberal democracy; the government should inform about what is happening at the national broadcaster. Denying the public access to the full information is tantamount to what the apartheid government would have acted.

The report of the Sisulu commission was not flattering to Zikalala. According to Sisulu and Marcus (2006:37) “we find Dr Zikalala’s intervention on this issue to be in conflict with the editorial policy requiring provision of a “full spectrum of opinion”. It was a direct interference, not simply of a point of view, but one which is dominated political discourse in our country”. The Sisulu commission concluded that Zikalala had overstepped his role and had breached the SABC editorial policy. Zikalala is found to have distorted the public discourse and by banning black public intellectuals who were too critical of Mbeki had acted against the best interest of the public, which the SABC is accountable to.

The SABC under the leadership of Zikalala was accused of being biased towards the ANC, they would only report of positive things they did and would water down the criticism towards them. Admin from SANEF (2011:1) wrote that “the SA National Editors’ Forum is appalled at the extent of the deceit, malpractice and political manipulation of the South African Broadcasting Corporation news services in favour of the ruling African National Congress”. The SABC was accused of being impartial and subjective when it came to reporting matters pertaining to the ANC. Zikalala was accused of ruling with an iron fist and wanted black public intellectuals who adopted sunshine tourism approach towards the ANC, particularly Mbeki.

The SABC was taken to court by the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) to make the SABC report public. Admin (2011:1) stated, “Judge Claassen was scathing in

his criticism of the then head of SABC news, Dr Snuki Zikalala, who, he said, had unlawfully manipulated SABC news coverage of Zimbabwe's 2005 elections in favour of President Robert Mugabe and of blacklisting critics of the conduct of the elections, Elinor Sisulu, Moeletse Mbeki and publisher Trevor Ncube. The judge ruled against the SABC and was critical of the way Zikalala choose which information was given to the public. The SABC was supposed to make the full report public and hold Zikalala accountable for his actions, but they refused to abide by the report. Zikalala should have been fired for his role in breaking the SABC's editorial policy. Instead the SABC board fought to keep Zikalala in his position and to withhold the full report from the public.

The SABC was criticised by the media for withholding the blacklisting report even though the commissioners had recommended it should be made public. Acting chairperson of the SABC stated that "the report of the Commission had been finalised and presented to the SABC Board on 2 October. The Board having considered the report, had decided not to release the Report at that time and set up an ad hoc committee to consider it further. The report was leaked to the press". The SABC had not withheld the report but was carefully considering the results of the report. The media was not patient, and the media leaked the report instead of waiting for the SABC to release the report. The media acted intolerantly against the SABC by publicly bullying them it into realising the report before it was done conducting an internal committee,

The SABC and its board denied withholding the report but accused the media of selective criticism and misinforming the public. The then CEO Adv Mpofu (2006:1) stated that "the whole event had been subject to "media frenzy" and "selective reporting", which he considered unfortunate. It was clear that appropriate corrective action would be taken, with due regard to the Constitution and the Labour Relations Act". The SABC had to carefully weigh the outcomes of the report; it was unfair of the media to publicly lambast the SABC for not hastily releasing the report. The media's tactics of leaking the report before the SABC could were tyrannical. The media had practiced selective criticism which is equally if not more dangerous to the public as withholding of information. The public should be given a chance to hear both sides of the story and not the media mainly attacking the SABC.

The media was fixated on their version of the truth and pushed their own agenda to the public. This is contradictory to the role of the media in a democratic society. The media should be impartial and only seek to find the truth, even if their opponent is right. Adv Mpofu (2006:1) adds that "the report related to only one radio station and programme. No blacklist or blanket ban was found. It was also found by the Commission that there

was neither political bias nor an attitude to the Presidential succession debate. The Commission had found that the media had distorted the issue". The report had found that there was misconduct, but it was no political bias towards President Mbeki. The media did not engage in this part of the findings but fixated on the narrative they wanted to create.

The media during the blacklisting frenzy they displayed their intolerance of criticism, by withholding the public platform for those who disagreed with them. The media created a public platform that was binary as they accused Mbeki of doing, commentators who were arguing for the SABC were denied the public platform and those who lambasted the government could argue their viewpoints in public.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined and examined the two spectrums of media and democracy as well as media and oppression in post-1994 South Africa. It is imperative to understand these two spectrums for this study, because it ensures a clearer understanding to the antagonistic relations between Mbeki and black public intellectuals; especially in relation to the South African public domain. This chapter has attempted to clarify that those who criticise the media does not mean that they are themselves intolerant to criticism. Furthermore, this chapter has illustrated that the media need to encourage plurality of ideas and to extend the public domain to those who disagree with them instead of practicing selective criticism. This chapter concluded that tolerance of criticism should be practised by both Mbeki and black public intellectuals.

The media in post-1994 is complex and it is clear that the media platform including the state owned SABC, selected public intellectuals who aligned with their ethos. The problem with the media is centred on the intolerance of criticism and the selection of public intellectuals who will not go against the grain. The media continues to be organised and filled with public intellectuals who are able to toe the line, should they go against the ethos they will be banned from deliberating their ideas as was the case with the SABC.

Media houses claim to give black public intellectuals a platform to freely contest their ideas and that they are tolerant of criticism from public intellectuals, however to believe these claims would be delusional. The media will continue to be problematic if they continue to give preference to black public intellectuals who were the most critical of Mbeki and were intolerant of public intellectuals who were tolerant of Mbeki's views.



## **Chapter 6: Conclusion to the study**

The study was based on the relationship between Thabo Mbeki and three black public intellectuals – namely, Siphso Seepe, Xolela Mangcu and William Gumede with specific reference to the politics of tolerance and politics of criticism. What is key to this study is that tolerance and criticism are not deterministic binaries, but fluid dynamics that allude to the fact that tolerance and criticism are not one dimensional, but co-constitutive and dynamic. That being said, it is important to note that tolerance and criticism should apply equally to Mbeki and the three black public intellectuals.

This study utilised, analysed, and applied two concepts, politics of tolerance and politics of criticism, this was done in the context of the post-1994 South African public discourse. These two concepts are considered the cornerstone of a legitimate public discourse. One of the main conclusions of this study is that the absence of these two concepts in the public domain, not only is it an indication of a fractured public discourse, but it also delegitimises the public discourse. Additionally, the linkage between these two concepts should not and cannot be ignored. Furthermore, collectively these two concepts are central to this study in that they give a nuanced account of the relationship of Thabo Mbeki and black public intellectuals. The argument extended in this study is that, in order for the public discourse to be favourable, tolerance and criticism need to be practiced by both sides.

The public discourse is an antagonistic space in its true nature. It is important to note that an antagonistic relationship between those in power and public intellectuals is inevitable and its formation legitimises the independence of the public domain. Gouws (1993: iii) surmises that “tolerance is the willingness to put up with opposition. It implies procedural fairness – a commitment to the rules of the game and a willingness to apply them equally”. The argument advanced by Gouws highlights the importance of opponents being tolerant towards each other’s criticism, no one is more entitled to tolerance than the other. In order to have a robust public sphere, all parties should be willing to receive as much as they give.

Haddadan et al. (2018:1) define political criticism as a phenomenon whereby opponents “attempt to make their claims appealing, while discrediting their opponent by attacking the strength of his/her claims”. This study stresses the importance of opponents criticising each other’s views in the public discourse. However, what needs to be emphasised is that in order to create, maintain and nurture a healthy public discourse, criticism needs to be met with tolerance. Opponents should not demand tolerance, but yet refuse to practice

tolerance. Such actions are tantamount to intolerance towards your opponent's viewpoints and therefore infringes on their civil rights. Said (1994:66) posits that "freedom of expression cannot be sought invidiously in one territory and ignored in another".

Furthermore, as illustrated in this study an antagonistic relationship between opponents in the public discourse is beneficial to the public, through the exchanging of opponent's ideas in the public domain, the public receive pluralistic viewpoints and as a result of this, the public is able to create their own informed political opinions. In simple terms, through the contestation of ideas the public receives various angles of the same story, therefore creating a pluralistic and healthy public discourse.

This study has attempted to comprehend the context of the relationship between Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede in relation to Mbeki. This was done through going through their intellectual work thematically. This study has concluded that these black public intellectuals were given a platform by the media when they criticised Mbeki and on the other hand, Mbeki could highlight issues that were important when arguing with these black public intellectuals. Black public intellectuals were initially jubilant when Mbeki came into power but as time passed this relationship became adversarial. Mangcu (2008:34) postulates that "Mbeki felt like the right man for the moment – a radical cosmopolitan intellectual in the mould of nationalist leaders such as Robert Sobukwe and Steve Biko". However, this anticipation was not permanent as Mbeki and these public intellectuals disagreed on many issues, and black public intellectual accused Mbeki of being intolerant to their criticism. As time passed Seepe (2004: 56) observed that Mbeki was "associated with an image of a president who was ultra-sensitive, unable to accommodate others and who was impatient with differing opinions".

Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede were selected for this study because they were amongst the most critical of Mbeki. These black public intellectuals accused Mbeki of being intolerant to their criticism, the argument advanced in this study is that it is almost impossible for those in power to criticise public intellectuals without being accused of being intolerant to criticism. This study attempted to debunk several misconceptions that are tied to public intellectuals, the most important is that public intellectuals are treated as the moral authority, who embody all knowledge and whoever contradicts them is more often than not is accused of being intolerant to their criticism.

Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede were highly critical of Mbeki and would consistently and continuously criticise Mbeki and his government over numerous issues but, more

especially on his views on race, HIV/AIDS and the media. It is important to take note that these three black public intellectuals were active during Mandela's presidency, but they were not as critical of Mandela, even though these issues were prevalent during his tenure. It needs to be emphasised that Mbeki was the second democratic President and that he inherited a broken system, this is not to exonerate him but to give context to his presidency. Mangcu (2008:50) acknowledged that "by the time Mandela handed over to Mbeki in 1999 about 7% of the population was HIV positive. Undoubtedly, then Mbeki inherited an increasingly serious situation". When Mbeki came into power, numerous issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic were already problematic. Mbeki inherited many social ills from the Mandela's administration, which were a result of the racially oppressive apartheid system. This thesis also highlighted the inconsistency of the post-1994 South African discourse. Clearly, from this point of view, these black public intellectuals were emboldened in their criticism towards Mbeki, more especially in the year 2007. These inconsistencies were ignored in the public domain, black public intellectuals failed in their role as impartial thought leaders, when they selectively spoke truth to power.

Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede advised Mbeki, more especially during the HIV/AIDS discourse to leave matters to specialists. Seepe (2004: 124) puts forwards the views expressed by Professor Malegapuru Makgoba when he "warned that politicians cannot become scientists by learning through the internet, and one cannot replace the training and experience gathered over many years of learning and practice at the bench by surfing the Net overnight". It is important to take note that none of these three public intellectuals were also specialist on many issues they contested in the public domain. This study has exposed the hypocrisy of the black public intellectuals and ignoring the fact that they themselves along with Mbeki, were both stepping outside of their area of knowledge. It can be concluded that both opponents would partake in intellectual pissing matches and, both opponents on many instances cared more about being right or intellectually superior. It is important to bear in mind that these issues were beyond who was right or wrong, opponents were supposed to act in the best interest of the public. Another main conclusion of this thesis is that both Mbeki and these black public intellectuals had tendencies to contradict themselves.

Mbeki was referred to as an intellectual, he was revered by public intellectuals, more especially black public intellectuals. Mangcu (2008:33) was euphoric when Mbeki came into power by stating that "here was a black intellectual whose posture and message reminded me so much of my own family history, the self-assured black person who had

mastered the political and cultural facilitators' into modernity". Black public intellectuals considered Mbeki to be the perfect intellectual president, who would be able to contest ideas with them, a worthy adversary in the public sphere. I believe that this sentiment is problematic, a president should not be favoured or revered by public intellectuals, as such leaders will feel entitled for leniency from public intellectuals, and criticism will feel like a betrayal from these public intellectuals.

My argument is that both Mbeki and the three black public intellectuals participated in selective criticism and victimhood, they were both intolerant of some of the criticism they received from each other. The public discourse in post-1994 South Africa is not consistent, and its independence is at best questionable. Below I have concluded on the three issues that were focused on this study HIV/AIDS, race and the media.

In conducting this study, the study uncovered the extent to the severity of the HIV/AIDS discourse in the post-1994 South African context. This study concluded that never had a disease been as destructive, disruptive and contentious as AIDS in modern history, it highlighted the economic and social inequalities that are still prevalent in post-1994 South Africa. It was shoved in the public domain and was, continuously debated by black public intellectuals and Mbeki. It was also concluded that HIV/ AIDS debate examines the position that defined the AIDS discourse in post-1994 South Africa, more especially, how race and the AIDS discourse were intertwined. This study has uncovered that no group was more affected by HIV/AIDS more than black people. According to Mabaso et al (2019:1) "overall HIV prevalence was significantly higher ( $p < 0.001$ ) among both Black African males (16.6%; 95% CI: 15.0–18.4) and females (24.1%; 95% CI: 22.4–26.0) compared to their counterparts from other races".

From the outset, the study set to establishing the differences between AIDS denialists and AIDS dissidents. These black public intellectuals accused Mbeki of being an AIDS denialist who was intolerant to criticism, whereas he saw himself as a dissident, this distinction is imperative to this study. Mangcu (2008:49) highlights James Myburgh's statement that "Mbeki's utterances and actions in what is probably the most authoritative time-line of our president's alliance with denialism". Whereas Roberts (2007:180) disagrees with Seepe and Mangcu and states that, "Thabo Mbeki is not now nor has he ever been as AIDS dissident". From this assertion, one can see that it is difficult to classify Mbeki as an AIDS dissident or denialist, but in this study, I argued here that a leader does have the right to go against the status quo and question thought leaders, which Mbeki often did.

From the investigation of the HIV/AIDS debate, one can see that this was an issue that shaped and still haunts Mbeki's legacy, during Mbeki's tenure the effects and the infection rate of HIV/AIDS peaked. Mangcu (2008:49) posits that "Thabo Mbeki's legacy will largely be defined by his intransigence on the greatest health threat facing South Africa – HIV/ AIDS". Black public intellectuals urged Mbeki to do more when it came to administering AZT/ARVs that were believed to be in the public interest or for the public good. Gumede (2005:149) posits that Mbeki's "folly in re-opening the debate on what causes AIDS rather than focusing on practical ways to curb the pandemic sweeping Africa".

It is important to note that Mbeki by his own admission did acknowledge that the government could have done better when it came to handling of the HIV/AIDS discourse similarly, the government could have taken more steps to ensure that the lifesaving drugs were rolled out earlier. Mbeki (2007b:6) stated that "of course much more still needs to be done before we can claim any victory in our response to HIV and AIDS including PMTCT". This study stressed that black public intellectuals should acknowledge when Mbeki has done good, the HIV/AIDS discourse illustrated the intolerance of public intellectuals and how they engaged in selective criticism when it came to engaging with Mbeki.

Mbeki had imminent and important decisions he needed to take as a leader, he did not have the luxury to engage in discussions but had to make tough decisions. The HIV/AIDS discourse plagued millions of vulnerable people, Mbeki had to make tough decisions, but the study concluded that Mbeki should not have taken so long in rolling out the lifesaving drugs.

Race is deeply embedded in the South African historical context; South Africa is a country that is deeply entrenched in racial segregation. Race issues were not constructed under apartheid, but it was a continuation of a racially unjust system. Throughout this thesis it has been argued, race is an issue that should not be ignored. Additionally, race should be discussed in the post-1994 South African public discourse, ignoring racial issues is creating a keg powder in an already fragile country. As stated by Pillay (2004:5) "its history is still too closely bound up with colonialism, racial segregation and apartheid". Race is ingrained in the fabric of South Africa's reality; it is present and prevalent in every situation. The grotesque effects of apartheid system cannot be superficially wished away, they must be aggressively tackled, and public intellectuals are duty-bound to be the voice of the oppressed and must always ensure that the government acts in their best

interest of those who are disenfranchised. In the South African context, the people who are oppressed, overlooked and poor are predominantly the black majority. Black public intellectuals should use their platforms to address, tackle and challenge race issues. Said (1993:5) posits that “real intellectuals are never more themselves than when, moved by metaphysical passion and disinterested principles of justice and truth, they denounced corruption, defend the weak, defy imperfect or denounced oppressive authority”.

Seepe and Mangcu like Mbeki would often publicly boldly speak about racial issues whereas Gumede did reference racial issues, but he was not as vigorous as the other two black public intellectuals. All four men that were focused on in this study are black men, however, they are not homogenous, they do not speak for all black people nor do they have the same viewpoints, ideologies, and priorities. It can be concluded that black public intellectuals should not exclusively focus on their race nor should they solely focus on racial issues, they should also contest their views on other issues that they believe are pertinent. Although race should not be the only thing that black public intellectuals focus on, however they are black and they cannot ignore their blackness, nor their black conditioning, which has in some way or another have shaped their thinking. Mbeki’s positionality on race is unambiguous and he argues that race and racial should be central focus to black people who have access to the public domain.

If the South African public discourse is to be understood, then it is important to understand the media, especially in the post-1994 South African public discourse. Mbeki (2006:6) understood that “a free, diverse and vibrant media is essential to democracy”. Nobody wants a timid media that merely reprints press statements of government”. I posit in this study that the independence of the media is important and people who contest their ideas in the media, they should be tolerant of criticism. The media platform is critical in this study and this platform awards them the space and why does it matter, there are other people who has the same thinking but because they do not have the platform. They were chosen to perform on the respective platforms. In hindsight he is speaking more now but none of these BPI are attacking him, he had political power

The study highlighted the importance of establishing the reasons as to why the selected public intellectuals were chosen to express their views on media platforms over others. Black public intellectuals were given space by the media houses to contest their ideas, this thesis has put forward that the media platform is awarded to selected public intellectuals, there are media gatekeepers who decide which public intellectuals is selected to participate on their platform and which topics will be allowed a bigger

platform. Shoemaker and Vos, (2009:1) concludes that “gatekeepers ultimately craft and conduct what is being published to the masses, therefore they determine what is to become the public’s social reality, and their view of the world. Public intellectuals that are selected to contest their ideas in selected media, are chosen in order to push a certain narrative”. Black public intellectuals should be able to contest their viewpoints even if it goes against the ethos of the media house that employs them.

The notion applied in this argument is the interrogation of the independence of black public intellectuals. Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede occupy a space that appears to have created a single narrative and only awarded space to public intellectuals who practiced selective criticism, this resulted in delegitimising the independence of these black public intellectuals. Daniels (2010: 331) reinforces that “ideally, the role of the media should precisely be to contribute to the creation of these agonistic public spaces in which there is possibility for dissensus to be expressed or alternatives to be put forward”. Mbeki did contest his ideas in the media, and he was a constant figure in the media, a leader’s constant presence in the media will result in them distorting it, intentionally or unintentionally. Mbeki would constantly criticise black public intellectuals and his allies who had control of the media did the same and exerted their powers in silencing public intellectuals who were deemed too highly critical of Mbeki, this was evident in the SABC blacklisting saga.

This showed that the media was exercising its professional role as watchdog, as in checks against the abuse of power and attempting to hold power to account and could not then be so easily dismissed as the bourgeoisie press. “Ideally, the role of the media should precisely be to contribute to the creation of these agonistic public spaces in which there is possibility for dissensus to be expressed or alternatives to be put forward” (2006: 974). On a tangential but important note, what the struggled with media was remaining impartial when it came to certain issues, allowing certain public intellectuals space to contest their ideas and prohibiting others who have a different ethos from the narrative space to contest their ideas. Having argued, and shown that the media will only give space on their platforms to those who perpetuate their agendas and does not go too far from the narrative that is supposed to be created, this is an illustration that the media along with public intellectuals will not revolutionize the post-1994 South African public discourse nor will they award space to public intellectuals who goes against their ethos.

Post-1994 South Africa’s public discourse under the democratic regime has a long to go, in order for robust and unbiased exchanging of ideas to take place between public

intellectuals and those in power. Transformation is necessary and a fundamental change is needed in order to ensure that plurality of ideas takes place, which will ensure all parties are tolerant to criticism. In conclusion Mbeki as well as Seepe, Mangcu and Gumede practiced selective criticism, and would conveniently accuse the other of being tolerant to their criticism the media did play an important role in exacerbating this antagonistic relationship.

The issues plaguing the post-1994 South African public discourse cannot be simplified and studied in one study. By way of recommendation, there needs to be more research done on this topic and the relationship of black public intellectuals and Mbeki. It is too complex to be condensed into one study especially in the context of the post-1994 South African public discourse. It is also recommended that further studies be done in order to thoroughly understand the complexities and difficulties of black people operating in the post-1994 South African public discourse. In addition, a study of the agency of public intellectuals in South Africa that includes women as intellectuals might also alter the picture of homogeneous only male intellectuals who appear to command powerful speaking positions.



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