UBUNTU AS FOREIGN POLICY: THE AMBIGUITIES OF SOUTH AFRICA'S BRAND IMAGE AND IDENTITY

Garth le Pere
Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria and Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection, South Africa

Abstract

South Africa's 2011 White Paper on foreign policy, "Building a Better World", is predicated on the far-reaching ambition of how *Ubuntu* (humanity) and *Batho Pele* (putting people first) together with their underlying humanist principles will guide the country's external relations. However, while noble, this calculus is poorly conceived as an approach to global issues. The article argues that while still a relatively successful nation brand if measured by marketing indicators, South Africa's normative currency and agency in foreign policy has depreciated considerably, with a direct bearing on its nation brand and identity. These are examined with regard to the security of citizens and the personality of the state and provide a register of the branding and image deficits of the White Paper. Such deficits are then considered in terms of the cosmopolitan vision in South Africa's foreign policy and its moral and normative underpinnings. The article provides examples in both the domestic and global regimes to demonstrate the extent to which South Africa has lost its normative resilience in the conduct of its foreign policy, thus giving rise to ambiguities in its brand image and identity.

1. Introduction

South Africa's White Paper on foreign policy was released in May 2011 under the title *Building a Better World: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu.* This

is a highly significant document because it represents the first time since South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 that a strategic road-map in the form of this White Paper has been produced to shape the principles and practice of its foreign policy into the future. The document thus provides the substantive, normative, and conceptual parameters to guide South Africa's diplomacy on the basis of the people-oriented philosophy of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele*.

Beginning in 1996, a variety of *ad hoc* policy documents were produced which had a bearing on the general conversation about the scope and domain of South Africa's expanding range of foreign policy challenges. However, the White Paper is the first consolidated attempt to develop an official and formal policy template that provides a vision for the country's foreign policy informed by the path it has travelled on the road to liberation and since then after its democratic transition. Quite crucially, it is also a highly aspirational and philosophical statement of what the country hopes to achieve under the institutional and diplomatic custodianship of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO).

The White Paper thus offers an analytical opportunity to assess South Africa's success or otherwise as a nation brand since in many ways this brand embodies an 'ecosystem' that has both shaped and determined the political and social construction of its international image and identity. At a fundamental level, South Africa's nation brand in foreign policy is deeply rooted in the ethos of its liberation from *apartheid* rule and the nature of its transition to democracy. This takes on added significance since there were dour predictions of a racial civil war and harbingers of an apocalyptic future given the seeming intractability of *apartheid* rule. And, therefore, its complex but ultimately successful transition was rightfully extolled as "one of the most extraordinary political transformations of the twentieth century" (*Financial Times,* 18 July 1994). This attribute has become a critical constituent element of South Africa's branding 'ecosystem' and is best captured in the metaphor of the 'Rainbow Nation'.

It is for these reasons that the Foreword of the White Paper emphasises the importance of Pan-Africanism and South-South solidarity as anchors of the country's international engagements since both were formative influences in its liberation trajectory. These influences are complemented by other foundational norms of South Africa's foreign policy such as global equity and justice; building strong partnerships

with developed countries; and strengthening the multilateral system. Moreover, the project of *Building a Better World* is very much predicated on South Africa's quest to be a winning nation in the 21st century based on the "endeavour to shape and strengthen our national identity; cultivate our national pride and patriotism; address the injustices of our past, including those of race and gender; bridge the divides in our society to ensure social cohesion and stability; and grow the economy for the development and upliftment of our people" (White Paper 2011: 3).

Importantly, the publication of the White Paper and its goals and aspirations have to be located against the backdrop of an increasingly fractious and uncertain global order, marked by contradictory tendencies and impulses. The promise of cosmopolitan globalisation in providing the integrative gravitational pull of prosperity for all has been fatally undermined by the difficult imponderables after 11 September 2001 which irrevocably altered the security complex of international relations. The one offers a "busy portrait of onrushing economic, technological and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity" while the other dooms us to "the grim prospect of a retribalisation of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed" (Barber 1995: 4).

It is in this struggle between the universal and parochial as it were, that the White Paper establishes a basis for South Africa's definition of who it is as a country and a society and how it ought to relate to other countries and societies under the philosophical and normative remits of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele.* These are profoundly grounded in a universal moral teleology which "is reflected in the idea that we affirm our humanity when we affirm the humanity of others" (White Paper 2011: 4) As part of its own nation-building and democratic transformation process, the White Paper underscores the importance of meeting international expectations for "South Africa to play a leading role in championing the values of human rights, democracy, reconciliation and the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment" (White Paper 2011: 4). This calling represents South Africa's quintessential national interest.

However, this article argues that the values and virtues of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele* have been poorly served and executed in South Africa's foreign policy if viewed through the prism of an imaging and branding exercise. While obviously a broader problem and dilemma for the African National Congress (ANC)-led government, we cannot discount DIRCO's culpability, especially its troubled institutional profile, its weak managerial and political leadership, and its human and analytical

constraints. This problematic profile of DIRCO is even more worrisome in view of projecting itself in the White Paper as "the principal adviser on foreign policy, and lead coordinator and manager of South Africa's international relations and cooperation" (White Paper 2011: 9).

In any event, the first draft of the chapter dealing with foreign policy in the National Development Plan (released in June 2011) provided a critical but fair diagnostic assessment about South Africa's global image and stature. The main points were that its diplomatic capacity was over-stretched; that its power and influence had declined in relative terms; that it was viewed as Janus faced in Africa and its *bona fides* were suspect; and as a consequence, the country had suffered material losses in bargaining power and had lost trade and investment opportunities not only in Africa but more broadly.

Even though the chapter was withdrawn and subsequently revised (ostensibly following protest and dissent by the DIRCO Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane), the initial diagnosis was suggestive of a country whose moral and political currency was depreciating. This depreciation, in the author's view, has become even more pronounced and evident since 2009 under the Presidency of Jacob Zuma. The perception and reality has gathered pace of a new ruling aristocracy more concerned with the trappings of power, self-enrichment, and wealth accumulation. This has become a creeping cancer that has undermined the very substance and neutrality of public power. The ANC government finds itself at an intersection where the majority of South Africans feel that their hopes and aspirations for a better life have been betrayed, exacerbated by growing social alienation, anger, and discontent among the country's poor and marginalised (Reddy 2010). These impressions were reinforced by the outcome of the local government elections in August 2016 which, in a sense, was a referendum on the ANC's moral authority to govern South Africa, a gain that was painstakingly engineered since its establishment in 1910.

Because of the growing cynicism and despair fuelled by the Zuma Presidency, this article argues that there has been a drift away from the ethical foundations of South Africa's foreign policy into a crude instrumentalism characterised by diplomatic ceremonialism and unprincipled pragmatism. This drift accords more with public relations and marketing imperatives than with the normative internationalism which has shaped South Africa's foreign policy and nation brand since 1994. We would do well to remember that since 1994, South Africa has pur-

sued an activist foreign policy, informed by the historical antecedents in the struggle against *apartheid*. This was rooted in a strong moral convergence in its beliefs, and ethical compatibility in its behaviour with regard to the promotion of human rights, democracy, solidarity politics, and its own developmental needs (see le Pere 2014).

In this manner, South Africa was able to meet the successful branding conditions of credibility, uniqueness, and evidence based on three axiomatic considerations: a relatively peaceful negotiated transition to democracy; Nelson Mandela as the global embodiment of reconciliation; and South Africa's emergence as a strategic multilateral actor under President Mbeki. In essence, these were the vectors that provided South Africa with vast reserves to act and behave as a 'norm' entrepreneur in international relations. As a consequence, the country was able to exercise considerable regional and global influence quite disproportionate to its population size, material capabilities, and geographical location; in short, South Africa was able to punch above its weight (Geldenhuys 2006).

2.   Nation brand and image: Conceptual issues

These qualities and attributes are consistent with a historically-grounded strong and positive nation brand and image which South Africa has enjoyed on the global stage until its recent decline and erosion under President Zuma. We should recall that South Africa's transition to democracy was more or less coterminous with tumultuous changes and tectonic shifts in international relations characterised by the end of the Cold War and the onset of globalisation. Not only was this a politically insecure and uncertain environment but it was also economically highly competitive (Nel, Taylor and van der Westhuizen 2001).

The challenges confronting South Africa were well articulated by President Mbeki when he addressed the National Assembly on 13 June 2000:

> At the centre of all our multilateral engagements is the critical question of our time, of how humanity should respond to the irreversible process of globalisation while addressing the fundamental changes that face the bulk of humanity. These include poverty, underdevelopment, the growing North-South gap, racism, xenophobia, gender

discrimination, ill health, violent conflicts, and the threat to the environment (Mbeki 2000).

Mbeki was articulating a version of moral universalism and how these challenges could be embedded in the anatomy of South foreign policy: it is these shared challenges rather than some utopian notion of the good life "that dissolves pernicious distinctions between insiders and outsiders" (Linklater 2007: 23). Indeed, South Africa's avowed commitment to robust multilateralism and international activism to address such challenges have helped to frame its nation brand and image in a highly competitive and volatile global environment.

South Africa's nation brand and image — and hence its global reputation — have thus benefited greatly from a propitious set of conjunctural factors. Most critically, these relate to the struggle against *apartheid*, the nature of its democratic transition, a social contract founded on constitutional rule, and an embracing and hospitable international milieu. These were the foundational factors which provided the impetus for a successful nation brand and image under 'Rainbowism' that was quite unlike branding any product or service. No dazzling advertising or marketing campaign could have assisted the country to achieve such hallowed status in international relations. Typically countries go through long and rich histories, some peaceful and others convulsive, that shape the collective consciousness and cognitive maps of citizens at home and people abroad (see Tilly 1990). At the same time and willy-nilly — with due regard to their economic power, political system, military strength, religious and cultural affinities, and geographic location — countries are located in an international hierarchy in a manner that shapes and informs their nation brand and image.

According to Anholt and as far as this hierarchical taxonomy goes, in order for a country to change its nation brand and image it will have to change its behaviour on the global stage: "It is the past and current behaviour of the nation, region, or city — or its lack of behaviour — that creates its reputation: almost every place on Earth gets the image it deserves, and imagining that one can change the image of the place without changing the way one behaves is simply naïve" (Anholt 2007: 35).

However, while image and identity share a relational logic, in branding theory there is a paradoxical gap between brand identity and brand image. Brand identity "refers to what something truly is, whereas

the image refers to how something is perceived" (Anholt 2007: 42). For example and in the aftermath 11 September 2001, many Americans asked: "Why do they hate us?" No branding campaign would have helped the United States (US) deal with this serious perception deficit since the problem was not so much about its values but the deep dissatisfaction about American unilateralism, the divide between rich and poor, growing racial division, intolerance towards immigrants, and human rights abuses at Guantanamo Bay. In short, the US was perceived precisely as it was through ontological lenses.

For Anholt, a country must change its actions in order to change its brand and identity on the global stage (Anholt 2007). Therefore, a country cannot communicate an image of itself that does not accord with its nation brand and identity. The image of a country must be consistent with what is actually happening across its domestic landscape; in other words, it has to live its nation brand and identity. As part of this formula, the values which a country wishes to communicate must be the values that are grounded in its identity. This is what Anholt has called a competitive identity: "The basic theory behind Competitive Identity is when governments have a good, clear, believable, and positive idea of what their country really is, what it stands for, and where it is going [in order to] maintain a national identity both *internally* and *externally*" (Anholt 2007: 26 emphasis added).

There is a linkage between competitive identity and the (over-worked) concept of soft power as a means through which a country could "obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries — admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness — want to follow it" (Nye 2004: 5). The practice of certain values must be transparent and ought not to serve some cynical propaganda purpose that does not reflect reality: "political values like democracy and human rights can be powerful sources of attraction, but it is not enough just to proclaim them" (Nye 2004: 55). As with nation branding, it bears repeating that a country must honour its own values by being the living incarnation and existential expression of its brand and identity. This is important for safeguarding it from reputational risk and damage.

3.   The nature of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele*: An imminent critique

The above observations become even more germane in terms of how countries respond to a highly fragmented global order that is inter-penetrated by a dense web of political, economic, and social forces, all of which are forceful expressions of the outward spread of modernity in our globalising age (Giddens 1990). Almost three centuries ago, Immanuel Kant wrestled ambivalently with this topic when he asked whether "oceans make a community of nations impossible?" (Kant 1965: 126). In a highly perforated and globalised age separated by vast metaphorical spaces, there is a notion that people, countries, and regions are more bound and enmeshed together as never before as "overlapping communities of fate". Here trust, collaborative and co-operative endeavours are over-riding imperatives in protecting the global commons and averting global systemic risk in an avowed unequal, violent, and disillusioned world (Held 1995). The question becomes one of expanding moral horizons that transcend the geographic limitations of social and political relations in response to changing spatial and territorial relevance (Linklater 2007). This brings us to the nature and meaning of normative agency and 'moral goodness' which derives from a country's moral authority, political capital, and norm-building ability.

For Kant 'moral goodness' transcends strategic or self-interested behaviour since it is an end worth pursuing for its own sake: "We do not perform a moral act because it is to our own advantage but because we feel in our consciousness an obligation to do so … the benefit is the good for all (not the pragmatic good for me)" (Lohmann 2013: 281). There is thus a Kantian ambiguity in human behaviour where the 'inclination' is to pursue our own preferences and interests but we also have a moral 'obligation' to other people and societies which helps us to domesticate our own interests. It is precisely this ambiguity that contributes to joint (domestic) and collective (global) identities.

South Africa's moral infrastructure in foreign policy is an Afrocentric one "rooted in national liberation, the quest for African renewal, and efforts to negate the legacy of colonialism as well as neo-colonialism" but which is also sensitive to "the socio-economic realities that continue to prevail in the country … characterised by great in-

equality" (White Paper 2011: 7,8). This is very much in keeping with the deontological principle relating to a manifest sense of duty and obligation that came with South Africa's transition to democracy and the manner in which the ruling party, the ANC, chose to position the country on the global stage. Put another way, South Africa was able to meet the demands of Kant's 'categorical imperative' which underscores virtuous conduct underpinned by universal precepts and which advance the ends of a common humanity.

And here we find a certain complementarity between the philosophies of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele* <u>and</u> the basic Kantian maxim which enjoins us to act in line with principles under the reasonable assumption that those principles are logically applicable to everyone else (Kant 1970 and Lohmann 2013). There is an added urgency to do so because not only are we "unavoidably side by side" (in Kant's language) but our mutual vulnerabilities and degrees of interconnectedness are also increasing.

However, and to repeat the point, the role of moral discourse has been eroded in South Africa's foreign policy in favour of a more instrumentalist and functional branding and imaging: in Anholt's terms South Africa has not lived its nation brand and identity in its external conduct. For example, rather than moral reasoning that explicates the humanist origins of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele* and crucially its implications for the conduct of foreign policy, the White Paper focuses on drivers and trends in the global system such as demography, the realignment of economic power, innovation, new media and social networks, environmental change, demand for scarce resources, and the changing nature of conflict and security (White Paper 2011: 12-17).

In terms of a cosmopolitan ethic, the question for the White Paper should rather be how liberty, rights, and vital interests ought to be mediated and articulated through this rather perfunctory listing such that human beings become the chief stakeholders in a universal ethical realm where the effects of these trends play themselves out and where there is the possibility of reciprocal recognition, informed by the principles of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele.* In the absence of such reciprocal recognition which draws on the *Ubuntu* axiom that "I am because you are", normative agency is impaired and even undermined.

The ultimate test of moral concern is the plight of human beings and not how South Africa positions itself across different operational milieux or configurations of strategic associations (White Paper 2011:

18ff). This, for example, means that priority cannot be given to the avoidance of serious harm or ameliorating urgent need according to the principles of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele*. If such priority was defined, then perhaps more focused attention could have been paid to the most pressing levels of vulnerability that have life-and-death consequences: "in the main, absorbing personal pain, anxiety or fear contract the moral universe … human capacity for compassion is the key to global solidarity" (Linklater 2007: 24; see also Rawls 1971 and Barry 1995).

4.   A failing brand and image: The discursive dilemma

And herein lies the dilemmas for the White Paper and most crucially, whether *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele* are able to provide the heuristic impetus to recapture the lost discursive moral ground in South Africa's foreign policy. Here we are not simply talking, for example, of instrumental triumphs such as successful hosting of international events like the soccer World Cup, joining BRICS, providing regional public goods such as the North-South corridor, delivering development assistance, or participating in peace missions. Put another way, it is not so much about how well South Africa performs against the measurement thresholds of Anholt's "national brand hexagon" relating to tourism, governance, exports, investment, immigration, heritage and culture, and people.

The main concern is about the extent to which South Africa can and will continue playing an influential and consequential leadership role on the global stage that is normatively defined and ethically driven but which has a direct impact on its brand and image. The country was able to build and develop its reserves of soft power because of the essential purpose and ambition of its foreign policy project in a difficult and mercurial global environment. In particular, less developed countries and people have been subject to greater structural vulnerability and insecurity in the form of poverty, conflict, disease, environmental degradation, economic stagnation, social dislocation, underdevelopment and so on (Pogge 2002).

Therefore, and to the extent that the legitimacy and power hierarchy of the international order can be challenged, there is an imperative to move away from or at least contest the realist dictates of international relations. In his *Peloponnesian War,* Thucydides fills his epic of

the war between Athens and Sparta with tales of heroism and brutality, victory and defeat, brilliance and stupidity, and honour and deceit; these binaries in many ways continue to shape world politics. But there is also an underlying cynicism that the brutal suffering of the Melians at the hands of the Athenians represents an on-going and dominant logic of realist thinking where the powerful get what they desire and the weak suffer what they must (Thucydides 1982). It is in the interstices of these consequentialist extremes where we need to locate our deontological critique about the nature of moral duty and the correctness of actions.

According to Hurrell, a central theme of current world history is the struggle by revisionist states (also known as 'middle or emerging powers') for equal rights. Without discounting the concerns of military confrontation between major powers and the nature of asymmetric conflict after 9/11, the idea has gained traction that the global community of states and people should strive to promote shared values and purposes in the provision of global public goods in a discriminatory and disempowering neo-liberal and capitalist international order. Ironically, this order has seen an exponential increase in the number of international institutions; in the growth of the scope, range, and intrusiveness of global rules and norms; in the growing diversity of global governance; and in greater demands for collective action in the United Nations (UN) to deal with global problems and challenges (Hurrell 2006).

Hence, the normative quest for greater equity and justice in international relations has been closely linked to the articulation of state legitimacy and authority where emerging and middle powers have increasingly challenged traditional forms of statecraft and foreign policy under an expanding ambit of global governance. As such, new forms of soft power have been privileged and new forms of diplomacy have been rewarded.

It has been argued that the efficacy of such new forms of soft power and new forms of diplomacy have to be commensurate with and constitutive of a strong sense of self-esteem and identity. What Michel Foucault has called 'governmentality' provides the basis for self-esteem and national identity and this has to do with how the business of government is conducted with respect to such matters as managing the economy, executing social policies on poverty and unemployment, providing welfare services, putting incentives in place to encourage the private sector and so on (Foucault 1991).

As such and theoretically at least, domestic policy is mirrored or

refracted in foreign policy since 'governmentality' at home informs the values and identity narratives which a state projects abroad. Such a characterisation conforms to Holsti's concept of national role conception which according to Krotz are "domestically shared views and under-standings regarding the proper role and purpose of one's own state as a social collectivity in the international arena" (Krotz 2002: 6).

Such role conception involves the shaping of symbolic, ideational, and psychological parameters that derive from the security of subjects and their sense of well being, continuity, stability, and safety in the domestic regime. Where a state is secure, logic suggests that it will be able to affirm a personality that is based on a consistent sense of identity and self-esteem in international relations. In other words, the imperatives of ontological security focused on welfare and physical safety mutually reinforce a country's ontological personality represented and enhanced by coherent narratives of society, and its role and place in the world. In this way, foreign policy becomes inextricably interwoven with the values and identity of a country and *ex hypothesi* with its sub-jective sense of dignity, honour, recognition, and standing.

5.   The fraying fabric of the domestic regime

In the case of South Africa, there has been an erosion of the foundations that hold its security and personality ontologies together, with serious implications for the White Paper's *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele* underpin-nings and for the status of its national brand. This is emblematic of a growing pathological syndrome where the state has not been able to ensure the security of its citizens with consequent negative implications for its personality, image, and standing in international affairs. It is even more significant because South Africa has to strategically navigate its way between the modern world of geo-politics and power *and* the post-modern world of images and influence.

If Hegel would have us believe that the state is the incarnation of reason and rationality (Franco 1999), then unreason and irrationality are incrementally creeping into the marrow of the South African state in its current form. In Hegelian discourse, the South African state has not lived up to its emancipatory calling as the "universal overseer" thus leading to an attenuation of its leadership and hegemony over society and this is closely tied in with the failures of the ruling party to maintain itself as an idea and reality among its support base.

A major normative and political dilemma that the ANC has not adequately addressed is its transition from a liberation movement to a governing party in a modern state system with significant racially determined socio-economic challenges. The role which the ANC has played in advancing the frontiers of freedom, democracy, non-racialism, non-sexism, and development in South Africa is uncontested and is a noble one to be celebrated as part of the country's collective memory. This is another important attribute in its branding 'ecosystem'.

However, instead of developing the strategic literacy and tactical intelligence of using the instruments and authority of government to deliver the greatest good for the greatest number of South Africans (the utilitarian equivalent of 'governmentality'), there has been a descent into a patrimonial and predatory type of politics which is alien and antithetical to the core values of the movement which the ANC stands for. In this vein, we are reminded of what Antonio Gramsci wrote in his *Prison Notebooks* when reflecting on the crisis of Italian fascism: "If the ruling class has lost its consensus, that it is no longer 'leading' but only 'dominant', exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously etc". And then in one of Gramsci's most cogent and profound insights, he writes that: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci 1971: 275-76).

The election outcomes in August 2016[1] may thus be seen as an expression of this Gramscian moment where rather than being front and centre in dealing with the morbid symptoms of South Africa's transition from *apartheid* to democracy, the ANC has in many ways contributed to their multiplication in the form of factionalism, corruption, abuse of public trust, wastage of resources, lack of accountability, poor governance and so on. And herein lies a major conundrum for the ANC — does it have the ability to constantly renew and reproduce itself as a political party on the one hand, and to promote an organic ideological order in its Alliance with the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist party (SACP) on the other? On both fronts there has been political decay and an atrophy of ideas in generating the necessary balance of forces for progressive change within the state and society at large.

Hence, the SACP and COSATU have hardly been complement-

ary or supportive political and ideological structures in guiding the ANC in how it continues to broaden and deepen its hegemony and legitimacy across the state and society, especially during the divisive aftermath of the ANC's Polokwane elective conference in 2007 and the undignified 'recall' of President Thabo Mbeki in 2008.[2] Rather, a new conjuncture has been established codified by a regime of patrimonial and patron-client politics; this has been a watershed development that inaugurated a struggle "for the soul of the ANC" amongst its fractious forces. As a result, there has been widespread conceptual and moral confusion in trying to make sense of how the ANC would rediscover its soul after the contested ascent of President Zuma (see Saul and Bond 2014).

An unresolved strategic conundrum is that the regeneration of the ANC has often been lost in managing the schizophrenic tension of being a both a liberation movement and a political party. Amid the ANC's existential dilemmas and Zuma's erratic and compromised leadership, there have been community and student protests which have taken on a destructive life of their own as expressions of growing social alienation, anger, and discontent among the country's poor and marginalised.[3] These failures of 'governmentality' exercise serious downward pressure on South Africa's nation brand and image. In an almost cynical zero-sum game, as the ruling elites associated with Zuma have grown wealthier, greedier, more corrupt and aloof from their popular base, the general welfare of the black majority has experienced further decline if indices of poverty, inequality, and unemployment are anything to go by (Booysen 2015). Matters have not been helped by the severe knock-on effects that the global financial crisis had on the deterioration of South Africa's already fragile economic fortunes. The erosion of the ANC's popular base has thus found its way into the changing political and electoral landscape.

Once more, here Gramsci is very instructive when he writes:

> At a certain point in their historical lives, social classes become detached from their traditional parties. In other words, the traditional parties in that particular organisational form, with the particular *men* who constitute, represent, and lead them, are no longer recognised by their class (or faction of a class) as its expression. When such crises occur, the immediate situation becomes delicate and dangerous because the field is wide open for violent solutions, for the activities of unknown forces, represented by charismatic men of

destiny (Gramsci 1971: 210).

The recent troubling developments in South Africa's economy and polity represent a crisis of governance in the ANC and *a fortiori*, in the South African state with troubling implications for its role conception.

This speaks volumes of the consequences that arise from the delicate and dangerous terrain the country has entered because of the vertical and horizontal detachment of the ANC from its foundations among all sectors of South African society and for its image and identity abroad. In such a patrimonial environment of patrons and clients spread across institutions of the state and compradors in society, the stage is set for politically deviant behaviour that is devoid of any ethical content since the use of political office provides the fastest route to wealth accumulation and the promotion of individual and corrupt interests above public goals (Mashele and Qobo 2014).

It, therefore, becomes difficult to imagine how the liberating and emancipating ethos of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele* can be realised under these conditions, let alone how South Africa can vouchsafe for the security of its citizens and rescue a fast deteriorating global image and identity.

6.   The fraying fabric of the global regime

The foreign policy of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele* resonates with critical debate and discourse about normative power in international relations (see Smith and Light 2001). This is rooted in a Kantian logic according to which the path to shared security, peace, and prosperity for all lays in identifying and resisting what Adorno has called "forms of the bad life" with an emphasis on tackling human vulnerability (Adorno 2000: 167-168). In foreign policy terms, this would translate into having clear and coherent normative goals such as those enunciated in the White Paper. Such goals must be accompanied and supported by the necessary normative means such as economic, social, diplomatic, and cultural instruments. With goals and means providing the impetus of a normative foreign policy, there must be a traceable path between direct and indirect actions and behaviour in order to have a normative impact. It is precisely at this normative interface where a country's competitive identity, and its image and nation brand can flourish.

And it is here where the White Paper becomes fallible since it

does not delineate these three normative arenas in unambiguous fashion; it is the confusing means and ends continuum that is especially perplexing. For instance, its global positioning with an emphasis on Africa is devoid of any normative reasoning with regard to this continuum. As a foreign policy *modus operandi*, the White Paper, therefore, represents a muddled mix of principles, norms, practices, and procedures that lack an institutionalised centre of gravity where DIRCO emerges as the rightful public authority. This incoherence has reverberated in growing criticism and disenchantment about the extant condition of foreign policy in South Africa, particularly the growing normative disjuncture between intentions and outcomes (see Smith 2013).

Xenophobia[4] is arguably the single issue that has had the most impact on South Africa's normative depreciation and the deterioration of its nation brand. The effects of xenophobia signals the most egregious loss of the country's 'moral goodness' and the political erosion of its cosmopolitan covenant as articulated through the use of its soft power attributes. In May 2008, "the world watched in horror as South Africans turned on African migrants with murderous intent, killing looting, raping women and girl-children, and leaving tens of thousands homeless … What had happened to the 'Rainbow Nation'?" (Evaratt 2011: 1). In February 2017, the country experienced another spate of xenophobic violence around Johannesburg and Pretoria, primarily directed at undocumented Nigerians, Pakistanis, and Zimbabweans.

The reputational damage caused by xenophobia has given South Africa the image and personality it deserves and has highlighted the growing dissonance between 'governmentality' and the conduct of foreign policy. Indeed, the scourge of xenophobic violence has "immolated any lingering, wistful hopes for the 'miracle' of the post-apartheid 'Rainbow Nation'" (Evaratt 2011: 8), thereby putting paid to any branding pretences of South Africa as an 'immigration state'. More than any other issue in its Africa relations, xenophobic resentment has had serious implications for South Africa's ambitions to continental leadership. Rather than an open embrace of migrants from Africa contributing to a strong brand identity, the overall impact of xenophobia has instead been a fading brand image.

As a consequence, in a moral universe of grave asymmetry where combating "forms of bad life" takes on added urgency, it would seem that the South African government and its citizens have rather contributed to them. No small wonder then that South Africa's image

and identity have been severely wounded since there has been a failure of reciprocal obligation: African countries offered the country's exiles safe refuge in the days of struggle but its migrants who came to South Africa in search of a better life have been treated with violent disdain and contempt (see Hassim, Kupe and Worby 2008).

There are also mounting concerns about the retrenchment of multilateralism as an anchor of South Africa's foreign policy and especially, the extent to which this has betrayed an otherwise positive global image and identity. The White Paper defines much of the terrain of South Africa's dedication to active multilateralism based on the "political will of countries to honour their obligations under international law and commitments agreed to in multilateral institutions" (White Paper 2011: 24). Yet, it can be argued that the country's decision to withdraw from the Rome Statute,[5] which established the International Criminal Court (ICC), directly contradicts these noble sentiments. Amnesty International lamented that "the country is betraying millions of victims of the gravest human rights violations and undermining the international justice system ... [and is] a disgrace to South Africa and Africa" (*City Press* 21 October 2016).

Instead of helping to strengthen the shaky foundations of global governance, it seems that South Africa has opted for a crude form of advancing 'credentialism' among an increasingly sceptical and alienated African leadership and civil society after failing to arrest Sudan President Omar al-Bashir during his visit to South Africa to attend an African Union (AU) summit in June 2015. Bashir, wanted for war crimes by the ICC, was given safe passage out of the country before the courts decided that South Africa did not comply with the rules of the ICC and that he should have been arrested.

Moreover and although later reversed after the damage had been done, the ICC withdrawal[6] is symptomatic of a multilateral retreat in other forums such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) where South Africa's normative and reformist voice is now decidedly muted at best and nonexistent at worst. This retreat is also reflected in South Africa's refusal to support the UN General Assembly resolution to decriminalise homosexuality even though gay rights enjoy constitutional protection in the country.[7] And then in June 2016, equally startling was South Africa's abstention in the UN Human Rights Council to appoint an independent monitor for dealing with violence against gay people at a time when

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons in the country were being subjected to rising levels of homophobic resentment and social stigmatisation.

We cannot ignore the impact of on-going and impending downgrades by ratings agencies, Standard & Poor's, Fitch, and Moody's. Up to March 2017, the three agencies held South Africa's credit rating at BBB — which is one notch above junk status. On 3 April 2017, Standard & Poor's downgraded the country to junk status due to President Zuma's unceremonious dismissal of the well-respected Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan the previous week and the collateral damage caused by the other unexpected changes to his cabinet. Then on 7 April 2017, Fitch's downgrade followed that of Standard & Poor's, citing similar reasons and the extent to which these changes will weaken standards of governance and public finance. Moody's, meanwhile, has given the country three months to get its economic house in order to avoid a downgrade. Nevertheless, the agencies' negative outlook on the economy together with a low growth trajectory — which the Reserve Bank forecasts at zero per cent in 2017 — has direct consequences for South Africa's *Batho Pele* social contract and 'governmentality'. For the past two years, the ratings agencies expressed growing concern about how political tumult and attendant risk and uncertainty under the Zuma presidency have threatened policy and institutional stability and undermined structural reform, especially in bloated and mismanaged state-owned enterprises. South Africa's sovereign credit profile has, therefore, been severely compromised and the country has lost its lustre as a primary destination for foreign investment, with direct ramifications for its global standing and stature.

7. Conclusion

This article has been an attempt to tease out the branding and identity dilemmas that are inherent in South Africa's quest to promote a humanist foreign policy framed by *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele*. These humanist impulses have led to a meditation about the White Paper's cosmopolitan thrust as informed by some of the central tenets of moral and normative philosophy. The moral and normative idiom of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele* is profoundly cosmopolitan in character for here we are able to "envisage a world that is progressing some distance beyond a society of states, and is becoming a solidarist community or *cosmopolis*

of mankind where ethics are truly universal, in the sense of applying to every man and woman on earth" (Jackson 2005: x). And we made much of how Kantian moral universalism obliges us to contemplate our place as citizens of the world with the imperative to build humanist bonds and principles that bind us as "overlapping communities of fate". This is the essence of the deontological claims in Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (Lohmann 2013)*.*

While the White Paper does attempt to extend our moral imagination beyond the confines of parochial interests, it fails as a political praxis of diplomacy in providing a strategic path for the realisation of the humanist spirit and ideal. While there are legitimate historical points of reference with regard to liberation history and South Africa's transition to democracy, these have not been adequately woven into the fabric of foreign policy but in particular how diplomacy — in keeping with the categorical imperative — can serve the ends of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele.* What we have witnessed instead are the degenerative effects of fraying fabrics in both the domestic and global regimes.

The inability to provide for the security of citizens has been refracted in a distressed global image, identity and personality, thereby suggesting an environment of moral confusion and uncertainty that flows from an unprincipled pragmatism and acquisitive instrumentalism in public policy under the Zuma presidency. That these have triumphed in the face of an avowed normative calling to address human vulnerability at home and abroad is perhaps indicative of growing ethico-political cynicism in public life. This fact alone represents the cardinal failure of the White Paper since the narrative of human progress and social solidarity, which it anticipates, falls flat amid the morbid symptoms of moral decline in 'governmentality'. This is compounded by a bizarre and inexplicable depreciation of the coinage of multilateralism in South Africa's foreign policy.

The White Paper was a great opportunity for South Africa to craft an identity and nation brand that accords with the normative challenges and tectonic shifts in international relations with regard to "building a better world". This has much to do with new entropic and centripetal historical constellations informed by competitive economic globalisation, reconfigurations of power away from established forms of Western hegemony, and radical changes in human production and consumption patterns which make humans the most destabilising geological force in the global commons. These changes are volatile and as such require a

new hermeneutics of solidarity, cooperation, responsibility, and empathy. Unfortunately, the White Paper is a monumental failure in defining a nation brand and identity and is incapable of providing South Africa with the categorical imperative to confront the vicissitudes of our time.

Endnotes

1.   On 3 August 2016, local government elections were held across South Africa's nine provinces to elect district councils and local and metropolitan municipalities. The elections were widely viewed as a referendum on the ANC's moral authority to govern the country. Even though the party earned 53.9 per cent of the national vote, its support declined to the lowest level since the country's democratic transition in 1994. Most egregiously, the ANC lost the major urban metropoles of Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Port Elizabeth. The election outcomes thus underscored the extent to which the ANC's electoral dominance had declined, as minority and coalition local governments relegated it to the opposition benches across many municipalities and councils.

2.   In September 2008, with nine months left in his term of office, President Mbeki announced his resignation from office after he was 'recalled' by the ANC's National Executive Committee. His resignation was a consequence of a Supreme Court judgement which held that he had improperly interfered in the National Prosecuting Authority, in particular with regard to prosecuting his then Deputy President Jacob Zuma on charges of corruption. Even though the Supreme Court of Appeal overturned the judgment, this did nothing to change the status of the resignation or the 'recall'.

3.   These expressions are a function of the dire circumstances in which the majority of black South Africans have to exist. Racialised poverty condemns 12 million people to subsistence, with most having to live on less than US$1.25 a day. There are high levels of unemployment in a sluggish economy: the official figure is 27.5 per cent and the unofficial figure a staggering 42.5 per cent. South Africa is also one of the most unequal countries in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 0.69 where 4 per cent of the wealthiest households receive 32 per cent of national income while 66 per cent receive only 21 per cent.

4.   The fear and contempt which mainly black South Africans have for immigrants and foreigners, especially those from African countries, has led to unacceptable levels of violence and discrimination. Between 2000 and 2008, 67 foreign nationals died in xenophobic attacks and in the worst of such attacks, in May 2008, 41 foreigners were left dead and 50 000 had to flee their homes. The common charge levelled against foreigners are that many are in South Africa illegally, perpetuate criminality, and robbing locals of

employment and business opportunities. In defining the 'other', certain stereo-types about foreigners have emerged that: Nigerians are involved in drugs, prostitution, and extortion; Ugandans in quack sorcery; Zimbabweans in house-breaking and burglary; Tanzanians in petty theft and mugging; Mozambicans and Zambians in car theft; and Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in recycling stolen mobile phones and lap-top computers.

5. The Rome Statute which established the International Criminal Court was adopted in Rome on 17 July 1998 by a diplomatic conference, and entered into force on 1 July 2002. South Africa was one of the founding signatories of the 124 countries which are now party to the Statute. The ICC has jurisdiction over four classes of international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression. However, this jurisdiction is restricted to cases where member signatories are unable or unwilling to mount a prosecution themselves.

6. On 22 February 2017, the full bench of the Pretoria High Court found that South Africa's notice of withdrawal from the ICC was procedurally invalid and irrational and, above all, unconstitutional since only Parliament has the authority to suspend international treaties and such action was not approved by it. The court therefore ordered the government to revoke the notice of with-drawal, to which it has now acceded and South Africa will thus remain a member of the ICC. The court judgment followed a legal challenge by the official opposition, the Democratic Alliance, regarding the government's deci-sion to revoke its ratification of the Rome Statute.

7. There is a sizeable community of LGBTI persons in South Africa. Their rights are protected under Section 9(3) of the Constitution which prohibits discrim-ination on the basis of sex, gender, or sexual orientation. In a recent ruling, the South African Constitutional Court held that these protections must be extended to transgender and intersex persons.

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