



“ZERO TO HERO” - THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL FLAG IN NATION BUILDING IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

The national flag of South Africa adopted on 27 April 1994 is the primary and most visible symbol of the country and its people. Its adoption coincided with the commencement of the first universal adult suffrage elections in the country which ushered in a new political dispensation. With the dawn of democracy, the hope was that this new flag would serve as a symbol of the diverse components of the constitutionally created South African nation¹, a flag with which the entire country could identify with.

As with any ‘new’ society, post-1994 South Africa has created a new institutional symbolism in which the national flag, anthem and other emblems of the state have become an integral part of the country’s redefined national and cultural identity.

The role of the new flag in nation building and in the creation of this new national identity is the focus of this paper.

Concept of nation building Prior to the introduction of the interim Constitution² on 27 April 1994, South Africa was a highly fractured society characterized by institutionalized racial segregation known as *apartheid*.³ As part of the apartheid policy, the country was divided into ten more or less ethnically homogeneous *Bantustans* (or Homelands), four of which had declared themselves independent from South Africa and the remainder having a large degree of political autonomy. All of the homelands had symbolic trappings of nationhood. These are usually a flag, parliamentary mace and a coat of arms (**Figure 1**). Only Ka Ngwane did not adopt a distinctive flag of its own. It is not surprising then that following the announcement by President F.W. de Klerk on 02 February 1990 that Nelson Mandela and all other political detainees would be released, that the then existing national symbols would change as the country moved towards a new, more inclusive, political dispensation.



Figure 1 : The flags of South Africa (26 April 1994)

Nation-building is constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state.⁴ The term is not new and was fashionable in the 1960s after being linked to the process of de-colonization, especially in Africa, where new state structures were created, reinvented and recognized,⁵ with the post-1994 'new' South Africa being a well-known example.

ADOPTION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL FLAG

The process leading to the design and adoption of the current national flag of South Africa has been well documented.⁶ The flag was adopted in terms of the provisions of the "interim" Constitution and was, for just over the initial two years of its life, an "interim" flag. It was officially hoisted for the first time at one minute past midnight on 27 April 1994 at flag raising ceremonies in each of the nine new provincial capitals to the accompaniment of the two new national anthems. This symbolized the end of the *apartheid* era and more than 340 years of white minority rule in South Africa. The new South African flag not only replaced its predecessor, but also the flags of the *Bantustans*. These territories were reincorporated into South Africa in terms of the new Constitution and thus ceased to exist as separate political entities with symbols of their own.⁷

As can be expected in the circumstances, initial public reaction to the new flag was somewhat muted. Following the acceptance of the new design by the Transitional Executive Council on the evening of Tuesday, 15 March 1994, the flag was the topic of much debate - ranging from doubt, through euphoria, to despair.⁸

The *Beeld* newspaper headlined the day after the design was announced (16 March 1994) that the new flag was *uitstekend* (outstanding)⁹ while the other major dailies also featured the new flag design in their headlines but with somewhat less emotion, together with colour images and explanations of its symbolism (**Figure 2**). The *Sowetan* (17 March 1994) featured a cartoon which depicted a sceptical crowd looking on under a cloud of question marks as Cyril Ramoposa and Roelf Meyer (the Chief Negotiators of the African National Congress and the then National Party controlled South African Government) walking past carrying the new flag, with Ramoposa saying "They'll get used to it, Roelf"¹⁰ (**Figure 4**).



Figure 2 : Announcing the new South African flag ...(*Beeld*, 16 March 1994)



Figure 3:(*The Star*, 16 March 1994) and (*The Citizen*, 16 March 1994)



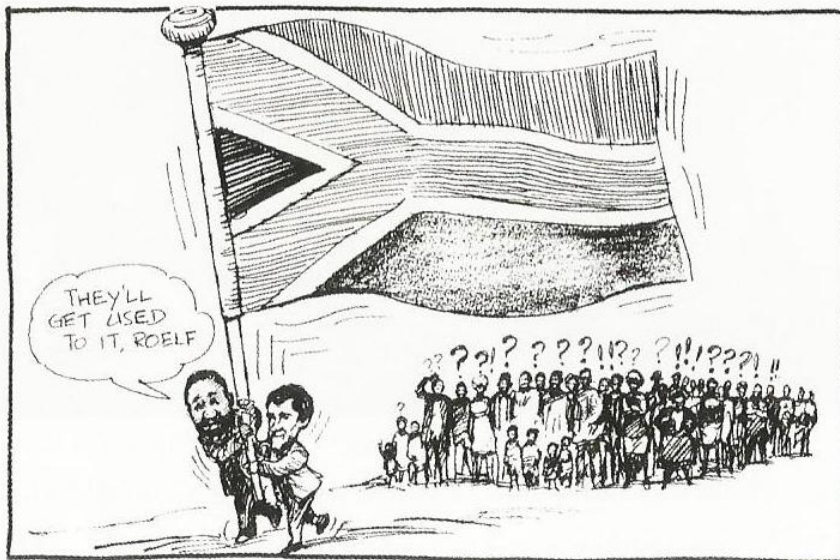


Figure 4: Announcing the new flag in cartoons ... (Sowetan, 17 March 1994)

Figure 5 : (Daily News, 17 March 1994)

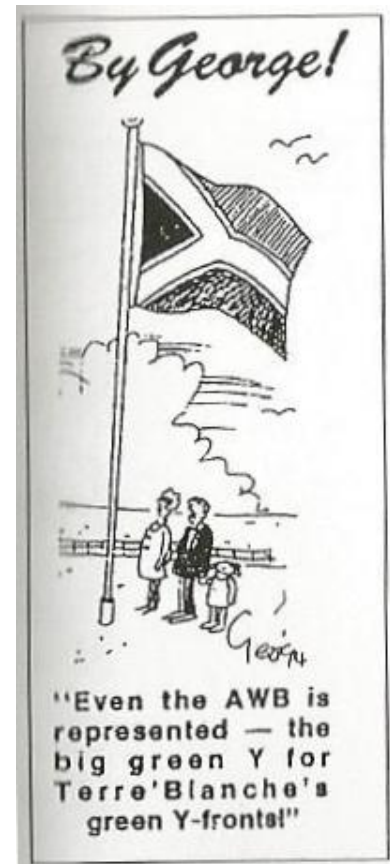


Figure 6: (Sunday Times, 20 March 1994)



"A dictionary of disapproval"

Vlag lyk soos sokkertrui, kettie ...
Die Volksblad, 17/03/94

CP & Volksfront reject new flag ...
The Citizen, 17/03/94

Flag's a drag say disgusted callers ...
The Argus, 17/03/94

New flag unique and inclusive ...
Daily News, 17/03/94

New SA flag is more like a traffic sign ... *Eastern Province Herald*, 17/03/94

Half mast response to new flag ...
Natal Witness, 17/03/94

City Parties reject new flag ...
Diamond Fields Advertiser, 23/03/94

A flag that signifies one man, one Y front *Cape Times*, 17/03/94

Flag fury pathetic ...
City Press, 20/03/94

New SA, new flag, new chaos ...
Pretoria News, 31/03/94

In contrast, *The Guardian* (UK) published a cartoon, later reproduced in the local *Mail and Guardian*, showing the then UK Prime Minister, John Major, wearing Y-front underpants over his suit trousers while telephoning Nelson Mandela and saying “Nelson! May I be the first to congratulate you on your brilliant new flag!!”¹⁴ (Figure 7).



Figure 7 : Reaction to the new flag ...
(*Mail and Guardian*, 23 December 1994
– 05 January 1995)

The underpants theme featured prominently in a disparaging critique on the new flag design by Barry Ronge in the *Sunday Times Magazine* of 03 April 1994:

“There’s been a nation-wide search for designs, a year’s work by a group presumably seasoned in the traditions of heraldry and symbolism, and what do we get? A Y-front flag with more mismatched colours than you’ll find in a hooker’s make-up kit.

I’ve read all the expository blah they publish along with the flag’s unveiling, the converging paths from the past and the broad band leading into the future. And who knows better than I the pressures of political correctness that require so many bits of so many other flags to be represented. But they can talk until they are blue (or perhaps multi-coloured) in the face, they cannot convince me that, with all the options open to them, we had to have a flag that looks like the underpants of a prone harlequin.

Can you imagine our athletes pitching up to the next Olympics waving this thing on high? I can see the slogan already ‘You’ve seen the jockstrap. Now meet the team.’

Did they give any thought to how we are going to describe it? The great flags of the world have got lovely snappy titles like Old Glory, the Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack, the Tricolour and even the Maple Leaf. When people talk about the red, white and blue you know what they are talking about.

But how are we going to describe this one? Old Undone Zip? Old Y-flies?...

*They tell us we are stuck with it for the next five years. All I can say is that if this is an example of what negotiated consensus can produce at the level of flag design, heaven help us when they get down to designing a new society”.*¹⁵

However, by the time the new flag was formally taken into use on 27 April 1994, the day the new Constitution came into force and the first fully democratic elections commenced, the initial criticism was being replaced by more positive comments. The *Pretoria News* published a large “Dr Jack” cartoon depicting a sailing ship passing a directional buoy showing that it had come from “the burning shore” and was heading into “the unknown future”. Its sails were patched and the new national flag was flying from the masthead with the text



Figure 8 : Reaction to the ‘new’ South Africa
(*Pretoria News*, 27 April 1994)

“I know its leaky, Captain, but it’s all we’ve got,”¹⁶ which reflected the somewhat hesitant national sentiment towards the new dispensation (Figure 8).

Once again, *Beeld* was more optimistic carrying a full colour cartoon on its front page of the then State President F.W. de Klerk and future President Nelson Mandela, jointly carrying the new national flag and leading the nation over the bridge to the ‘new’ South Africa¹⁷ (Figure 9). The transition to the ‘new’ South Africa was also shown in a cartoon in the *Mail and Guardian*, published over the weekend between the hoisting of the new flag and the inauguration of President Mandela, which showed the old national flag consigned to a dustbin, the new flag flying high and a smiling Mandela in the breaking dawn¹⁸ (Figure 10).

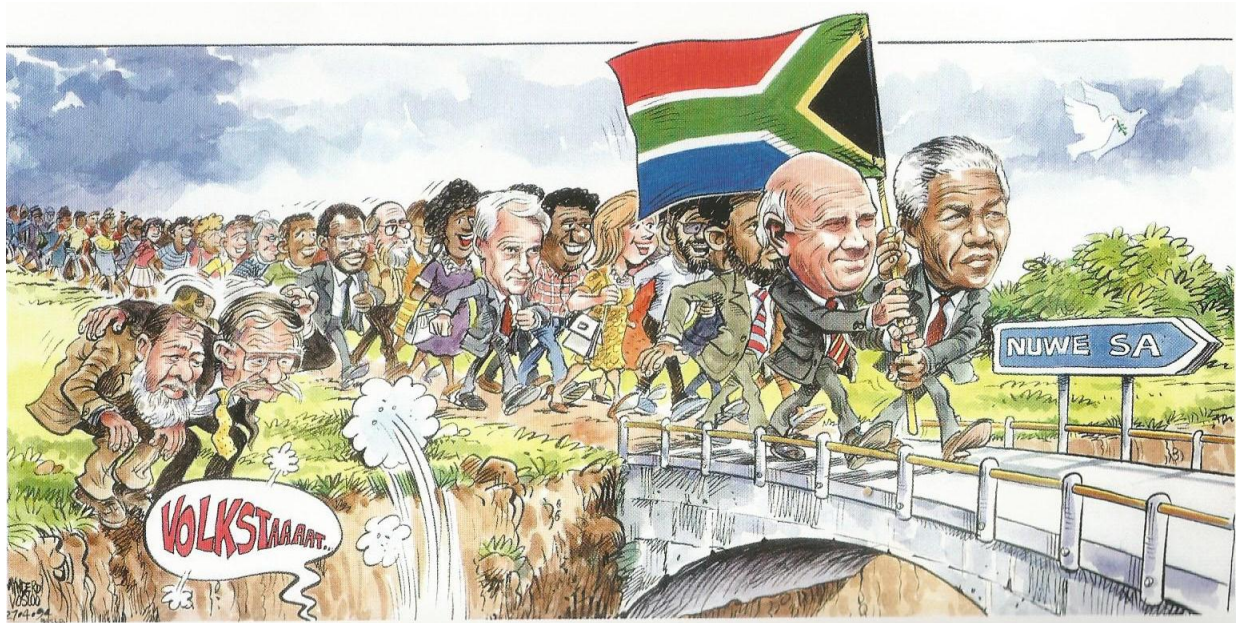


Figure 9 : Reaction to the 'new' South Africa (Beeld, 27 April 1994)

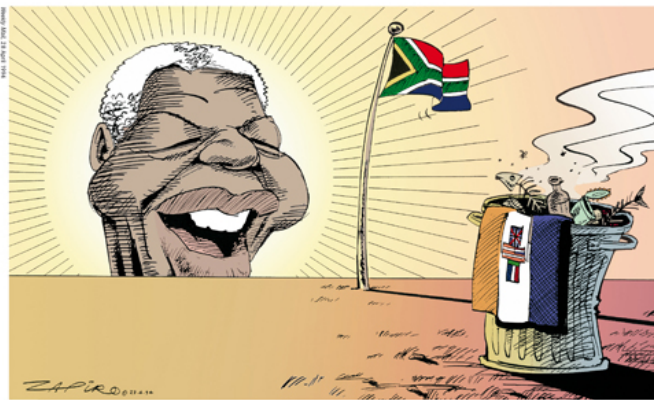


Figure 10 : Reaction to the 'new' South Africa
(Mail and Guardian, 29 April – 05 May 1994)



Figure 11:
Helicopter fly past with new flag.
(10 May 1994)

USE OF THE NATIONAL FLAG IN PROMOTING NATION BUILDING

Following the success of the first fully democratic elections, Nobel peace laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu referred to South Africa as the “Rainbow Nation”. The rainbow metaphor projects the image of different racial, ethnic and cultural groups being united and living together in harmony.¹⁹ The Rainbow Nation, as a spoken metaphor for South African unity is uniquely (although not deliberately) represented by the South African flag.²⁰ There was a short period when the national flag was referred to as the ‘rainbow flag’ in the media and by government officials until it was pointed out that this is the term commonly used to describe the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender (LBGT) pride banner.

The South African government is not alone in pursuing unity and emphasizing nation building. Many heterogeneous states opt for a policy of nation building in order to overcome and avoid the manifold problems associated with heterogeneity and diversity.²¹ As a metaphor of the Rainbow Nation, Bornman (2005) suggests that the new flag, national anthem, together with the preamble to the Constitution, that the new South African government has indeed been committed to a strategy of nation building as is illustrated by the following quotation from a policy document of the ruling African National Congress (ANC); “... the main thrust of the National Democratic Revolution is not to promote fractured identities, but to encourage the emergence of a common South African identity. At the same time, it should be noted that some of the identities associated with “culture” or “ethnicity” or “religion” can in fact be contradictory to the building of a new nation that is based on the principles of equity.”

Bornman (2005) continues, it is not without good reason that the ANC government has been pre-occupied with the issue of nation building. Most analysts are of the opinion that South Africa can be regarded as a complex, divided and heterogeneous society characterized by deep-seated racial, ethnic, cultural, language and religious differences overlapping with large-scale socio-economic disparities.²³

It is not surprising then that the most visible symbol of the ‘new’ South Africa, the national flag, would play a prominent role in promoting this policy of nation building and in the creation of a common national identity. The new flag, along with an image of President Mandela and the opening verses of the national anthems, featured on the first commemorative postage stamps issued in the ‘new’ South Africa (**Figure 12**). The Post Office also issued an airmail sticker using the national flag with the green stripe ending in an eagle’s face (**Figure 13**). This has become a collectors’ item after the State Herald’s office pointed out that the national flag should not be defaced in such a manner.²⁴



Figure 12 : First commemorative postage stamp issue in post-apartheid South Africa (10 May 1994)



Figure 13: Airmail sticker based on new flag design

The national flag was the main feature in the logo of the *Masakhane* campaign, which also featured on postage stamps issued in September 1995 (**Figure 14**). With its slogan of “Building Together Now”, the aim of the campaign was to instil a sense of responsibility and patriotism in the people of South Africa and to encourage local communities to form development fora in order to stimulate investment in local economies.²⁵



Figure 14 : Masakhane campaign commemorative postage stamp



Figure 15 : Using the new flag colours in Government department and agency logos:





Government Digest

Adaptions of the new flag and its colours also quickly appeared in the logos and emblems of various government departments and agencies such as the South African Broadcasting Corporation, the South African Weather Service and the Tourism Grading Council etc. (**Figure 15**). In 1997 South African Airways, the national carrier in which the government has a majority shareholding, incorporated the flag into its new livery (**Figure 16**). The airline's mission was also changed to state that it would; "... fly the spirit of the nation to the world; be a role model to the South African people; and to embody the magic of a free South Africa in a warm African experience for all those who fly to, and within, the country." ²⁶



Figure 16 : New South African Airways livery

In 2000, a "Welcome to Tourists" campaign was launched with the endorsement and support of the South African government featuring the "Flag Dude" ²⁷ (**Figure 17**). This logo uses the flag in the form of a human character and features on all tourism related material and in the creation of a more tourist friendly environment in the country and to raise awareness of the importance of the tourism industry in the national economy.



Figure 17: "The Flag Dude"

In 2001 the **Proudly South African** campaign was launched with the support of the South African government, the private sector and civil society. It also uses a variation of the national flag design in its logo (**Figure 18**) and its "buy local" campaign encourages the nation to buy local products and make use of local services in an effort to stimulate the local economy and help create jobs. **Proudly SA** also promotes national pride, patriotism and social cohesion. Members are allowed to display



Figure 18: Proudly South Arica logo

the logo on their products as an assurance of high quality and local content that will contribute towards the creation of jobs in the country. ²⁸

Brand South Africa was established in August 2002 to help create a positive and compelling brand for South Africa via coordinated marketing initiatives. It too uses the national flag as the basis for its emblem (**Figure 19**).



Figure 19: Brand South Africa logo

When the new political dispensation came into being on 27 April 1994, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) was established which comprised not only members of the former South African Defence Force, but also members of the Defence Forces of the former independent Homelands and members from the liberation movements. This was followed with the adoption of a new series of military ensigns bearing the new national flag in the canton on 11 November 1994. Initially the flags of the South African National Defence Force, the South African Army, South Africa Air Force and South African Medical Services were identical to their immediate predecessors save for the replacement of the new national flag in the canton. In the case of the South African Naval ensign, however, the naval emblem which had been incorporated into the lower fly between 1981 and 1994, was dropped.²⁹ The flags of the Department of Correctional Services and the South African Police Service were also changed to incorporate the new national flag in the canton in 1997 and 1998 respectively.

Further changes were made to the military ensigns on 29 April 2003 when the new SANDF emblem and flags were presented at a parade presided over by the Chief of the South African National Defence Force, General Sipiwe Nyanda, at Thaba Tshwane in Pretoria. This change saw the Cape Castle outline used in all military insignia being replaced with a new emblem incorporating a nine-pointed “star” representing the warm sun of Africa and the nine provinces of South Africa. The five SANDF flags featuring the emblems with the Cape Castle outline were changed to that with the new star outline. In addition, three new Divisional flags were also unveiled - namely those of Joint Operations, Joint Support and Defence Intelligence – which all followed the usual defence force pattern by containing the national flag in the canton.³⁰ Further additions to the suite of military ensigns took place in May 2010 with the establishment of the Department of Military Veterans³¹ and the Departments of Human Resources, Legal Services and Logistics in 2011. All have distinctive flags based on the SANDF flag, having the badge of the respective department in the fly of a dark green ensign with the new South African national flag, fimbriated in white, in the cantons³² (**Figure 20**).

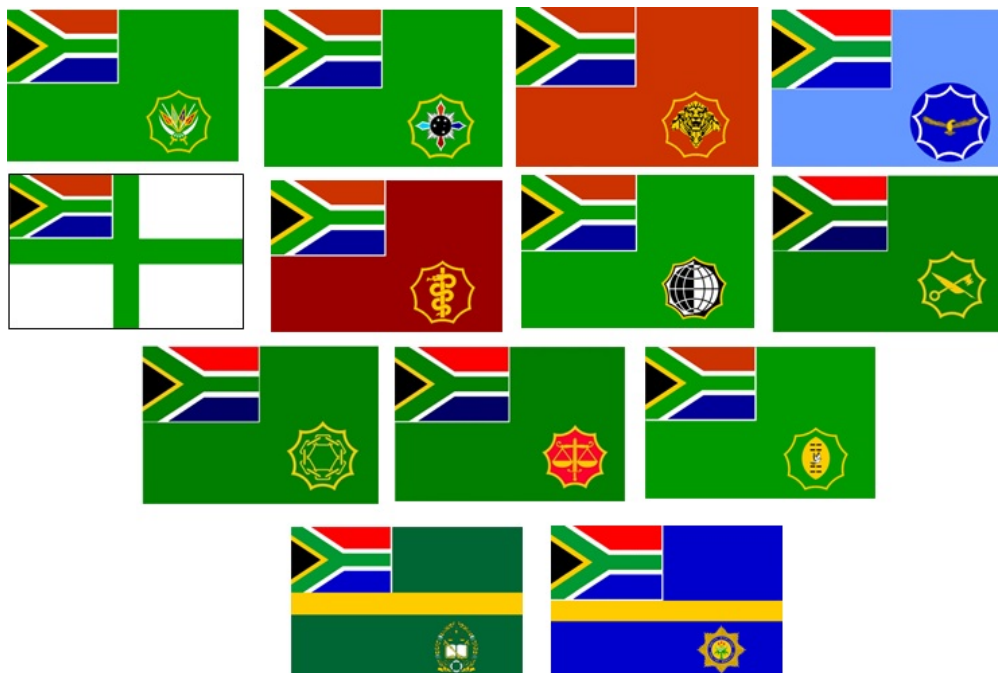


Figure 20: Suite of South African National Defence Force flags featuring new national flag and nine-pointed star emblem.

It was not only the South African government and its agencies that used the new flag to promote nation-building after 1994, the private sector also joined in. The new national colours and variants of the flag itself started to be used in various advertising and marketing campaigns as corporate South Africa adopted the flag as its own and embraced the new political order (**Figure 21**). The more prominent of these were full page newspaper advertisements by Kodak towards the end of 1994 using the by-line “For the most colourful nation in the world, the world’s number one colour film” (**Figure 22**) announcing its return to South Africa after it had left the country in the late 1980s during the anti-apartheid disinvestment campaign. Local insurance company Southern Life Association ran an advert which featured an undulating South African flag rolling off into the distance, where one’s gaze is drawn to a new beginning with the by-line “Change has opened new horizons for us all, revealing a brighter future, a future we can manage better, together” (**Figure 23**). From the larger, more well-known household names such as De Beers, Woolworths, Mercedes Benz and Volkswagen to smaller, individually run companies, the use of the flag to promote things South African has become commonplace.



Figure 21 : Corporate logos incorporating the national flag colours

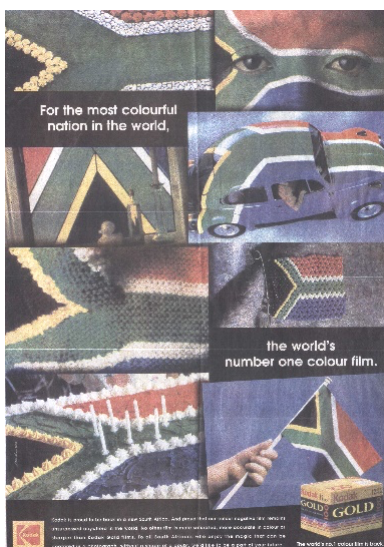


Figure 22 : Kodak “most colourful nation in the world” advertisement

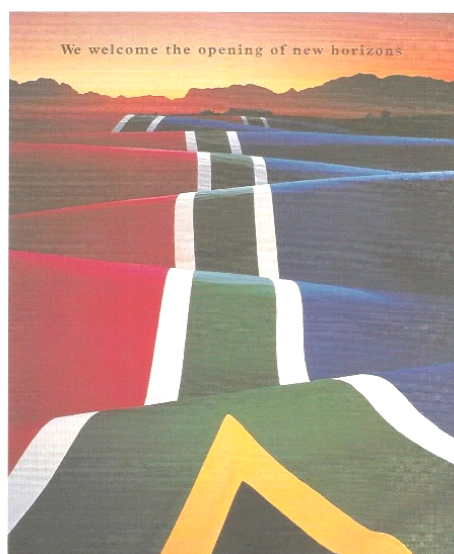


Figure 23 : Southern Life Association “change” advert



Figure 24: Viva Condoms

Viva condom, viva! That was the cry of a volunteer who handed out leaflets decorated with pictures of a prophylactic draped in the flowing red, white, blue, green, black and gold colours of the new flag on World Aids Day in December 1994 as part of an awareness campaign by the Society for Family Health ³³ (**Figure 24**).

This did elicit some negative reaction from the public who felt that this was an “inappropriate” use of the national flag. However, such sentiments did not deter the Afrikaans pornographic magazine, *Loslyf*, from publishing a caricature of a bi-racial couple copulating on the flag - the supporting text suggesting that if motor-vehicle manufacturers use sex to sell their products, hardware stores use patriotism to sell hammers, perfume advertisers show skin, then so too is it one’s patriotic duty to have sex on the flag (**Figure 25**)! Given that just a few years previously it had been illegal in South Africa to have sex across the colour bar, the impact of this image was felt on many levels.

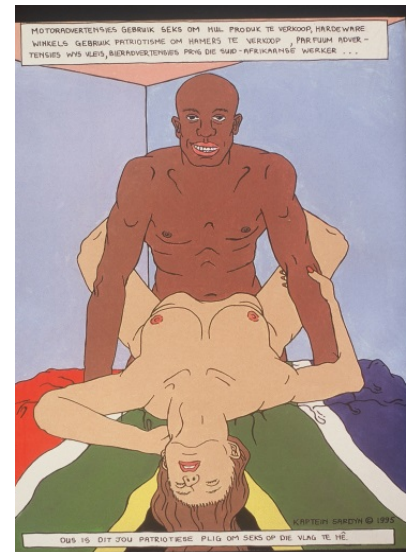


Figure 25: Patriotic duty!



Figure 26: Flag flap

Emotions about the inappropriate use of the flag continue to be aroused, such as years later on 15 February 2011, when a popular radio presenter was arrested while protesting over a billboard on Johannesburg’s M1 highway. “He was protesting against a billboard on the highway advertising warehouse space which features pictures of elephants, and one elephant has the national flag draped over its backside” (**Figure 26**) said the spokesperson for Johannesburg Metro Police. The State Herald met with the company sponsoring the advert and it was later removed on the grounds that the flag should be treated with dignity and respect at all times. ³⁴

Using the flag to convey messages of national concern has also become commonplace. The first of these was in July 1997 when 160,000 postcards bearing a South African flag riddled with bullet holes were dumped on the lawns of the Union Buildings in Pretoria, where the Office of the President is located, in a display of public concern about the escalating crime rate in the country (**Figure 27**). These postcards carried an impassioned plea to President Mandela to make crime prevention an urgent national priority as many citizens felt anxious about the apparent deterioration of law and order. Subsequently a follow-up postcard was issued, depicting the same bullet ridden flag but this time with band-aid plasters covering the holes, with a message appealing to ordinary South Africans to get involved in nation-building and to re-commit themselves to civil obedience etc. ³⁵ (**Figure 28**). Later, the Elastoplast brand of plasters hit the market festooned with the national flag.



Figure 27 :
Decrying the State
of the Nation (1)

Figure 28 : Decrying the State of the Nation (2)



USING AND ABUSING THE FLAG

Despite the initial misgivings about the new flag, it was soon apparent that it had become accepted by the majority of the populace. Improper use of the flag is now likely to spark outrage as was the case when the *Mail and Guardian* (24 February 2012) reported on the activities of the right-wing *Kommandokorps*. According to the report, a group of Afrikaans-speaking teenage boys at a 'survival' camp were ordered to wipe their filthy army boots on a South African flag which had been laid before the entrance to the mess hall like a doormat ³⁶



Figure 29 : Abusing the flag





The role played by sport has probably had the most direct and visible impact on nation building in South Africa since 1994. During the *apartheid* years, sport was used as a major tool for resistance against the system of racial segregation, with South Africa being banned from competing on the international stage in most sporting codes. Sport – starting with the 1995 Rugby World Cup, followed up by the 1996 African Nations Cup, and reaching the zenith with the 2010 FIFA World Cup – played, and continues to play, a major unifying role within the country.³⁷

As with their counterparts in government and the private sector, many of the sporting codes adopted new emblems and logos incorporating the new flag and its colours after 1994, most notably SA Cricket which has the national flag (albeit in the incorrect proportions) above a stylized Protea as its emblem and the National Olympic Committee of South Africa (NOCSA) which also featured the national flag above the Olympic rings (**Figure 30**).

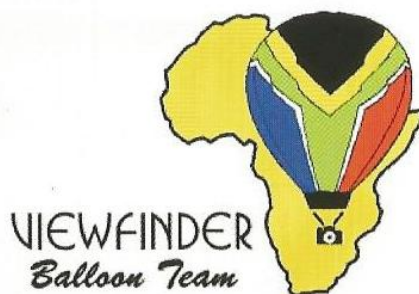


Figure 30: The flag on sporting emblems



The exception is the South African Rugby Union (SARU) which has frequently been embroiled in controversy over its refusal to abandon the Springbok name and emblem. However, the national flag was initially displayed below the collar on the back of the Springbok rugby jersey.

The Rugby World Cup was held in South Africa in 1995 when the country was still very much in its transition phase. A seminal moment for the nation was not only the national rugby team winning the tournament, but with the team captain, Francois Pienaar, being presented with the Webb Ellis Cup by President Mandela clad in a Springbok Rugby Jersey. Carlin (2008) records that “As the captain held the Cup, Mandela ... fixed him a fond gaze, shook his right hand and said, ‘Francois, thank you very much for what you have done for our country’, to which Pienaar replied, ‘No, Mr President, Thank you for what you have done for the country.’”³⁸



Immediately after the euphoria of winning the Rugby World Cup, where national flags were increasingly in evidence, the Constitutional Assembly resolved on 28 September 1995 that the “interim” national flag would be retained. The Constitutional Assembly was charged with the responsibility of drafting the country’s new constitution and had called for submissions, inter alia, on the issues of its various national symbols. It received 118 submissions recommending the retention of the new flag and 35 suggesting changes to it. All political parties, with the exception of the Pan Africanist Congress, supported the retention of the existing design and that the debate on the need for a new design need not be reopened. The Southern African Vexillological Association (SAVA) was amongst those submissions recommending that the flag be retained *unchanged*.³⁹ Thus it was against this background that a new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996), as recommended by the Constitutional Assembly, was signed into law by President Mandela on 16 December 1996 and came into force on 04 February 1997.⁴⁰

Almost three years after its design had been adopted by the Transitional Executive Council, the flag was now “final” as described in section 1 of the Constitution.⁴¹

In January and February 1996 South Africa experienced another flag frenzy when it hosted the 20th African Cup of Nations football competition, a bumper 16 nation and 32 match event. Once again flags were everywhere and the crowning achievement was South Africa’s 2-0 victory over Tunisia on 03 February, the day before the national flag became permanent!

In a survey into determining the extent of national pride amongst various South African racial, ethnic and language groups, and the importance attached to particular national symbols and cultural concepts, Bornman (2005) found that only Afrikaans-speaking whites scored low ratings for most of the national symbols and cultural concepts investigated. The only symbol that was rated relatively highly by all groups was the Constitution, with the national flag the second most highly rated symbol at 4,1 out of a possible 5.⁴² It is interesting to note that even at the time of this survey, conducted five years after the attainment of democracy, the national flag was already considered one of the most important symbols in South Africa.



Figure 31: 10 and 20 years of Freedom logos

democratic elections in April 1994. The most obvious expression of this patriotism was the display of the national flag which could be found on all kinds of consumer items such as bumper stickers, caps, clothes, socks for vehicle wing-mirrors, headbands, garden walls, offices and billboards, on all kinds of curios and traditional art and yes, even finding its way onto underpants⁴³ (Figure 32 below)!

The 10th anniversary of the adoption of the flag was marked with minimal fanfare. A logo depicting people carrying the South African flag in line to vote was used by the government to highlight the “10 years of Freedom”. This featured on a special R2 coin which was issued to commemorate the milestone. The same logo was also used to mark the “20 years of Freedom” in 2014. It was the main feature on a commemorative postage stamp and also on a R5 coin issued to mark the event (Figure 31).

However, it was when South Africa hosted the 2010 FIFA Football World Cup that it can truly be said that the new flag had come of age. The tournament provided the catalyst for an unprecedented outpouring of patriotism in South Africa, not seen since the holding of the first



Right: South African satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys in flag drag



Once again Corporate South Africa used the flag in various advertising campaigns during and immediately after the tournament (**Figure 33**).



Figure 33 : Some of the ads using the flag during the 2010 FIFA World Cup



Ordinary South Africans, not in the usual habit of flying the flag at their homes or on their cars, took flag exuberance to levels not previously seen before as national pride surged to new heights (**Figure 34**). No matter that the country was knocked out of the tournament in the early stages, it was unquestionable that the nation was celebrating more than just football – it had come of age and was celebrating as One after centuries of division and distrust – and the display of the flag was the symbol of that newly found nationhood. “Today this is the greatest country in the world,” declared First National Bank (**Figure 35**), an official World Cup sponsor, while *The Economist* (15 July 2010) eloquently summed it up thus: “Perhaps the biggest benefit (of hosting the tournament) has been the battered nation's rise in self-respect. South Africans, white and black, are hugely proud of their achievement. The post-apartheid six-colour national flag, once scorned by many whites, now flutters joyfully from the cars, shops and homes of all racial groups ...”⁴⁴

Figure 34 : Enjoying the 2010 FIFA World Cup

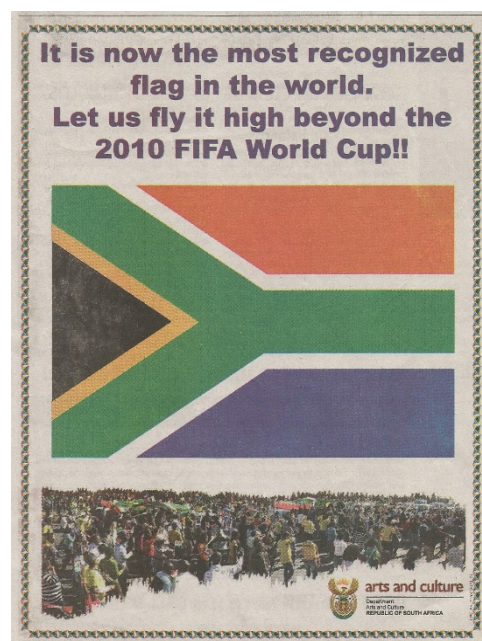




Figure 35 :
First National Bank
advert post 2010
FIFA World Cup



Figure 36 :
Dept. of Arts and Culture
advert post 2010
FIFA World Cup




USING THE FLAG



KEEP FROZEN

QUALITY GUARANTEE All our products are quality guaranteed. If you are not completely satisfied with this product, please return the empty carton to the distributor in your country, or to the address of the manufacturer, giving details of the complaint and purchase. This does not affect your statutory rights.

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FLYING THE FLAG





The Flag stands out as the symbol that serves to identify the nation.

The former national flag was essentially a symbol of the State whereas the new flag has been embraced as a symbol of the People.



Tapping into this renewed patriotic fervour immediately after the hosting of the FIFA World Cup, the Department of Arts and Culture ran an advertisement in all the major newspapers with the flag as the prominent feature and with the caption: It is now the most recognized flag in the world. Let us fly it high beyond the 2010 FIFA World Cup!!” (Figure 36).

However, the last word goes to the designer of the flag, former State Herald Frederick Brownell, who commented after the tournament; “The enthusiastic use of the national flag and flag-related products brought together our people as never before – there was, in essence, a ‘convergence and unification’ ... This flag has achieved its primary function of providing a unifying national symbol for South Africa’s diverse population.”⁴⁵

While the euphoria of the 2010 FIFA World Cup has gone, the flag still features highly in the national consciousness. As in other parts of the world, it is displayed at sports matches, on bumper stickers, clothing, food packaging and all manner of other items. The flag is now an integral part of many aspects of life in South Africa, as for example in the marketing for the “*local is lekker* (nice)” branding of a local supermarket chain. One shopper remarked, “You cannot walk five metres in a supermarket without seeing it”!

A particularly innovative use of the flag has been in the development of an educational tool whose purpose is to deepen the knowledge of mathematics amongst school children and to use maths in design contexts and for business gain. The kit contains 30 activities based on the flag, whose design and colours lend themselves to experimentation in a fun and creative way, to explore Transformational Geometry as part of the national mathematics curriculum ⁴⁶ (**Figure 37**).

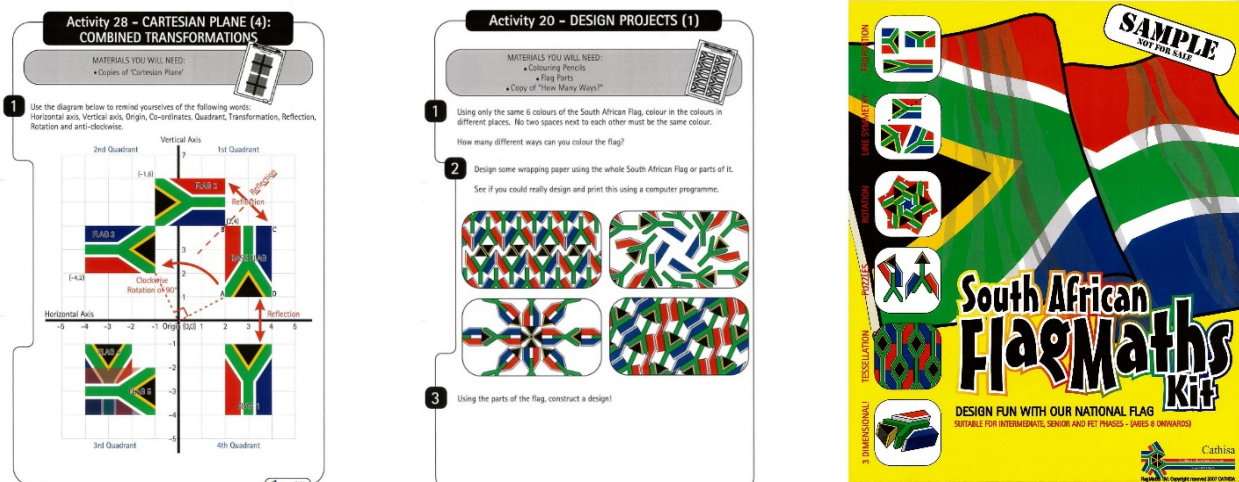


Figure 37: The flag in geometry lessons

That the flag has come of age and is a truly national symbol is reflected in the call by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), following its debut in parliament in 2014, when it called for a review of the national anthem after a controversial right-wing Afrikaans singer announced he only sings a part of it. In the ensuing debate it became apparent that many South Africans identify with only parts of the anthem, which is a hybrid song combining new English lyrics with extracts of the hymn 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' (God Bless Africa) and 'Die Stem van Suid-Afrika' (The Call of South Africa). Most people indicated a much stronger affinity to the flag. The Department of Arts and Culture later announced it would be spending R34 million so that every school can fly the flag and to teach pupils the anthem. ⁴⁷

The recently announced Giant Flag Project highlights the continued use of the country's national symbol to promote nation-building. ⁴⁸ The project in the semi-arid Camdeboo area of the Eastern Cape Province envisages a 66-hectare flag, which will be able to be seen from space, and will be made up of 2.5 million coloured desert plants such as cacti and *spekboom*. A 6.6-hectare solar field, producing four megawatts, enough to power 4,000 households, will make up the black triangle (**Figure 38**). Organisers say the R180-million project will create over 700 permanent full-time "green collar" jobs in the area. The Giant Flag is yet to be built but the planning has been done and some funding secured. The choice of the flag design is deliberate as the project is a game-changer, not just for the area but for the country as a whole - something never done before just like South Africa in April 1994 when the flag itself was adopted.



Figure 38 :
The Giant Flag Project -
flag schematic with plants
and solar panels

CONCLUSION

As South Africa celebrated 21 years of its democracy, there were calls for the nation to reflect on its achievements. Nation-building no longer occupies centre-stage as other more pressing political and economic issues have come to dominate the national discourse. Nevertheless, the national flag stands out as the symbol which has come to identify the nation. Whereas the former national flag was essentially a symbol of the State, the new national flag has been embraced as the symbol of the people. Apart from its visual impact, its colours and their graphic adaptability, at least part of its success lies in the extent to which it has been associated with the concepts of “freedom” and “democracy”, which were ushered in on 27 April 1994, the day on which the flag was taken into use.

The national symbol has been used for all manner of purposes – as an icon and logo, by small businesses and large corporations, it has morphed into the Welcome Dude, and into an umbrella, golfer, tree and diamond. It flowed and it ran, it flew and it swam. It has soared in space, reached the world’s highest peak and been planted at the South Pole. Although not the kind of vexillidolatriy⁴⁹ found in North Korea, the former Soviet Union or in Nazi Germany, the South African flag has nonetheless been used in a greater variety of ways than almost any other flag in the world. The reason for this is simple – it is the most visible symbol of the hard-won unity of the country which has been embraced by the nation as a whole.

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BIOGRAPHICAL



Bruce Berry was born and grew up in Zimbabwe and watched with interest the vexillological changes in that country up to and immediately after independence in 1980. This interest developed into a substantial (and still growing!) flag collection, with a focus on southern Africa and flags based on the British ensign pattern.

He participates in a variety of vexillological projects – formal and informal – and contributes to vexillological publications and conferences. Attending Rhodes University and graduating from the Universities of the Witwatersrand and South Africa, with an MA and Diploma in Project Management, Bruce is a Unit Manager at the Development Bank of Southern Africa, and lives in Johannesburg with his wife and two sons. He is a founder member of the **Southern African Vexillological Association (SAVA)** and has been Secretary/Treasurer since its inception in 1990.

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