

What Lies Beneath the Rainbow

By Lisa Nel

The multi cultural lives of South Africa's complex society are confronted with an even greater struggle today than they were either during 'the freedom struggle' or at the incipience of the country's nascent democracy when Nelson Mandela was elected.

In an interview which I conducted with a friend of mine, who is a Xosa, I boldly asked questions which were less politically incorrect or ethnically indiscreet than necessary for a common understanding of an unacknowledged fact: A 'white' man or woman will never be elected President of any African country. Trust has been irrevocably broken. Although the remnants of colonialism, apartheid and influences of protectorates will percolate down to generations for whom the history of repression will be just another chapter in outdated text books, in politics it's either black or white. Or on the surface at least.

I lived in Botswana for over 20 years beginning in the early 80's. I lived on the Northeastern border of Zimbabwe and Botswana and remember vividly traveling by train to recently renamed Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia), and frequenting shops which had hired dozens of women to meticulously block out the name 'Salisbury' on locally manufactured items, and delicately write in with magic markers 'Harare.'

Freedom was hard earned. White people suppressed Black people. Whites will indefinitely be perceived, whether by indoctrination or confluence of a Black African identity, to be oppressors and a continual and potentially imminent threat.

But it is not that straight forward. If only it were: South Africans have different perspectives and within their own 'class' and their own 'frequently visited hangouts,' which have been admittedly predominantly 'white,' still vary in their opinions about what is really happening in this country.

I am in a privileged position being a de-tribalized American and have been able to: teach, befriend, and generally get to know people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds who have been erroneously categorized and over presumptuously perceived to hold opinions which are anathema to what they personally believe.

The real South African society, as compartmentalized as the media and propaganda make it out to be, has far more nuances and depth of meaning, which has eclipsed the ignorance and uber academically infested perspectives of writers, journalists and scholars who might just might have something else to gain than accessing the truth? If there is a truth?