**Justice, populism and restitution in South Africa**

**How much does our history have to do with the populist movements we see in South Africa today? And, asks Sharlene Swartz, how susceptible are South Africans really to these movements and their leaders?**

A country that is committed to justice for current and past inequalities, and is making progress in redress, has nothing to fear from populist leaders or populist movements. So how are we doing in South Africa when it comes to justice and redress?

We know that 23 years into democracy, South Africa remains a starkly unequal society. The most unequal in the world, in fact. But do we know the facts behind these inequalities, and how they are distributed? If we did, we could begin to understand the appeal of populist leaders and populist movements that draw attention to them, and offer unconstructive answers.

We know that black South Africans bear the largest burden of this inequality. As for the statistics on coloured and Indian/Asians, they fall somewhere between that of black and white South Africans, and reflect almost exactly the relative privileges and benefits afforded each population group under apartheid.

According to Statistics South Africa’s 2014 General Household Survey, the life expectancy of whites in South Africa is 20 years longer than that of blacks. Black unemployment is four times that of white unemployment, and 60% of blacks live below the poverty line (compared to 4% of whites).

Add to that an average household income for whites that is six times higher than that of blacks. Findings that put half of privately owned land in white hands, and a 2016 South African Institute of Chartered Accountants survey that found 75% of all directors of JSE-listed companies to be white, and it becomes clear that not only is South Africa the most unequal country in the world, but that these inequalities remain differentiated by race.

Despite the formal end of their institutionalised privilege, white South Africans still have one of the highest living standards in the world. This is most unambiguously illustrated when we consider the United Nations Human Development Index. South Africa as a whole is placed 116th out of about 200 countries, whereas the white population is ranked 15th. It is on par with Sweden and the UK and one place ahead of Belgium and France. So clearly we are not doing well when it comes to issues of justice and equality.

But what of redress? When it comes to land reform, affirmative action, sport quotas and apartheid compensation, a 2016 Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) survey of South Africans’ social attitudes found white South Africans to be least in favour of government actions to redistribute wealth.

Similarly, for forms of redress such as support for the unemployed, tertiary education opportunities for the poor, progressive taxation and higher social grants, of which most other South Africans are highly in favour, whites lag behind considerably, despite knowing that wealth is highly unequally distributed in South Africa and saying that they are opposed to such inequalities.

Despite inequality, racism and injustice, South Africans do not easily follow populist movements.
PoPulism & redress
have a very welcoming environment in which to thrive.

restitution compared to 56% of the black participants.
said that there should be small group discussions about
the black respondents). even with regard to steps that would
they should act to repair the past (vs 60% of blacks) and
only 8% agreed that a compulsory restitution tax should be
be taken, whites were markedly less keen. for instance,
compared to 2015.

and decreased for blacks (now 51%, down from 63%)
recently, when asked who was in favour of forgetting and
survey by the institute for Justice and reconciliation. more
in view of this, populist movements and populist leaders
changing, relinquishing. However, they did succeed
and ‘decolonisation’ in 2017. #thisisonlythebeginning
but students vowed to continue the struggle for equality
no fee increases in 2016 and the country was delighted
to January. the President announced that there would
end of the academic year and many postponed final exams
transport functions under the banner #outsourcingmustfall.

by #transformwits at
fees and accommodation.
academics and a curriculum
the focus soon shifted to
campus, focusing on that
imperialist statues on
began by highlighting
stellenbosch university
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