

# Transactional Analysis Holds Promise for Healing Trauma and Building Resilience at a Societal Level

*Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge*

## **Abstract**

**This article is an edited version of the opening address given by Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, MP, to the World Transactional Analysis Conference on 7 August 2008 in Johannesburg, South Africa. Madlala-Routledge, a Quaker, served as Deputy Minister of Defense and then Deputy Minister of Health before being dismissed by President Thabo Mbeki for her outspoken views about HIV/AIDS. She is currently Deputy Speaker of Parliament under recently elected President Kgalema Motlanthe. In this article Madlala-Routledge reflects on the traumatic past of South Africa and the need for personal and social healing and welcomes the role that transactional analysis could play in contributing to that process. She also looks at the importance of social and psychological factors in the health of individuals and societies and the need for an integrative approach such as the one transactional analysis might provide.**

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It is an honor to have been asked to deliver this opening address for the first Transactional Analysis World Conference to be held on the African continent. I am especially pleased that it is being held in Johannesburg, South Africa. We can benefit from your wisdom in helping us sort out our relationships with one another as South Africans sharing this new, exciting, roller coaster of a democracy as well as our relationships with our sisters and brothers in other parts of Africa. The way we have treated our neighbors is shameful. It is disciplines such as yours that can help us say we are sorry, make amends, and heal.

I want to congratulate the South African transactional analysis community on keeping TA alive in South Africa and hosting this conference, which brings together some of the best

transactional analysis practitioners in the world. We will be making good use of them because they will not only be contributing to this conference but also sharing their wisdom in pre- and postconference workshops.

The theme of the conference, "Cradled by Culture: The Journey of Humankind," brings up for me not only our past and our common heritage here on the African continent but also our common destiny on planet Earth. We who are politicians tend to think that all that is needed is power, laws, plans, blueprints, spin, and elections, but this conference and your profession brings home to us the importance of relationships that are OK. You must see some of the "games politicians play" to understand the importance of this conference and the value of your work.

I am especially pleased to have been invited to this particular conference for two reasons. The first is because my friend Diane Salters invited me, and I will have an opportunity to share with some of the people and listen to some of the ideas that make her tick. The second is because transactional analysis is an approach that can be used to enhance, integrate, and bring together a broad range of disciplines that do not normally come together and communicate at an equal and responsible level: psychotherapy and community work, coaching and education, counseling and organizational development.

Coming to this conference also gives me an opportunity to listen, reflect, and focus on the mental state of our nation, which was one of my responsibilities when I was Deputy Minister of Health up until a year ago tomorrow. I wish to learn from you and pass on what is important to the African National Congress (ANC) task team on health, of which I am now a member. I hope that in the time that I am here you will pass on what you think is important for us to take seriously. I hope it will also give some pointers to me on my own journey of healing.

Our journey as South Africans has been one of trauma: 350 years of colonialism, 40 years of apartheid, years of struggle and war, 20 years of low-intensity civil war and so-called “black on black” violence, and untold years of racism and patriarchal violence. Recently, we have had the shame and horror of xenophobic violence against refugees and immigrants to South Africa.

If what the Trauma Centre for the Healing of Survivors of Violence and Torture says about the transgenerational transfer of trauma is correct, then we have a lot of healing to do. Recently, I visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Center in Jerusalem. It brought back some of the memories of what we have gone through as a result of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. This historic trauma is real, and it affects our lives today. A few weeks ago, I heard a phone-in program on stress. I was amused by one caller who said, “Your program stresses me. I am tired of hearing about how bad the past was.”

Looking beyond our borders to Zimbabwe, Somalia, Kenya, Darfour, and now Mauritania, we can see how much transactional analysis could be an important part of developmental peacekeeping. If, in addition, we factor in the violence of poverty and unemployment as well as the inequality in South African society—which has a Gini coefficient of 0.58 (a measure of inequality of income and wealth distribution; see “Gini Coefficient,” 2008), one of the highest in the world—we see the value of transactional analysis as an integrating discipline in politics and economics.

Heidi Holland, author of *Dinner with Mugabe* (2008a), wrote in a newspaper article that there is an anger not only in South African politics, but throughout our society over our traumatized past. Far from being a society in the advanced stages of recovery from our terrible history, South Africa is a gigantic psychiatric unit. We fail to acknowledge, let alone wrestle with our wounded psyches . . . ; we are a traumatized people hovering between depression and delusion. We approach each challenge in a state of collective denial, apparently oblivious to the urgent need for introspection. Look at our unrealistic hopes of

redemption in the face of our brutal history, for instance. We are surely deluded in the first place to imagine that an individual (such as Mandela) could deliver us from the damaging effects of apartheid. The most elementary grasp of psychology reveals bleak mental hygiene prospects for those in society who have been deprived of adequate parenting and those who have suffered systematic humiliation throughout their lives. . . . Equally those who have bullied their way to material prosperity over the years are bound to suffer psychologically, if only as a “worried well” who fear deep down that retribution will descend some day. Let’s face it: we are in our current disillusioned state together. (Holland, 2008b)

However, I would assert that our journey as South Africans has also been one of healing that has at times reached sublime heights. I remember our first elections, the roller coaster of the negotiations, the drafting of the new constitution, and, more recently, Mandela’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. We must not forget the daily acts of kindness, caring, forgiveness, and compassion that are the everyday fabric of our society, in which each one of us takes responsibility for our families and neighbors. We must also remember all the organizations that contribute to the social fabric of our society and hold it together, despite our collective trauma. I hope that this conference will be such a high point for transactional analysis but, more importantly, for TA in African healing, helping us to change the limiting script messages of apartheid, colonialism, and patriarchy (Salters, 2006).

A recent book, *The Impact of Inequality*, by the social epidemiologist Richard Wilkinson (2005), addresses people’s experience of inequality and presents a radical theory of the psychosocial impact of class stratification. The book demonstrates how poor health, high rates of violence, and low levels of social capital all reflect the stress of inequality. It also explains the pervasive sense that, despite material success, our societies are sometimes social failures. What emerges is a new conception of what it means to say that we are social beings and how the social structure penetrates our personal

lives and relationships. This challenge is particularly relevant in South Africa, with its high levels of inequality. Wilkinson shows that we should not wait to reach some unattainable level of equality and leaves us in no doubt that even a small reduction in inequality matters. The challenge for politicians is to ensure that the policies that we implement, such as affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment, actually decrease the inequality in society as a whole.

It would be interesting to see how transactional analysis, with its origins in radical social psychiatry, could bring together the contributions of politics, economics, and the traditional African ethic of ubuntu—"umntu ngumntu ngabantu," which translates as "a person is a person through other people." What sort of healing and what sort of relationships are needed to bring about a more equal society? If the dignity of some people is undermined, then the dignity of all is undermined. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu said in 1999,

A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed. ("Ubuntu," 2008, ¶ 2)

A recent newspaper article by Professors Mahmood Mamdani and Sampie Terreblanche (Cornell, Mamdani, & Terreblanche, 2008) highlighted the fact that

the recent xenophobic violence was systemic in nature and will not end until the underlying causes of economic distress have been dealt with thoroughly. South Africa is in a state of emergency because of the failure to address desperate poverty and is in urgent need of a mechanism to begin public discussion on how to ensure dignity for all those who live here.

They reminded us of their call in 1996 for a Justice and Reconciliation Commission, which would

focus on the systematic exploitation endured by the majority black population

over 350 years of racial capitalism. The work of the commission would be to educate whites who were the beneficiaries of this exploitative system, as well as to develop a programme of reparations, restitution and perhaps most important, the establishment of economic measures that could effectively grapple with the devastating effects of an internal system of colonialism.

We have had such a healing deliberation through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which focused on the perpetrators of violence and reparations for individual victims. The genius of the chairperson, Desmond Tutu, was to bring it into our living rooms and bring about deliberation and connections to people caught up in the extremes of our violent past. This past still needs healing. It is still with us, and children born after 1994 cannot escape it. We all need healing. I was asked to give input on the political context at the opening of the TRC hearings on women in Durban, where women who had been identified as victims would share their stories and be supported. I had not seen myself in need as a victim but rather as a victor and not in need of healing. When I came back to Parliament, other MPs (Ministers of Parliament) asked me why I had broken down and cried when my job was only to provide the political context.

#### **Transactional Analysis as Medical Anthropology**

In 1848, Rudolph Virchow, a nineteenth-century pathologist, was sent to upper Silesia (now a part of Poland) to investigate an outbreak of typhus fever, which had reached epidemic status. After the investigation, he advised that to avoid future epidemics, the region should be granted self-government, free democracy, tax reform, the end of feudalism, and a constitution. As I outlined earlier, no social or scientific discipline can stand alone, unaffected by other disciplines. Virchow, who is regarded as the founder of social medicine—which focuses on the fact that disease is never just biological but is often socially derived—said, "Medicine is a social science and politics is nothing but medicine on a large scale. . . ."

Physicians are the natural attorneys of the poor and social problems should largely be solved by them” (Kidder, 2003).

South Africa is at the epicenter of the AIDS pandemic, and the pandemic cannot only be addressed by one sector, such as government. Its complexity, as with all social systems, requires sound relationships, good communication, and deliberation on the role each sector can best play in overcoming the disease. We have seen how the Treatment Action Campaign has found a particular role in advocacy work on treatment. What is the particular role of transactional analysis in facilitating sound relationships and supporting the creative process that occurs when people from diverse sectors such as business and the unemployed, community workers and academics, traditional healers and western doctors, old wisdoms and new wisdoms, men and women, and spiritual leaders and politicians come together and deliberate?

#### HIV/AIDS

As part of taking the National Strategic Plan (NSP) (2007-2011) forward, in my past role as Deputy Minister of Health, I engaged researchers to help find solutions to the multiplicity of problems around the HIV pandemic. A key issue that came up was the pervasive issue of mental stress. The fear, stigma, isolation, not being able to share and be comforted, loss, and death need to be dealt with as we deal with other diseases in a supportive and caring environment. Why can't we share openly these fears and hopes?

Johnny Steinberg (2008), in his latest book, *The Three Letter Plague*, highlights the absence of African men in the public campaign against HIV/AIDS. He writes about the psychological trauma African men feel and the fear that their natural role of protecting and propagating the human race is threatened and undermined by HIV/AIDS.

I have been blessed with an interesting career in politics and am looking for those integrating principles, such as transactional analysis, that can bring together and heal my experiences. Another such integrating principle I have found is deliberative democracy, in which citizens

can deliberate on and contribute to decisions that affect their lives on an adult-to-adult basis and not just vote every 5 years. Transactional analysis has so much to offer to so many, and I wish the international TA community and TA in Africa good fortune at your world conference.

*Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, MP, was elected to Parliament in 1994 in South Africa's first democratic election. She served first as Deputy Minister of Defense and then Deputy Minister of Health in President Thabo Mbeki's cabinet. Having been dismissed by him for her outspoken criticism of the government's approach to HIV/AIDS and her concerns about high infant mortality rates in some of South Africa's hospitals, she returned to the back benches. She has recently been appointed Deputy Speaker of Parliament in the new cabinet appointments made by recently elected President Kgalema Motlanthe. Nozizwe has a degree in sociology and philosophy and diplomas in medical technology and adult education. She is currently registered at the University of Cape Town to do a master's degree in philosophy. She can be reached at nzixesha@parliament.gov.za .*

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