

RELAÇÕES BRASIL E ÁFRICA DO SUL: PASSADO, PRESENTE E FUTURO

Embaixador Vusi Mavimbela

No dia 29 de maio de 2023, na abertura da Semana do Curso de Relações Internacionais, a Universidade Católica de Brasília teve a honra de receber o Senhor Embaixador da África do Sul no Brasil, Vusi Mavimbela, a quem agradecemos por gentilmente colaborar com nossa revista Conexões Internacionais. Em seu discurso, destacou o histórico das relações bilaterais entre Brasil e África do Sul nos âmbitos político, econômico, e cultural, bem como as instituições e agrupamentos compartilhados, como o BRICS. Por fim, ressaltou a importância de uma educação ampla, interativa e emancipatória.

Jean Lima
Editor Adjunto

Distinguished Professor Dr. Pelizzari, Academic Pro-Rector,
Professor Romero, Coordinator at the Faculty of International Relations,
Lecturers and Students from the International Relations and Research Unit at the
Catholic University of Brasilia,

Ladies and Gentlemen and all protocol observed,

I feel immensely honoured to be invited to this august university as part of the
inauguration of the International Relations Week.

I have been asked to talk about Brazil/SA relations - past, present and future - and
to touch on some key agenda topics.

It is my understanding that this university started off as a Catholic School of
Humanities in 1974 offering courses in Business Administration, Economics and
Pedagogy. It is similarly my understanding that today your offer around 34
undergraduate degree courses but in essence you have continued emphasizing the
primacy of promoting knowledge without neglecting spirituality based on Christian
ethics. This background and essence of your character makes our engagement today
even more interesting. In this context, this university shares its background and
pedagogy with many institutions of learning both in the wider African continent and in
my own country, South Africa. In the African continent, one of the greatest ongoing
contributions of Catholic institutions is in the area of pedagogy. This contribution has
outlived centuries of slavery and colonialism, it has also outlasted the victories of national
liberation movements, revolutions of one form or another, democracies and dictatorships
of different kind.

It is said that more than 30 universities in Africa are supported by Catholic
institutions or the Catholic Church itself. There are many more schools that enjoy similar
benefits. A report issued by the non-profit organization, Global Catholic Education, says 4
out of every 10 students enrolled in Catholic schools are in Africa. Since 1980, the number
of students enrolled in Catholic schools has quadrupled in Africa whereas in Asia it has
only doubled. That number has hardly changed in Europe and the Americas. The report
further says that the most important driver of these increase in Africa is economic.
Catholic educational institutions are generally in more demand among the most
vulnerable communities and that is the case in many African countries.

That was certainly the experience of my own mother and her two siblings when
they wanted to enroll at a secondary school and my grandparents did not have enough

money to pay for school fees. They went to the Catholic Inkamana Abbey, one of the best result-orientated schools in South Africa. It was not only one of the best schools, but a student who did not have enough money to pay school fees, could sacrifice a holiday by working in the school's revenue-generating projects to supplement the fees.

The St Augustine College of South Africa is the most prominent representation of Catholic tertiary institutions in my country. Much like the history of your institution, the idea for the establishment of St Augustine evolved from as early as 1951 but it was eventually inaugurated only in 1999. Its focus is the humanities, ranging from Theology to Pedagogy, Philosophy, Applied Ethics and Peace Studies. St Augustine derives its name from St Augustine of Hippo (also known as Saint Augustine), the most prominent African theologian and philosopher who made major contributions to Western philosophy and Western Christianity. He also made major contributions to pedagogy including “critical thinking skills” and the different styles of teaching and learning.

I thought I should paint this brief sketch of Catholic educational institutions to put the Catholic University of Brasilia, your own institution, closer to a common historical context between you and the people of Africa and my country. It is important that we do not see the relationship between Brazil and South Africa or Africa in a way that is detached from you as academics in a Catholic University but to realise that our history and our experiences are linked together by a thousand threads, threads that are philosophical, pedagogical, spiritual, religious, economic, political and cultural.

Relations between South Africa and Brazil go back to 1918 when Brazil opened a trade Consulate in Cape Town. At the time South Africa was called the Union of South Africa. The use of ‘Union’ basically signified the collaboration between the British and the Afrikaners (who were largely Dutch descendants) in governing South Africa to the total exclusion of native Africans whose land they had usurped. In 1948 the National Party, which was essentially an Afrikaner political party, won the national elections that did not allow the majority black majority to vote. It soon introduced Apartheid legislation that stipulated legal legislation and religious justification for total deprivation and oppression of black people. The policy underpinning that legislation and religious justification came to be known as Apartheid (separateness).

In the same year, 1948, Brazil opened a diplomatic legation in Pretoria and South Africa did the same in Rio de Janeiro, the then capital of Brazil.

It was not surprising that Brazil moved quickly to establish diplomatic relations

with a government that had just legislated Apartheid laws; Brazil itself was under a military dictatorship of Field Marshall Eurico Gaspar Dutra. In 1971 South Africa upgraded the diplomatic office to a full Embassy and Brazil followed suit in 1974. Similarly, the upgrading to full Embassies took place during the period of a harsh military dictatorship in Brazil which lasted from 1964 to 1986. In South Africa, the Apartheid regime was continuing to enforce Apartheid through imprisonment, violence against the people and the killing of anti-Apartheid activists.

The decade of the 1970s, the decade when the military dictatorship in Brazil and Apartheid South Africa were upgrading diplomatic relations in their respective capitals, saw momentous anti-Apartheid political events happening in South Africa. One of them was what came to be known as the Durban Workers' Strikes that started in January 1973. Underpinned by the demand for workers' rights and the principles of democracy and equality, the strikes saw joint action involving workers, academics, students, churches community organisations, and helped to redefine the political landscape in South Africa. In 1976, South Africa was engulfed by student protests that started in the townships of Soweto. On 12 September 1977, a young activist by the name of Steve Biko was killed in police detention. On 19 October 1977, 19 Black Consciousness Movement Organisations, including those that Steve Biko had helped to establish, were banned by the Apartheid state. The banning included Black-edited newspapers like 'The World' and the 'Weekend World'. This clampdown on black representation and black voice came to be known as 'Black Wednesday' and it was accompanied by the arrest and detention of scores of activists.

In the very decade of the 1970s, as the world was campaigning against nuclear weapons and proliferation, South Africa and Brazil were collaborating in developing nuclear capability and both opposed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that was being negotiated by world leaders at the time. It was only in 1985, as the military dictatorship was ending in Brazil that the country started to distance itself from Apartheid South Africa.

Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990 and in 1991 he came on a six-day visit to Brazil.

The legislated system of Apartheid in South Africa ended in April 1994, the year when we held our first democratic elections that resulted in Nelson Mandela becoming the first Black African president of South Africa.

I do not know how much all of you know about what the system of Apartheid meant and how it worked. Trying to describe Apartheid in one or two paragraphs always runs the risk of miscommunicating the extent of the horror that it represented. But let me try to do that in a few words.

The South African political history identified four major racial groups; Native Africans, White people, Indians and Coloureds (mixed race). The collective reference to 'Black' in South Africa encompasses Native Africans, Indians and Coloureds. This is a category that the Apartheid government classified as 'Non-White'. Under Apartheid laws there was another classification called 'honorary Whites' and it was mainly reserved for non-South African race groups that the regime could not classify under 'Whites' or 'Non-Whites'. Some of the examples would be some Asian nationals including those from China, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, etc.

One of the cornerstone Apartheid laws was the 1913 Land Act which designated only 13% land of the country to more than 90% of Native Africans whilst Whites reserved the rest of the productive land for their exclusive ownership and use. The land deprivation of Black people was fundamental in ensuring exclusion of Native Africans from the economy of the country. Exclusion from land has the devastating multiplier effect throughout many other economic avenues.

The practice of Apartheid reached ridiculous levels and ensured complete humiliation of Non-Whites. For example, there were marked signs that clearly stated, "FOR WHITES ONLY", or for "NON-WHITES ONLY". These would be placed on park benches, public beaches, public transport, hotel entrances, housing areas, etc. For a Non-White person or persons to trespass a 'For Whites Only' designation was punishable by law and/or physical assault by white people.

The system of Bantu Education was instituted and reserved only for Native Africans. Among other things, it ensured a calculated system of inferior education that excluded and restricted access to certain subjects such as mathematics, science, economics, accounting, engineering, as well as a complete distortion of the history and culture of Native Africans. The Apartheid regime adopted a differentiated approach on the issue of Education to Non-Whites. For example, Indians and Coloureds were not subjected to the worst elements of Bantu Education such as draconian deprivation of mathematics, science and economic subjects. That is why it was referred to as 'Bantu Education' because it applied only to Bantu-speaking Native Africans who happened to

be the overwhelming majority in the country.

There were designated resident areas for each major racial group; Native Africans, Whites, Indians and Coloureds. Native Africans areas were further subdivided according to language groups like Ngunis (Zulus, Xhosas, Swazi, Ndebele, etc), Sothos (Tswanas, Pedis, Sothos, etc.), Tsongas, Vendas, etc. The Apartheid system had to ensure the complete segregation of communities to prevent the forging of a common South African nationhood, to instill the sense of suspicion and animosity among different communities and to facilitate the time-tested policy of divide-and-rule of those who were oppressed.

The extent of Apartheid discrimination extended to all spheres of life including the kind of job one could get, access to health care, sport and recreation facilities, salary levels at work, the management hierarchy, and so forth.

Under Apartheid it was prohibited by law for a Non-White to have a sexual relationship with a White person, let alone the marriage between the two. Violation of this law resulted in jail time although today it might sound medieval and barbaric. In South Africa it is a recent lived experience and there are individuals who are live today who carry the mental and emotional scars of that policy and its practice.

It is, however, pleasing to note that even under the military dictatorship in Brazil and Apartheid in South Africa, there were different ways in which activists and intellectuals in both countries continued to crosspollinate their experiences, to learn and reinforce each other morally, politically, culturally, organisationally and pedagogically. Perhaps the two exemplary individuals in this regard is Paulo Reglus Neves Freire on the side of Brazil and Steve Bantu Biko on that of South Africa. Paulo Freire's influential book 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' became the Bible of the anti-Apartheid student, trade union and Black Consciousness organisations in South Africa in the 1970s and the 1980s. It continues to influence a lot of progressive pedagogy in South Africa today. On the other hand, Steve Biko's activism, his arrest and death in Apartheid custody, as well as the collection of his writings entitled 'I Write What I Like', continue to galvanize Afro-Brazilian activism up to this day.

In his book 'The Wretched Of The Earth', Frantz Fanon called for the education system that would address the post-colonial realities of mental oppression, not an education that would simply extend the colonial culture in education. It can be said with some justification that Paulo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' goes a long way to answer to Frantz Fanon's call. Paulo Freire wrote:

“No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption”.

Paulo Freire argued that students should not be treated as if they are a *tabula rasa* (a blank slate or empty receptacle) on which the teacher must scribble or deposit his ideas. Rather he saw it as a regulation of interactive social consciousness where both the teacher and the student reconstruct themselves into new beings.

This approach of Freire’s pedagogy became an important weapon in South Africa to combat and revolt against the oppressive system of Bantu Education. Progressive trade union movements employed it in adult education classes to teach illiterate workers. Student movements and community organisations used it to counter the damage that came with Bantu Education. It contributed to no small measure in opening the eyes of the student movement that led nation-wide student uprisings that started in the black townships of Soweto in 1976.

My own alma mater, the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal-Pietermaritzburg, continues to host a Paulo Freire Project.

In November 2021 I visited the Steve Biko Cultural Institute in Salvador, Bahia. It was founded in 1992 by a group of Afro-Brazilian student and teacher activists. These activists were younger in the 1970s when Steve Biko’s ideas began to spread and when he was killed by Apartheid police, but they were influenced by his teachings. The Biko Institute draws its inspiration and its reason for existence from Biko’s dictum that “The most powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed”. This assertion by Biko echoes the foundations of Freire’s ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’, they both call for an education that liberates the mind. The founders of the Institute were initially motivated by the fact that the majority population in Bahia and its Capital Salvador, are Afro-Brazilians but this demographic was greatly skewed when it came to representation at tertiary institutions. Afro-Brazilians are about 75% of the population in Bahia and Salvador but less than 20% are to be found in tertiary institutions. Drawing from Steve Biko’s writings, they designed a program that sought to teach pre-university Afro-Brazilians in the subjects that prepare them to pass university entry examination with the focus on mathematics, science, technology and professionalism.

It is interesting to note that Paulo Freire’s own life under the military dictatorship that came into power in Brazil in 1964, foretold what would happen to Steve Biko in the 1970s in South Africa. Freire was subjected to rigorous interrogation by the military police

and accused of being a communist. He was thrown into jail and his writings were confiscated and was eventually exiled. In South Africa, Steve Biko was also harassed by the Apartheid system, banned, his writings declared subversive, detained and eventually killed in police custody.

This is a tale of two outstanding individuals who have exerted groundbreaking revolutionary influence in their individual countries, as well as in our two countries. They were condemned to the same set of treatment by the two oppressive regimes in their respective countries. These are some of the intangibles, but highly impactful human sacrifices and great contributions in ideas and activism that today continue to bind Brazil and South Africa together in pursuit of the emancipation of black people and the downtrodden in general.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Brazilian engagement with Africa was reinvigorated under the leadership of President Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva during his first two terms in the presidency. President Lula also played a key role, together with South Africa’s participation in the establishment of the IBSA Dialogue Forum (India, Brazil, and South Africa) in June 2003. This forum seeks to advance the interests, not only of the three countries, but also in building bridges of cooperation with other developing and emerging economies.

In September 2009, South Africa and Brazil signed a strategic partnership agreement and a memorandum of understanding on consultation and cooperation in the areas of inter-governmental relations.

Today this Agreement is managed at Ministerial level, under the Bilateral Joint Commission.

The development of the A-Darter air-to-air missile by South Africa’s Denel, in collaboration with Brazil, is one notable example of Defense cooperation between the two countries.

There are also Agreements on:

- Extradition of Prisoners,
- Mutual Assistance between its Customs Administrations,
- Cooperation in Higher Education,
- Agreement to Avoid Double Taxation and Prevent Tax, Evasion in relation to Income Tax

- Agreement on Preferential Trade between Mercosur countries and the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU)

SACU is made up of South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini and Botswana. Much like Brazil in the MERCOSUR, South Africa plays a central role in the SACU.

The main products that SA exports to Brazil are Platinum, raw Aluminium, Pesticides, wines and services.

In South Africa we import Brazilian Poultry and red Meat, Tractors and Ferroalloys.

A number of Brazilian firms (including WEG, Tramontina and Marcopolo to name a few) are invested and maintain offices in South Africa but also have operations in other African countries, using SA as their HQ and taking advantage of South Africa's more established infrastructure and financial system.

A South African multinational company, Anglo-American, has investments worth over \$16 billion in Brazilian mining through its subsidiary, Anglo-American Brasil Limited. The airport company that manages Sao Paulo Airport, the largest in the region, is South African – ACSA (Airports Company of SA). Naspers Limited is a South African multinational internet, technology and multimedia holding company headquartered in Cape Town, with presence in Sao Paulo. Its interests extend to online retail, publishing and venture capital investment. There are also other Mining companies and companies that provide services to Mining companies.

South Africa and Brazil are active members in a number of forums and reference to just a few should suffice. As I have indicated, India, Brazil and South Africa belong to an organization called IBSA. We are excited that President Lula has pledged to revive Brazil's participation and help put IBSA back to its former vibrancy and glory.

This year, 2023, South Africa is the chair of BRICS – as you might know, BRICS is the acronym out of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Scores of BRICS-related meetings will be held in South Africa before the year is over. The heads of state Summit will be held in Johannesburg in August.

We are pleased today that many developing countries of the South are applying to join BRICS. Others are already part of the BRICS New Development Bank and its institutions. By joining BRICS these countries will not only be bringing their people into the BRICS community, but they will also be adding their huge resources and their robust economies into a common developmental agenda.

As South Africa and Africa in general, we are encouraged by Brazil's commitment

to re-engage with the African continent for a mutually beneficial developmental agenda. The establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will now facilitate Brazil's economic re-engagement and investment throughout the African continent.

We are also pleased with Brazil's partnership with Africa in the quest for reformed and democratized multilateral institutions including the United Nations and its institutions. The struggle of the South for a democratic just world order will be enhanced if we all function within democratized multilateral institutions where those that have been marginalized for far too long can earnestly find an equal voice among the league of nations.

We sincerely hope that the broad, interactive and emancipatory vision of education that Paulo Freire and Steve Biko espoused will find accommodation in your future consideration of the affairs that afflict our planet whether it is the threat to democracy, the ever-present danger of new viruses or the effects of climate change. After all, one of the fundamental missions of universities and academic institutions is to produce new visionary leaders for the world.

Obrigado! Thank You!