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**Understanding non-racialism as an emancipatory concept**

Raymond Suttner  
Rhodes University

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Over time the word non-racialism became a central principle in the struggle against apartheid. One of the challenges of the 21st century is to consider meanings of this concept. This is by no means obvious and entails operating with paradigms of 'the complex and the uncertain'.

In the main neither racism nor non-racialism were unpacked as concepts and analysed in their respective potentialities. The word race was sometimes treated by virtue of its unscientific character as important to erase from discourse. Alternatively race has been seen as part of the omnipresent realities of apartheid, but not always theorised or problematised. This was not possible in the context of struggle where immediate organisational tasks tended to limit critical analysis of some elements of understanding, though this task was undertaken to some degree in academia.

After the strategic defeat of apartheid in the 1994 'democratic breakthrough', the 1996 Constitution entrenched the principle of non-racialism but there is not clarity as to what it embraces. The paper treats non-racialism as one of a range of concepts whose meanings are contested, which can be used in limiting freedoms and also an emancipatory manner, continually enriching the potentialities of liberation.

The association of non-racialism with unity, 'social cohesion' and ideas of the nation raise questions about its capacity to be both an inclusionary and potentially exclusionary, marginalising concept.

In the eyes of some political actors and scholars non-racialism is undermined by affirmative action, Black Economic Empowerment, Africanist thinking as well as African nationalism itself. The standpoint adopted in the paper is to see a number of concepts, especially nationalism as not being capable of 'final evaluation', since its trajectories may be multifold. The paper explores these questions as well as the use of the 'race card', that is, claiming racism in order to divert attention from one or other irregularity or incite towards racially polarised thinking. The paper does not aim to prove an authoritative interpretation, but arouse debate, which is absent.