

NATIONAL SYMBOLS



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AS THE WINDS OF
POLITICAL CHANGE
SWEEP OVER SOUTH
AFRICA, THE QUESTION
OF THE RELEVANCE OF
EXISTING NATIONAL
SYMBOLS IS
INCREASINGLY UNDER
DISCUSSION.
WHILE IDEOLOGICAL
ISSUES OFTEN DOMINATE
THIS DISCUSSION,
AESTHETIC AND
PRACTICAL PRODUCTION
ASPECTS ALSO NEED TO
BE ADDRESSED IN THE
CREATION OF A NEW
NATIONAL IDENTITY.

EXISTING NATIONAL SYMBOLS, THEIR RELEVANCE, THE REJECTION OF OLD SYMBOLS AND THE SEARCH FOR NEW ARE TOPICS WHICH ARE BEING SERIOUSLY DEBATED IN OUR COUNTRY AT PRESENT. AS FLAGS, COATS OF ARMS, MONUMENTS AND ANTHEMS ARE THE BEARERS OF IDEOLOGICAL BELIEFS, THEY ARE USED BY REGIMES TO REINFORCE IDEOLOGY, AND AS SUCH MAY COME UNDER ATTACK DURING TIMES OF POLITICAL CHANGE OR UPHEAVAL.



IN REACTION TO THE BRITISH OCCUPATION OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS, A FLOOD OF PATRIOTIC FERVOUR WAS UNLEASHED IN ARGENTINA DURING THE 1980s, LEADING TO VARIOUS ATTACKS ON PUBLIC MONUMENTS HONOURING INFLUENTIAL ENGLISHMEN. THESE INCLUDED REPEATED ATTEMPTS AT BLOWING UP A REPLICA OF BIG BEN IN BUENOS AIRES WHICH HAD BEEN DONATED TO THE ARGENTINE NATION BY THE BRITISH, AS WELL AS THE FORCEFUL REMOVAL OF MONUMENTS WHICH WERE OFTEN PHYSICALLY DUMPED IN THE RIO DE LA PLATA.



AFTER THE RECENT DEMISE OF THE SOVIET UNION, VANDALS WERE REPORTED TO HAVE ATTACKED STATUES OF LENIN, THE FATHER OF THE MODERN COMMUNIST STATE, DEFACING AND TOPPLING THEM, EVEN SELLING THEM TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER. UNDER PRESIDENT GORBACHEV'S REFORMS, PAST SOVIET LEADERS LIKE STALIN AND BRESHNEV WERE ALSO DENOUNCED IN THE OFFICIAL PRESS, AND MONUMENTS AND PLAQUES IN THEIR HONOUR TAKEN DOWN.



ON THE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AS RECENTLY AS TWO YEARS AGO, STATUES OF CONFEDERATE WAR HEROES WERE VANDALIZED BY PEOPLE OPPOSED TO THE IDEA THAT SOUTHERN WAR HEROES OF THE CONFEDERATE ARMY WERE STILL BEING HONOURED, AS THOSE HEROES HAD BEEN OPPOSED TO THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY. SLOGANS LIKE 'STOP RACISM' AND 'AM I A HERO?' WERE SPRAYPAINTED ONTO THE STATUES.

THE SAME KIND OF ACTION HAS BEEN THREATENED HERE IN SOUTH AFRICA: MONUMENTS AND EVEN PLACE NAMES HONOURING DR HENDRIK VERWOERD, THE FATHER OF THE APARTHEID POLICY, ARE UNDER THREAT BY THOSE WHO WISH TO REMOVE EVERY REMINDER OF A HATED REGIME, WHILE FOLLOWERS OF DR VERWOERD HAVE LAUNCHED A CONCERTED EFFORT TO RETAIN HIS IMAGE INTACT.

WHILE SOME MAY ARGUE THAT SUCH IMAGES, MONUMENTS AND THE WHOLE RANGE OF NATIONAL SYMBOLS ARE A PART OF A NATION'S HISTORY WHICH NOTHING CAN ERASE, AND SHOULD THEREFORE BE LEFT IN PEACE, OTHERS FIND THEM TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE AS PAINFUL REMINDERS OF IDEOLOGIES WHICH HAVE CAUSED PERSONAL OR NATIONAL GRIEF.

THE NATIONAL FLAG

THE SOUTH AFRICAN FLAG HAS RECENTLY EMERGED AS A STRONGER POLITICAL SYMBOL THAN EVER BEFORE, AND A NEW ERA OF FLAG AWARENESS HAS DAWNED AMID THE TURMOIL OF CHANGE IN THIS



COUNTRY. PEOPLE ARE SEEN WEARING AND WAVING IT AT SPORTS GATHERINGS AND POLITICAL RALLIES, WHILE IT FREQUENTLY COMES UNDER ATTACK FROM OPPOSITION POLITICAL GROUPINGS.

THE FLAG HAS NEVER BEEN USED BY OUR PUBLIC TO THE SAME EXTENT THAT FLAGS LIKE THE STARS AND STRIPES OR THE UNION JACK HAVE. PERHAPS BECAUSE THE THOUGHT OF OUR FLAG ADORNING EVERYTHING FROM T-SHIRTS TO BEER MUGS WAS CONSIDERED A SIGN OF DISRESPECT, OR PERHAPS BECAUSE THE DESIGN IS TOO COMPLICATED.

WHEREAS THE USE OF THE NATIONAL COAT OF ARMS IS BOUND BY STRICT REGULATIONS, THERE IS IN FACT NO LAW WHICH FORBIDS POPULAR USE OF THE FLAG. BY DEFINITION THE NATIONAL FLAG IS AVAILABLE TO ALL CITIZENS, RATHER THAN BEING RESTRICTED TO SPECIAL OCCASIONS, SITUATIONS OR ACTIVITIES (BROWNELL 1990a: 17). PROVIDED THE SPECIFIC APPLICATION OF THE FLAG HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE OFFICE OF THE STATE PRESIDENT (EVIDENTLY A MERE FORMALITY AND A MEANS OF QUALITY CONTROL) ANYONE IS FREE TO REPRODUCE THE FLAG. HOWEVER:

SINCE THE NATIONAL FLAG SHOULD BE HELD IN HIGH ESTEEM BY ALL CITIZENS, SECTION 92 OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA CONSTITUTION ACT, 1983, ALSO CONTAINS PROVISIONS WHEREBY CONTEMPT OF AND MALICIOUS DAMAGE TO THE NATIONAL FLAG IS A PUNISHABLE OFFENCE (BROWNELL 1990b).

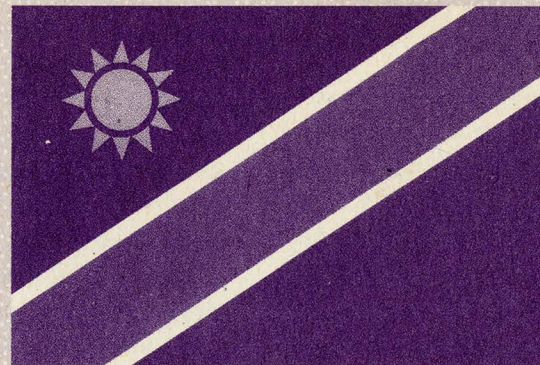
AN EFFORT AT POPULARISING THE FLAG ON AN OFFICIAL LEVEL HAS BEEN THE AWARD OF NATIONAL COLOURS TO CERTAIN REGIMENTS IN THE DEFENCE FORCE. THIS AWARD WAS INSTITUTED AFTER PW BOTHA BECAME SOUTH AFRICA'S FIRST EXECUTIVE STATE PRESIDENT IN 1984.

UNTIL 1928 SOUTH AFRICA DID NOT POSSESS ITS OWN FLAG. THE PRESENT FLAG IS A CONGLOMERATION OF VARIOUS ELEMENTS, AND DOES NOT MAKE FOR AN EXCEPTIONAL FLAG FROM A DESIGN POINT OF VIEW. THE BASIC FIELDS OF COLOUR - ORANGE, WHITE AND BLUE - WERE TAKEN FROM THE ORIGINAL DUTCH FLAG BROUGHT TO THE CAPE BY JAN VAN RIEBEECK THREE CENTURIES AGO. THE THREE SMALLER ELEMENTS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FLAG REPRESENT THE FOUR PROVINCES: THE OLD TRANSVAAL AND FREE STATE REPUBLICS ARE REPRESENTED BY THEIR RESPECTIVE FLAGS, WHILE THE CAPE COLONY AND NATAL ARE REPRESENTED BY THE UNION JACK. THE EXISTING FLAG THUS CONTAINS ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY UNTIL 1928.

A BILL WAS TABLED IN PARLIAMENT IN 1925 TO DEFINE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONALITY AND PROVIDE FOR A NATIONAL FLAG. THE THEN GOVERNOR-GENERAL, THE EARL OF ATHLONE, WAS AUTHORISED TO CALL PUBLICLY FOR DESIGNS, WHEREUPON THE *SUNDAY TIMES* SPONSORED AN UNOFFICIAL FLAG COMPETITION. THE WINNING DESIGN WAS LATER SUBMITTED TO THE FLAG COMMITTEE, BUT NO MORE WAS HEARD OF IT (BROWNELL 1990B). IN THE END, POLITICIANS MADE THE DECISION.

THE IDEA OF CALLING FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE DESIGN OF A NEW FLAG IS ONE THAT IS OFTEN EMPLOYED, AND WAS THE APPROACH ADOPTED BY NAMIBIA AT THE TIME OF ITS RECENT INDEPENDENCE.

THE NEW NAMIBIAN FLAG



THE PROCEDURE TO FIND A NEW FLAG FOR NAMIBIA INCLUDED INVITING THE GENERAL PUBLIC TO SUBMIT IDEAS IN THE FORM OF SKETCHES. A TEN POINT MEDIA RELEASE PROVIDED DETAILS TO THOSE WHO WISHED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECT. THIS RELEASE WAS DATED 10 JANUARY 1990, AND THE CLOSING DATE FOR ENTRIES WAS 19 JANUARY. DESPITE THE VERY SHORT PERIOD OF TIME ALLOWED, MORE THAN 800 SUGGESTIONS WERE RECEIVED FROM THE NAMIBIAN PUBLIC.

I QUOTE CERTAIN RELEVANT PARAGRAPHS OF THE MEDIA RELEASE REGARDING THE AIMS OF THE DECISION-MAKERS IN INVITING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, AS WELL AS SPECIFICATIONS:

3. THE STANDING COMMITTEE CONSIDERS IT OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE THAT THERE SHOULD BE MAXIMUM POSSIBLE PARTICIPATION IN THE DESIGN OF THESE SYMBOLS IN ORDER TO PROMOTE A SENSE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY. THUS EVEN THOUGH THE TIME AVAILABLE FOR THIS IS EXTREMELY LIMITED, MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ARE ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DESIGN OF THE SYMBOLS.

4. PERSONS WISHING TO SUBMIT DESIGNS FOR THE

FLAG, SHOULD ENSURE THAT THEIR DESIGN CONFORMS TO THE FOLLOWING BROAD PRINCIPLES:

- THE FLAG SHOULD PROMOTE NATIONAL UNITY.
- THE DESIGN OF THE FLAG SHOULD BE SIMPLE SO THAT
 - (A) ANY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC CAN REPRODUCE IT USING SIMPLE EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS, AND THAT
 - (B) EVEN A CHILD CAN RECOGNISABLY DRAW IT.
- THE FLAG, ALTHOUGH IT MAY CONTAIN THE COLOURS OF ANY POLITICAL PARTY WHICH REGISTERED TO TAKE PART IN THE 1989 ELECTION, MAY NOT NECESSARILY BE A REPRODUCTION OF THE FLAG OF ANY ONE OF THESE POLITICAL PARTIES.

5. PLEASE NOTE THAT THE NATURE OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE FLAG DESIGN IS NOT A COMPETITION. ALTHOUGH NO PRIZES WILL BE AWARDED, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION WILL BE DULY GIVEN WHERE APPROPRIATE. THE DECISION OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY WILL BE FINAL.

8. DESIGNS SHOULD BE SUBMITTED ON A SINGLE SHEET, A-4 SIZE, DEPICTING THE COLOURS OF THE FLAG TOGETHER WITH AN EXPLANATION OF THE SYMBOLISM OF THE COLOURS AND DESIGN CHOSEN (BROWNELL 1990A:9).

A PANEL OF SPECIALISTS APPOINTED BY THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY THEN SET TO WORK, EVALUATING THE DESIGNS RECEIVED FROM THE PUBLIC AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF DESIGN PROPOSALS WHICH HAD BEEN MADE BY FOREIGN VEXILLOLOGISTS DURING THE PRECEDING MONTHS. THIS MADE UP A TOTAL OF 835 DESIGNS. WHILE NO DESIGN WAS CHOSEN IN ITS ENTIRETY, THE MAIN TRENDS REGARDING COLOUR AND IMAGERY WERE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT AND INCORPORATED IN THE FINAL

PRESENTATION. IT WAS LEFT TO THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO DECIDE ON THE FINAL APPEARANCE OF THE FLAG AND COAT OF ARMS.

FIVE COLOURS APPEAR IN THE FINAL NAMIBIAN FLAG: A RED DIAGONAL FLANKED BY TWO NARROW WHITE DIAGONAL LINES DIVIDES THE FLAG INTO TWO REMAINING TRIANGULAR AREAS OF BLUE AND GREEN, WITH A YELLOW SUN PLACED ON THE BLUE FIELD. ALTHOUGH HERALDICALLY NOT ENTIRELY TRADITIONAL (THE SUN DISPLAYS 12 INSTEAD OF 16 POINTS, ACCORDING TO BROWNELL) THE FINAL DESIGN AND COLOURS PLEASED THE MAJORITY OF ROLE PLAYERS. THE FLAG WAS ENTHUSIASTICALLY RECEIVED BY THE NAMIBIAN PEOPLE, MARKING THE SUCCESSFUL END OF A TRULY DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.

IN INTRODUCING THE FLAG, MR HAMUTENYA, CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL SYMBOLS SUB-COMMITTEE, ATTRIBUTED THE FOLLOWING SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE TO EACH OF THE COLOURS:

THE COLOUR RED ... REPRESENTS NAMIBIA'S MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCE, ITS PEOPLE. IT REFERS TO THEIR HEROISM AND THEIR DETERMINATION TO BUILD A FUTURE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL; THE WHITE IN THE FLAG REFERS TO PEACE AND UNITY; THE COLOUR GREEN SYMBOLIZES NAMIBIA'S VEGETATION AND AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES; THE BLUE IN THE FLAG IS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CLEAR NAMIBIAN SKY AND THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, THE COUNTRY'S PRECIOUS WATER RESOURCES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF RAIN; AND THE GOLDEN-YELLOW SUN REPRESENTS LIFE AND ENERGY (BROWNELL 1990:22).

A FLAG FOR A NEW SOUTH AFRICA

THERE ARE MANY AND DIVERGENT OPINIONS WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA AS TO THE BEST APPROACH TO FINDING A NEW SET OF NATIONAL SYMBOLS. THE FACT THAT WE SIMULTANEOUSLY EMBODY FIRST AND THIRD WORLD CHARACTERISTICS LEADS TO THE FOLLOWING DEBATE: SOME BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD ADHERE TO STRICT HERALDIC GUIDELINES IN THE DESIGN OF NEW SYMBOLS, WHILE OTHERS BELIEVE THAT A MORE LIBERAL DISREGARD OF PAST STANDARDS WOULD BE APPROPRIATE. WHATEVER THE APPROACH, THERE ARE CERTAIN PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS, APART FROM THE IDEOLOGICAL ONES, TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHEN DESIGNING A FLAG.

- THESE INCLUDE THE FACT THAT A FLAG IS ULTIMATELY A PLIABLE PIECE OF FABRIC WHICH IS USUALLY SEEN AS A KINETIC/MOVING DESIGN, VIEWED AT A DISTANCE AGAINST VARIOUS BACKGROUNDS.
- LIGHT BACKGROUNDS DISAPPEAR AGAINST A LIGHT SKY-A FACT WHICH MIGHT BE USED TO ADVANTAGE VIZ. THE CANADIAN AND JAPANESE FLAGS.
- THOUGHT MUST BE GIVEN TO THE COMBINATION OF COLOURS: CERTAIN COLOURS, WHEN PLACED NEXT TO ONE ANOTHER, MAY BECOME INDISTINGUISHABLE, ESPECIALLY TWO DARK SHADES ADJACENT TO ONE ANOTHER. A WHITE AREA OR LINE MAY SERVE TO DIVIDE AND BETTER DEFINE COLOURS. ACCORDING TO THE BASIC RULES OF HERALDRY, '...METAL SHOULD NOT BE LAID ON METAL AND COLOUR SHOULD NOT BE LAID ON COLOUR' (BARRACLOUGH 1965:15). THIS MEANS THAT WHITE/SILVER SHOULD NOT BE PLACED NEXT TO YELLOW/GOLD, AND THAT WHITE/SILVER SHOULD SEPARATE ANY OTHER COLOURS IN ORDER TO KEEP THEM CLEARLY VISIBLE.
- INTRICATE DETAIL IS NOT CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE ON A FLAG. THIS IS ONE OF THE MAIN OBJECTIONS TO THE DESIGN OF OUR PRESENT FLAG.
- PROPORTION/COMPOSITION IS AN ALL IMPORTANT

ASPECT OF FLAG DESIGN TO ENSURE A SATISFYING BALANCE.

- THE MOST IMPORTANT SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS ARE TRADITIONALLY PLACED CLOSEST TO THE FLAGPOLE.
- THE QUESTION OF THE EVENTUAL MANUFACTURE OF THE FLAG ALSO HAS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT. AS FLAGS ARE USUALLY SCREEN PRINTED, THOUGHT MUST BE GIVEN TO THE NUMBER OF SCREENS THAT WILL BE NEEDED TO PRINT THE FLAG IF MONEY IS A CONSIDERATION (AND IT USUALLY IS). THE NAMIBIAN FLAG, FOR EXAMPLE, CAN BE PRINTED USING ONLY TWO SCREENS, DESPITE THE FACT THAT IT CONTAINS FIVE COLOURS.

WHILE ALL OR MOST DECISION-MAKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA AGREE THAT WE NEED NEW NATIONAL SYMBOLS, THE TASK AT HAND IS DAUNTING, CONSIDERING THE VAST SPECTRUM OF POLITICAL FEELING PRESENT IN THE COUNTRY. SOUTH AFRICA WITH ITS MULTITUDE OF PARTIES AND VISUAL SYMBOLS POSES A CHALLENGE TO THOSE WHO WILL EVENTUALLY DESIGN ITS NEW NATIONAL SYMBOLS. ONE CAN ONLY HOPE THAT A NEW FLAG WILL TRULY REFLECT THE ENERGY AND VITALITY OF OUR COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE, AND WILL SERVE TO PROMOTE MUCH NEEDED UNITY AND NATIONAL PRIDE.

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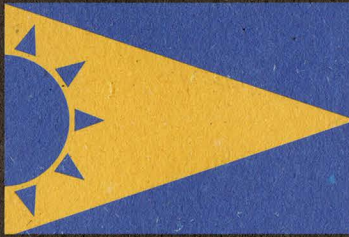
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& *Free* Formal INTERPRETATION

Second year design students of the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Pretoria were recently given a project which required them to design two proposals for a new national flag.



In the design of the first flag, students were asked to incorporate the existing colours and symbols of the various political groupings, trying to come up with a compromise that would satisfy most, if not all role players. The second flag was a free interpretation of what students thought would be most appropriate to promote unity and a sense of pride, ignoring heraldic guidelines and accepted symbols, merely designing an aesthetically pleasing flag.

For the first flag, heraldic guidelines explained by the Chief Herald, Mr Fred Brownell, were adhered to. The second flag followed the brief of Mr Ernst de Jong, Pretoria designer and founder member of the Blue Sky group, who is of the opinion that the design of the flag should be left to people in the design profession, disregarding stereotypical heraldic guidelines.

