

State of the Nation Book Launch Report

Title of the Book: Ethics Politics Inequality: New directions

Volume Editors: Narnia Bohler-Muller, Crain Soudien and Vasu Reddy

Date: 20 July 2021

Time: 14.00 – 16.00

Venue: Virtual webinar on Zoom

Background to the Book Launch Report

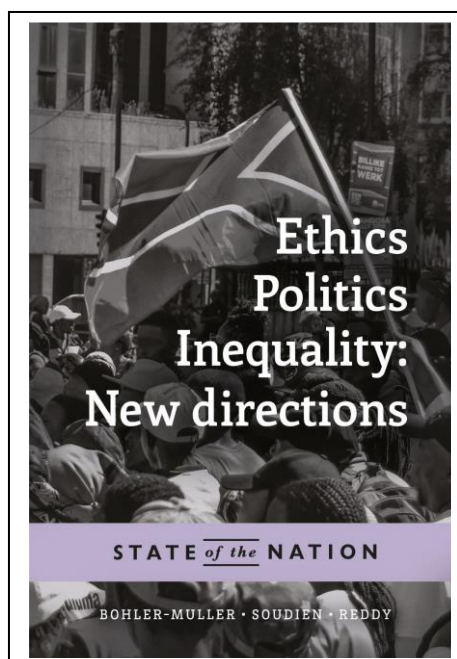
The State of Nation 2020 volume focuses on ethics and politics in South Africa's struggle against poverty and inequality. The basic issues ignited by an ethical perspective point to what poverty is, preferred remedies, how responsibility is distributed, and priorities in the delivery of assistance. Aligned to these issues are some questions such as (1) what is poverty and how is it measured; (2) what are the causes and consequences of poverty? (3) Do the wealthy have a moral duty to reduce poverty? (4) What should the role of state and society be in reducing poverty? The volume is divided into six sections which each speak to the main theme, internally and in the volume at large.

Section 1 titled 'Politics and the State' delves into the role of the state in tackling developmental issues. As mentioned above, discourse(s) on politics and the state facilitate the unmasking and disclosure of certain problematic areas, while bringing to the fore more meaningful interventions—through equality and ethics— in scholarly and practical ways. This section explores ethical State concepts with a specific focus on topics such as the electoral system, accountability, women and land, leadership, and socio-economic rights.

Section 2 examines two contemporary challenges facing the South African economy: the national minimum wage, and progressive taxation. Both important issues prompt us to consider how to effect real transformation of the South African economy that makes it more equitable. The **third section** on 'Society' commences with the important issue of the constitutional right to food – brought into sharp relief during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section 4 thematises 'Well-being and identity' and focuses on processes in life domains that impact diverse social markers in reducing inequalities and is shaped by two chapters. The broad strands of insights in this section are concerned with the interplay of social problems and their relevance for personal and social identity and well-being.

Building on the previous section, it is difficult to separate 'Identity and well-being' from the section titled '**Culture**' (**Section 5**) as they are so closely interrelated. While an appreciation for cultural processes is far from universal among social inequality researchers, cultural causes and consequences of inequality have strongly influenced thinking in this area.



Finally, in **Section 6** ('South and the World') poverty and inequality are viewed in a continental and global context and the challenge of building an ethical world order and social solidarity in a time of COVID-19. The rise of populism and conservative politics expressed in 'Trumpism' and a return to nationalism as seen in Brexit has challenged the foundation of a progressive world order. Thus, contemporary international politics play out in what could be seen as an age of increased uncertainty, which may result in increased tensions or cooperation to deal with and eventually to prevent a global crisis of the scale experienced in 2020.

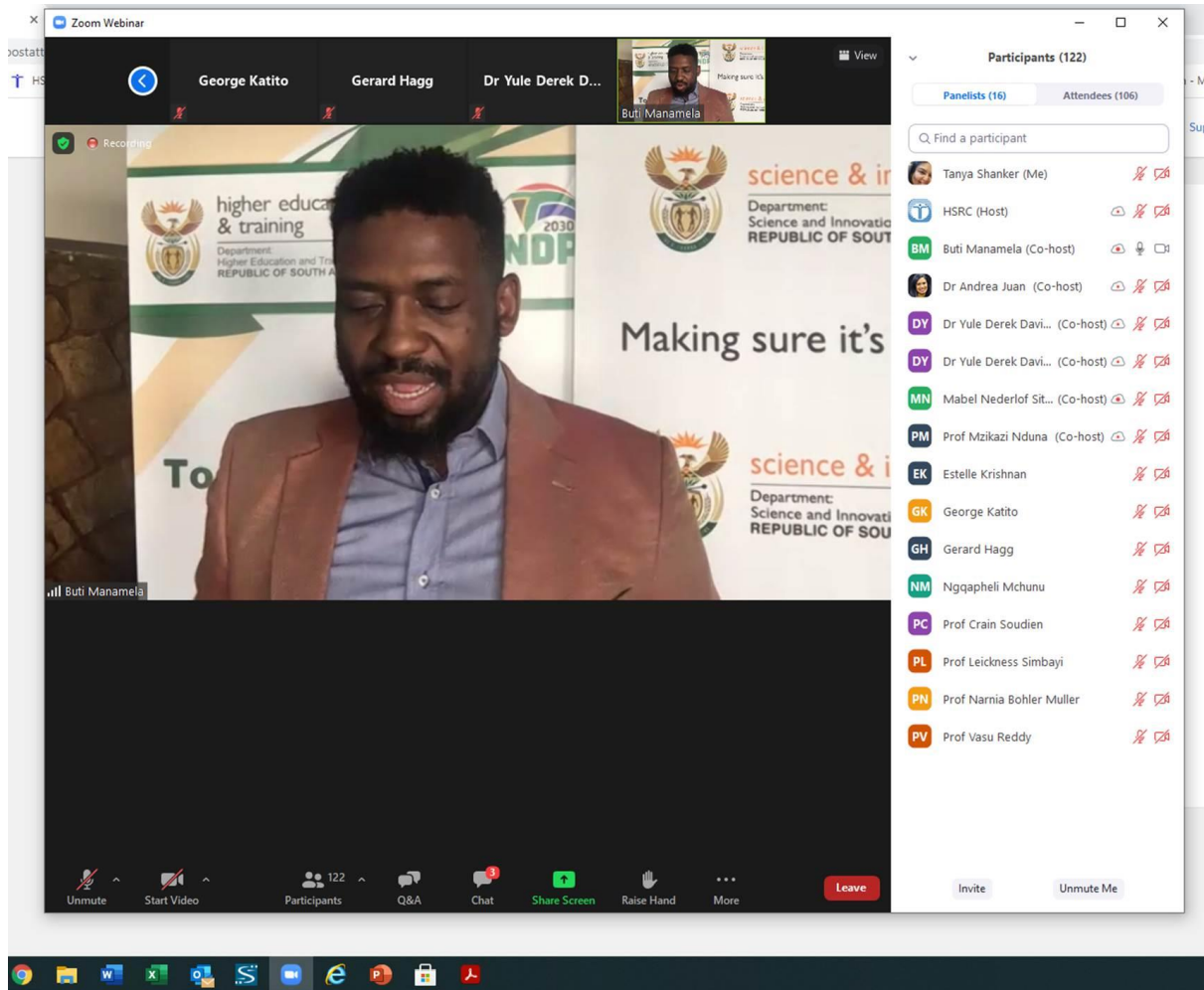
Purpose of the Book Launch

The main purpose of the SON Book launch is to inform the general-public, policy makers, scholars, students and the media about the findings presented in the book. The marketing of the publication is important to ensure wide media coverage and encourage debates on key national issues by leading figures in the academic community, members of government and civil society groups. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged South Africa on many fronts, but it also provided the HSRC with the opportunity to enhance our online and social media platforms to greater heights. The HSRC therefore used these platforms to increase its engagement with its SON readers and to stimulate debate among its target market. The longstanding Open Access policy of the HSRC Press also ensured that this research is freely available within the public domain, thus contributing to the empowerment of readers who are usually excluded from high-level publications (www.hsrcpress.ac.za).

Launch Programme:

The programme started with a welcoming by the Acting CEO of the HSRC Prof Leickness Simbayi and keynote address by the Deputy Minister Mr Buti Manamela (see Appendix A for notes on the keynote address). This was followed by a panel discussion and a question-and-answer sessions. See below the programme invitation.

LAUNCH PROGRAMME: STATE OF THE NATION 2021 BOOK LAUNCH	
No.	ITEM
1.	Welcome Professor Vasu Reddy (Programme Director) Professor Leickness Simbayi (Acting CEO HSRC)
2.	Keynote speaker Minister Dr BE Nzimande (Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation)
3.	Panel Discussion Topic: Ethics and Accountability Professor Narnia Bohler-Muller (Facilitator) <i><u>Panellists</u></i> Ms Mabel Sithole (Politics) Mr. Ngqapheli Mchunu (Public Perceptions) Dr Andrea Juan (Education) Dr Mzikazi Nduna (Health)
4.	Discussion All (Q&A)
5.	Thank you. Dr Yul Derek Davids



Report compiled by Yul Derek Davids

28 September 2021

Appendix A

Notes for the keynote speech of the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation

1. The State of the Nation 2021 Book is presented against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted countries in various ways. The devastating impact of the pandemic has forced governments worldwide to implement lockdown measures to protect its citizens. South Africa is also currently confronted with the destruction of public and private property as well as acts of violence that are damaging our democracy and economy. Undoubtedly, the pandemic and volatile climate across the country has intensified the debate about our high levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality.
2. State of the Nation 2021 therefore offers an opportunity to revisit the immense challenges of understanding and mitigating poverty and inequality within the South African context, through the lenses of accountability and ethics of care. Let us start with the two lenses, and then apply them to the dreadful conditions of poverty and inequality. In this process I would like to focus on the special role of the social sciences in exploring causes and trends, and mitigation opportunities and challenges, and through this information support the State and society to accept the practice of accountability and ethical care.
3. Accountability has become a key term, both within the State and in the wider context of South African society. The word is continuously being used by government leadership and shows government is serious about ensuring accountability. For example, the State of the Nation Address of 2021 refers to the Executives' performance agreements, and the Auditor-General's reports refer to accountability of local municipal executives. Numerous judicial processes over the past few years show that no man is above the law, and officials and civilians remain accountable for their actions.
4. Ethics and ethical care are more complex concepts that take us into the fields of Constitutional development, philosophy, religion, morality, behaviour and humanities. Ethical care is the underlying principle in the Preamble of our Constitution and the National Development Plan. Ubuntu and neighbourly love are ethically-driven. Xenophobia shows what happens when ethics is ignored. Two devastating cases where ethics failed were the Marikana conflict and the Life Esidemeni tragedy.
5. Applying the accountability and ethical care lenses to poverty and inequality highlights tensions between right and wrong, suffering and sacrificing, sharing and greed. As we live in a country with extreme poverty and inequality, resolving these tensions often place us before dilemmas that require decisions, policies and practices with consequences in which suffering cannot be completely resolved. In many cases, just like the Covid-19 pandemic in which we currently live, we just do not know and understand the complexities of the situation, the forces that play dominant roles and how these processes unfold over time. Let alone then that we have adequate answers to the myriad questions, and especially answers that show the links to accountability and ethical care. One example of this complexity is social responses to Covid-19 regulations and vaccination. Why is it that communities and individuals resist regulations that aim at protecting their lives? Why are such high numbers of people still refusing or reluctant to wear a mask or to be vaccinated? Another example is the poor state of accountability in local government, despite years of capacity building and support of officials, and continuous messages that services have a cost to each consumer? And in response to the recent unrest and looting of shops, the question is what is underlying this

unrest and what brought people to the point of unbridled looting and destroying infrastructure? It is here where the social and human sciences, and particularly social science research, play a major contributing role.

6. The State of the Nation Book provide some deep insights into poverty and inequality and the ethics of care that is much needed to help us avoid or reduce the challenges we are facing now. In this regard, please refer to Chapter 1 the first two paragraphs of the Conclusion on page 18 (see below for text).

Conclusions (first two paragraphs of Chapter 1 on page 18)

Profound socioeconomic transformations within the last few decades have resulted in multilayered inequalities and a sense of insecurity, resulting in a shared feeling of precariousness among South Africans – and now people across the world who are facing the same fears and challenges. Throughout this argument, we have pursued perspectives oriented towards a corporeal responsibility regarding inequalities and poverty, demanding greater intervention that crystallises with particular intensity within an ethics of care. Our view suggests that epistemological, ontological and affective interventions in countering poverty and equality reside in acts of strategic mediation that curb, counter and contain the challenges. Inequalities and poverty are visible – now more than ever – and operate as markers that are impossible to fully eradicate. They require a multipronged approach.

For one, care as a disposition, as motivated, is represented and constructed in multiple and diverse relational contexts that structure needs, desires and relations of power. We thus deduce that the nature of care responses helps us to find correctives to social problems. In our view, relations of care are complex and deeply contested and may not always be inherently positive. However, part of the challenge of a care ethos (which we have formulated as a responsibility in the intertwined relations between the state, its actors/agents and citizens) is to consider opportunities and challenges relating to the conditions under which relations can, and often do, become relations of domination, oppression, injustice, inequality or paternalism. These tendencies are what we wish to counter with regard to poverty and inequalities.

7. The Launch is therefore an important platform to engage with evidence about possible ways how the human and social science community can respond to the pandemic and challenges such as poverty and inequality. We should also ask how can research such as these contribute to solutions? What is the relationship between the research sector and the political sector and how can research be effectively fed into the political and administrative domains?