

MAX DU PREEZ

A Rumour *of* Spring

*South Africa after
20 Years of Democracy*



1

Multiply wounded, multiply traumatised

'I would stop talking about the past, if it weren't so present.'

~ Central African Republic politician Barthélemy Boganda, 1910–1959

Only an arrogant fool (and I know a few) can be confident that his or her analysis of what is happening in our country and what it will lead to is correct.

I am confident in stating only one thing as fact, and I think this should be understood before we examine the state of our nation twenty years on. We South Africans – the political parties, government, business, civil society – have hugely underestimated the real impact and legacy of colonialism and apartheid.

It's as simple as this: if we had succeeded in overcoming our bitter past during the last two decades, we would most definitely not be facing the problems threatening our future right now.

I will investigate in the chapters that follow what the ANC government has done to dismantle that legacy since 1994. But without even considering its successes and failures, the evidence relating to the mentality and attitudes of the different racial and ethnic groups, unemployment, inequality, education, health, policing, crime and xenophobia suggests that most of us didn't fully appreciate the lasting harm the decades before 1994 had inflicted.

Most of us, including the ANC, have also overestimated how quickly the former liberation movement would be able to adapt from running a resistance movement, mostly from outside the borders, to managing a modern democracy and economy.

My problem with the present crop of ANC leaders is that they use apartheid as an *excuse* for bad governance rather than as a considered *explanation* for persistent problematic trends.

We saw this in the reaction to senior cabinet minister Trevor Manuel's remarks to the government leadership summit in April 2013 when he said:

'We should no longer say it's apartheid's fault. We should get up every morning and recognise that we have responsibility. There's no Botha regime looking over our shoulder, we are responsible ourselves.' Completely ignoring the context of his remarks, elements in COSATU and the SACP attacked him as a reactionary and a maverick.

President Zuma seemed to join them when he said shortly afterwards that it was a 'mistake, to say the least' to say that the government should stop blaming apartheid.

In a lengthy critique of Manuel's statement, SACP deputy general secretary Jeremy Cronin took a swipe at the economic policies Manuel had championed, but made the distinction between using the past as excuse rather than explanation.

He wrote in *Unsebenzi Online*: 'We have to take active and collective responsibility for transforming our country, but in order to do so we also need to understand the continued, systemic impact of a colonial, semi-colonial and apartheid past upon the present.' It is hard to disagree with that.

All of us, but especially white South Africans, should re-examine the legacies of generations of minority domination and apartheid on our people – on whites too – if we want to understand our society properly.

I have often contemplated what went wrong in our society that would explain the humiliating treatment given to helpless patients by nurses in state hospitals we read about so often; the teachers at township schools who neglect their work and go on strike at the drop of a hat; the policemen who abuse and rape and torture. Ditto the rape of babies, the scourge of child abuse, the hate-filled attacks on citizens of other African states, the extreme violence accompanying many criminal acts, the depressing sense of entitlement among so many, and the massive problems of drug abuse and gangsterism.

How should we understand the phenomenon of the *izikhothane*, the township youngsters from poor homes who have 'dissing' contests, showing off the most expensive designer clothes and shoes before destroying them to say, 'Check it out, I have more where that came from' (see box on pages 9–10)?

In fact, how should we understand the irrational paranoia of so many whites, some of them intelligent, even sophisticated, who still believe that black South Africans can't wait to rape or kill them and are waging genocide against white farmers, despite all the information that disproves these fears?

The terror of violent oppression during the last decade of apartheid, including attacks on ANC camps in neighbouring states, the Border War culture and the violent nature of the resistance to apartheid played no small

role. The 'ungovernability' campaigns of the 1980s (remember the more than five hundred necklacings?) and the military campaign of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), as well as the conditions in MK camps in Angola and elsewhere, have surely left many deep scars.

Those who lick

A group of about fifty Soweto youngsters are gathered in a circle, all dressed in designer jeans, T-shirts and shoes. They brag about their expensive clothes with labels such as Armani, Rossi Moda and Murachini, taking jibes at each other.

A young man enters the circle. He empties a bucket of KFC chicken pieces on the ground and stomps on them with his R2000 Carvela loafers. He sprays lighter fluid over the food and sets it alight. Then he takes his Carvelas off and burns them too. He performs his 'gloating dance' and is greeted with wild cheers. Some of the smiles show shiny gold teeth.

On another day in a park in Thokoza, a teenage girl takes off her Prada T-shirt, throws it in the middle of a circle of youngsters and burns it. Another teenager pours the contents of a bottle of Johnnie Walker Blue whisky over the fire. Not to be outdone, his friend throws down his smartphone and jumps on it. The group laughs, dances and shouts.

This is the world of the *izikhothane*, 'those who lick'.

They're not rich kids. Many are the children of domestic, shop or factory workers struggling to make ends meet. Some of the teenagers do loose jobs on weekends, some resort to petty crime, others blackmail their parents into giving them money.

Some call it a desperate quest for individualism, others say it is a search for self-value or an attempt to escape the squalid uniformity of the townships. '*Izikhothane* will borrow Armani's name and Diesel's reputation, until they can make one of their own,' says writer Lindokuhle Nkosi.

Lebo Motshegoa, who does research into the black consumer market, says it's about extreme waste. The youngsters' message is 'I have more where this comes from'.

Clinical psychologist Simpfiwe Sinkoyi was quoted as saying the *izikhohane* have paid no thought to the psychology behind what they're doing. 'It's tempting to think of *izikhohane* as some kind of nihilistic reaction to a rampantly consumerist culture, a negation of the power that "stuff" has over us. But really it comes off as an exaggerated homage to consumerism, the desperate quest for individualism that ties its success to brand names and price tags.'

'It is a search for self-value, not notoriety. When all the romanticism has been sucked out of the ghetto, when history's lessons have stripped you of what should be inherent self-respect, dignity is inferred.'

A sixteen-year-old Grade 9 pupil called Keflwe was quoted in a newspaper report saying: '*Izikhohane* is a big thing. If you're not part of it, you're nothing. We have to spend in order to impress. I'm famous, many people know me.' Her friend Thandi said it was a 'celebration of life'.

It is a big thing. In 2012 fourteen-year-old Kamohelo Tsimane of Thathogang Primary School in Soweto hanged himself after his father told him he could not afford to buy his son a pair of Carvela shoes for R1 200.

But this kind of seemingly senseless, destructive behaviour is not restricted to young people from the townships. Kenny Kunene is a prominent member of Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters. He is also known as the 'sushi king' after publicly eating sushi off the naked bodies of young women. He once poured the contents of a bottle of expensive French champagne over the exhaust of a high-revving Harley-Davidson to also show he 'had more where this comes from'.

Malema defended Kunene at a press conference in Braamfontein in August 2013, saying his behaviour can be ascribed to a 'damaged mentality' inflicted upon him by apartheid when he was a child.

Malema, brought up by a single domestic-worker mother, could have referred to himself. While still leader of the ANC Youth League, he paraded around in super-expensive clothes, wore a Breitling watch worth R250 000 and a R4 000 Louis Vuitton man bag, and drove several cars, each worth more than R600 000.

It's all seriously messed up, isn't it?

Of course, all societies have their social ills, criminal tendencies and fringe groups. Not everything that is going wrong in our society can be blamed on apartheid. Present and past political, religious, cultural and community leadership certainly also contributed to some of our present negative tendencies.

But after I read about the experiences of Nicaraguan psychologist Martha Cabrera, I became convinced that we should consider that South Africa is also a 'multiply wounded, multiply traumatised, multiply mourning' country, as she called Nicaragua, with serious implications for our social fabric, development and sense of hope. Her work really tallied with my experiences with victims and survivors during my close association with our own Truth and Reconciliation process.

Nicaragua had been plagued by crisis upon crisis for decades with bloody civil wars, dictatorships, economic hardship and natural disasters. Among these events are an earthquake in 1972; the war in the 1970s to overthrow the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle; the Contra War of the 1980s; the devastation of Hurricane Mitch in 1998.

Cabrera and her team launched an 'affective and spiritual reconstruction' campaign in Nicaragua in 1997. Workshops, training and counselling were given in virtually every community in the country.

But then Cabrera paused and wondered why the results of all their work were so poor. 'Why, despite so much training, were people not responding to the seriousness of the problems? Why aren't they mobilising and making demands?' she wrote in an article in Nicaragua's *Envío* magazine in 2002.

The answer dawned on her while they were working on the emotional recovery of the survivors of Hurricane Mitch. People did want to talk about their immediate losses, but had an even greater need to talk about traumas they had never talked about before. They wanted to talk about their suffering after the earthquake, their oppression by dictators, the bloody civil wars, the exodus of so many to exile in Honduras and elsewhere, rape, domestic violence, poverty and health problems.

Cabrera and her team created spaces in which people could talk about all their painful experiences and traumas – the 'inventory of wounds', as she calls them.

'We worked a whole year after Mitch with those affected by the hurricane and found an enormous amount of losses, of personal and community wounds that had not been processed or even brought into the open, and thus had not been surmounted, which was the worst part', she says.

'For a variety of reasons, including the quick succession of dramatic and traumatic events in Nicaragua, people had been unable to work through their

experiences. When we asked people to reflect on the impact of what they had suffered and how they had dealt with it, the first thing we discovered was that they never had enough time to process it.'

Cabrera says when a person does not or cannot work through a trauma right away, 'its social consequences, the most frequent of which are *apathy, isolation and aggressiveness*, are only revealed over time' (my italics). She says accumulated pain leads to a diminished capacity to communicate, to be flexible and tolerant, and to accept change.

Cabrera's conclusions are supported by Caitlin Fouratt, a fieldworker studying Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica and their families back home, writing in the American Anthropological Association's online journal *Anthropology News* in July 2013. Referring to the series of traumas in Nicaragua, she writes: 'The people of Nicaragua have experienced these wounds as widespread unemployment, skyrocketing levels of crime, violence and domestic abuse.'

Anything sound familiar to you?

Think of the enormous dispossession of land and its ramifications, culminating in the 1913 Natives Land Act. Think of the devastating consequences to families and communities of the migrant labour system (which still continues – we'll talk about Marikana later). Think of the trauma of forced removals; the humiliation of pass laws; the psychological damage inflicted by treating generations of black South Africans as humans of lesser worth and capability; Bantu education; the 'Whites Only' signs on public amenities; police brutality; the torture and killing of anti-apartheid activists; and the ceiling put on black development by job reservation.

I have no doubt that it would be fair to say South Africa is also a 'multiply wounded, multiply traumatised' country. A lot of our fellow citizens present similar symptoms to those of traumatised Nicaraguans: anger, apathy, aggression, violence, lack of direction and ambition, domestic abuse, and so on.

The moment of liberation in 1994 with former prisoner Nelson Mandela at the helm must have brought some sense of justice to most black South Africans.

But Mandela did not have the inclination or luxury of indulging black South Africans in their enjoyment of a successful revolution. There could be no triumphant march to the Union Buildings by armed MK soldiers; no exuberant psychological release for the former oppressed; no Nuremberg-type war-crime trials to still the need for justice.

Mandela had to guard our stability and make the transition smooth and peaceful, which meant he had to concentrate on reassuring the white minority

and the business community, on 'nation building' and on presenting us as a stable, progressive democracy to the world – a world that was expecting the worst. He even flew to that island of Afrikaner exclusivity, the whites-only town of Orania, to have tea with the widow of one of the most hated apartheid prime ministers (who was head of government when Mandela was sent to jail), Hendrik Verwoerd.

The new government even had to include the last apartheid president, F.W. de Klerk, and some of his ministers in the new cabinet. The heads of the new police service, defence force and Reserve Bank also came from the old order.

Not much symbolism to satisfy a revolutionary thirst or even a magical moment to make you feel your suffering was worthwhile, was there?

What is more, Mandela and his *de facto* prime minister, Thabo Mbeki, had little choice but to keep the economy structurally intact.

So once the festivities were over, most people's lives returned to what they had been before liberation. Most of the poor were still poor. Most black South Africans still lived in townships, squatter camps or neglected rural areas. Most of their children still went to bad township schools. Few had the prospects of a good job and a good life. Millions moved from traditional areas (the former Bantustans) to the cities after 1994, where most of them still live in misery and struggle to cope with the change to life in the city.

Most whites were still materially comfortable and some still super rich. Most of them still lived in neat suburbs and drove good cars. Most of their children went to excellent schools and good universities. The Afrikaners' language started thriving more than any other indigenous language. Whites still occupied most of the land.

The Founding Manifesto of the EFF, issued on 25 July 2013, puts it like this: 'Those who fought the gallant wars of resistance did so to resist forced dispossession of land, wealth, livestock and heritage, which they cherished and inherited from forebears. More than 350 years later, the war of resistance has not been won, and the battles that were fought represent almost nothing, because twenty years after the formal political freedom, the black people of South Africa still live in absolute poverty, are landless, their children have no productive future, they are mistreated and they are looked down upon in a sea of wealth ... The conditions of the people are generally deplorable and show no evidence of a liberated people.'

Hyperbole, perhaps, and easy to poke holes in, especially as the EFF is

headed by the most infamous tenderpreneur, Julius Malema, and counts crass playboy and celebrity Kenny Kunene as one of its members.

But my guess is that the vast majority of black South Africans would support every word of the above excerpt.

The very next day, on 26 July 2013, ANC member of Parliament and leader of the Young Communist League of South Africa, Buti Manamela, said in his Political Report to the Second National Council of the League: 'As we walk towards twenty years since the democratic breakthrough in 1994, myth making at the expense of the youth has become a national pastime. Everyone will have us believe that those born when Madiba was released are the Born Free generation. Born Frees who supposedly have no memory or inkling of apartheid colonialism.'

Let me debunk this myth for the ahistorical nonsense that it is. The concept is ideologically fraudulent and is littered with inconsistencies. It essentially suggests that the struggle ended in 1994 whereas we know that the struggle continues.

'Just ask the millions who still don't have jobs, who still live in apartheid's spatial planning spending the bulk of their meagre wages on transport and food, who can't get loans to pilot start-ups, no matter how good their ideas, just ask the young graduates who still struggle to get into the corporate world never mind climb the ladder. For all of us who battle every day to make a living – it is *always* *continua*.

'We will only be born free if the hospitals we are born in have facilities of the same but better quality; if the crèches and pre-schools we go to have the same but better quality menu of education, quality teachers and quality nutrition; if the schools we get to attend have libraries, computer labs and science labs; if we all have equal chances of graduating at Grade 12 with better quality skills and equal access to further and higher education and training; if we have equal opportunities for work and employment and our qualifications are of a better quality; if we are all born into families who can bequeath inheritances of land and pensions or life covers.

'The truth is we are not all at the same starting line. Those who fail to see how the past inequalities fester in the present and will, unless addressed, explode in the future, are wilfully blind. Put differently, they don't want to see.

'The Born Frees will exist if we live under socialism and we have fully achieved the transition to communism, then we will be regarded as, for the first time, free.

'If it is demanded of us to forego our parents' memory and their visible scars of apartheid, is it not time we also ask those who demand from us to forget that they too forego their inheritances which were in most cases ill-disadvantaging others. It is cynical to denounce apartheid as an evil past whilst they enjoy the benefits they accrued under the same system without an iota of guilt and a sense of collective responsibility for what Verwoerd, Botha and De Klerk committed in their name!'

Again, easy to dismiss as rhetoric, but in my view a good reflection of the thinking of most politically active black youngsters. Manamela is one of the crown princes of the ANC and regarded as one of the upcoming intellectuals in the Tripartite Alliance – he even has his own talk show on Power FM. He is also a member of the Politburo of the SACP, Zuma's staunchest ally.

So now, twenty years after liberation, not having dealt properly with our past, the symptoms of our multiple wounds and traumas still manifest.

A small number of people (about two thousand) were given the opportunity to deal with their pain and trauma when they appeared before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). I was in charge of the television coverage of the TRC and met many of these people before and after they gave their testimony. Most of them felt huge relief, even closure, because they felt they were being heard and respected for the first time. I suspect many with similar experiences who did not appear before the TRC but who witnessed the process also felt some relief.

But the TRC dealt only with victims, relatives of victims or survivors of gross human-rights violations (severe assault, torture, kidnapping and murder) between 1960 and 1994. Because of the nature and political environment of the TRC and its narrow focus, it could not deal with the broader psychological trauma of apartheid.

The potential healing impact of the TRC process was further undermined by the Afrikaner and broader white establishment's negative reaction to it. The damage done by the denialist and hostile appearances of National Party (NP) politicians and police and defence-force generals before the TRC is, in my considered opinion, grossly underestimated by most. Former defence minister Magnus Malan's and law and order minister Adriaan Vlok's denials of all knowledge of wrongdoing by soldiers and policemen in the turbulent 1980s were particularly insulting.

The Afrikaans newspapers took a decision not to accept the TRC's

invitation to testify. They had a lot to answer for: decades of almost blind support for the NP and for apartheid and, more seriously, violating all journalistic ethics by pushing the propaganda of the police and the military without question.

Historian Hermann Giliomee told a meeting of Democratic Alliance functionaries on 15 May 2013 that the board of *Naspers* (the owners of most Afrikaans newspapers and magazines) had been undecided on whether or not they should turn down the TRC invitation to participate. Then a director 'with many decades of experience in courts and human foibles, Jeff Malherbe, swayed them with these words: 'Never bat on your opponents' pitch.'

I find this astonishing. Cynical, arrogant and short-sighted. It wasn't the ANC's TRC; it was a commission of the people of South Africa, a compromise to avoid going the Nuremberg route. (The ANC wanted the TRC's final report to be suppressed, remember?)

Or were the majority of the nation Malherbe and Co.'s 'opponents'? Under the circumstances, especially with its generous amnesty provisions, the TRC was the very best the Afrikaner establishment could have hoped for. There simply wasn't any possibility of not doing anything about the past, pretending it never happened. It was a special opportunity for all of us to look each other in the eye and deal with our history, so we could walk towards a new society less burdened by the injustices that had been perpetrated.

And the TRC was headed by a fair-minded, generous and brave man of great integrity, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, not by some wild political commissar from MK.

(I have to mention that a number of young Afrikaans journalists did distance themselves from their bosses' decision. I was proud of them.)

There was someone who could have made a huge difference, using this unique, once-off moment in history to talk to black South Africans from the heart on behalf of Afrikaners and whites past and present: Frederik Willem de Klerk. Not only about fifty years of apartheid, but about 350 years of colonialism in South Africa – like me and most Afrikaners, he counted among his ancestors the first Dutch settlers that arrived at the Cape from 1652 onwards, the French Huguenots that started arriving in 1671, and German and other European settlers that arrived in the decades after that. The free elections of 1994 not only marked the end of apartheid; they signified the end of white domination of the subcontinent that started when the Dutch East India Company arrived on 6 April 1652 and established a refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope.

F.W. de Klerk was more than the last apartheid president and leader of the biggest white political party. His family history was the history of Afrikaner nationalism: his great-grandfather was a senator in the Union parliament after 1910; his one grandfather was a founding member of the NP in 1914, the other a member of the Free State Provincial Council; his uncle, J.G. Strydom, the 'Lion of the North', was prime minister between 1954 and 1958; his father, Jan, was president of the senate and cabinet minister under three prime ministers; his brother Willem was one of the most influential Afrikaans intellectuals of his time.

When De Klerk appeared before the TRC in May 1997, I sat in the hall with great expectation. I sensed that Black South Africa was waiting for, almost willing, White South Africa to seize the moment. I wanted De Klerk to speak on my behalf, even though he once publicly declared with much venom that I was his enemy; and despite the fact that I have spent most of my adult life fighting apartheid, I needed him to talk on behalf of my ancestors, my family, my children and my ethnic community.

I sensed that this could be a magical moment that could unlock the forgiveness and generosity of millions who had been on apartheid's receiving end over generations. I also sensed that if De Klerk spoke from the heart and with a full realisation of the historical significance of the moment, it could have a profound effect on white South Africans, setting the tone for their engagement with the rest of society in years to come. If he knew ordinary white South Africans as he was supposed to after a lifetime in white politics, he would have realised then, three years after 1994, that most of them had little understanding of what apartheid had meant to its victims and, because of the seamlessness of the transition, thought it was business as usual, just with black faces instead of white ones in power. He should have realised that this was a dangerous state of affairs – he was, after all, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient.

He chose his words well as he started apologising to 'the millions of South Africans who had suffered the wrenching disruption of being arbitrarily deprived of their homes, businesses and land because of forced removals; who over the years had suffered the shame of being arrested for pass law offences; who over the decades – and indeed centuries – suffered the indignities and humiliation of racial discrimination; who were prevented from exercising their full democratic rights in the land of their birth; who were unable to achieve their full potential because of job reservation; and who received inadequate social, medical and education services'.

He mentioned the right things, but his speech was devoid of any emotion, of any sense of momentousness. They were the carefully considered words of a clever politician and lawyer.

It was just too clinical an apology, for something *others* had done, even though they had 'meant well' when they started apartheid, as he pointed out. My heart started sinking. Still, Tutu reacted at first by calling it 'a handsome apology'.

But then the denials started. De Klerk said he and his government didn't know about and never sanctioned any dirty tricks, torture or assassination. The torturers and killers in the police death squad at Vlakplaas, the shady Civil Cooperation Bureau and Directorate Covert Collection of the South African Defence Force (SADF), and the murderous security police units were 'a rogue minority' who had acted outside of their orders. He only learnt about them during the TRC process.

As prominent ANC leader Mathews Phosa remarked at the time: 'De Klerk sat in Pretoria and knew everything that was going on in the ANC's Quatro Camp north of Luanda, but nothing of Vlakplaas twenty kilometres away from him.'

Tutu was in tears. 'How can he just say he didn't know? When these people were killed, I went and told him about it. It makes me sad. I'm really sorry for him.'

Tutu then added to his statement that it was a 'handsome' apology: 'He spoiled it all when he qualified the apology virtually out of existence.'

Leon Wessels, who was a member of the cabinet of the last two apartheid governments, said when he appeared before the TRC: 'I do not believe the political defence of "I did not know" is available to me because in many respects I believe I did not want to know. I had my suspicions of things that had caused discomfort in official circles, but because I did not have the facts to substantiate my suspicions or I had lacked the courage to shout from the rooftops, I have to confess that I only whispered in the corridors.' Wessels later became a highly respected member of the South African Human Rights Commission.

The moment was wasted and it would never present itself again. The TRC provided the timing, political atmosphere, context and stage for white South Africans to finally acknowledge the generations of injustice and all its intended and unintended consequences, and to ask for the understanding, forgiveness and acceptance of black and brown South Africans.

I did not want De Klerk to apologise for being here in Africa. I sometimes

get the impression that some of my black compatriots want us to do that. The colonisation of southern Africa, as with the Americas, Australia and the rest of Africa, was probably historically inevitable. Our colonial history took a different route, though. Almost all the European settlers in the rest of Africa went back to the 'motherland' after their colonies became independent. Afrikaners did not have a motherland, being so diverse and mixed, with even some slave and Khoi blood. And unlike the Americas and Australia, South African whites remained a small minority. Afrikaners and many English-speaking white South Africans became Africans themselves and regarded themselves as indigenous with no other home.

We should also not fall into the easy trap of applying today's sensibilities and political sensitivities to the people who came many generations before us. But I do think it would be appropriate for us Africans with pale skins to get a proper understanding of what our early ancestors' arrival and treatment of the people they found here meant, and then to acknowledge the disruptive, disempowering and traumatic impact it had on local peoples and their spirituality and development. We should admit that apartheid and continuing white privilege flowed from the colonial era.

It's complicated, of course. With all my understanding of the devastation to local communities caused by my Voortrekker ancestors, I am still proud of being a direct ancestor of Paul Kruger, president of the Transvaal Boer Republic, and of my grandfathers (and other heroes like Koos de la Rey and Christiaan de Wet) who fought against the British Empire during the South African War of 1899–1902. They were 'freedom fighters of a special kind' (to paraphrase the old term 'colonialists of a special kind' that Thabo Mbeki was so fond of) fighting what they saw was an anti-colonialist war.

I wish more of my black compatriots could understand that a little better.

The day after it was announced that Nelson Mandela was 'critically ill', I posted a famous old Afrikaans poem on Facebook, making it applicable to Mandela. It was Jan F.E. Celliers's moving poem in honour of General Christiaan de Wet: *Stil, broers, daar gaan 'n man verby* (Be still, brothers, this is a man passing by). I was attacked in vicious and obscene language for associating a Boer general with Madiba.

Apartheid itself is closer to the bone, because most whites alive in South Africa today lived through that era, or their parents did. The vast majority of white voters supported apartheid when it became the formal state ideology after 1948, at least until P.W. Botha's last election in May 1987.

One can still try to understand why the white leaders wanted blacks to be excluded from direct political participation when the two Boer republics and the two British colonies became a Union in 1910 – the British also wanted it, and the wounds of the war were still fresh.

But that act triggered resistance by black intellectuals and leaders, for the first time across language and regional divides, and led to the founding of the forerunner of the ANC. These dignified leaders clearly articulated to Britain and the new Union leaders that there was something fundamentally wrong with excluding black people from political participation in the land of their birth.

The Natives Land Act of 1913 went further and excluded blacks from most of the land in the country – their country. Whatever your trauma or dream for your own people, this was an evil, selfish act of historic proportions. And it prepared the ground for full-blown apartheid: rigid influx control via passbooks, Bantu education, job reservation, forced racial classification, a ban on sex across racial divides. South Africa was turned into a 'white' country with the black majority shunted into Bantustans and coloured and Indian South Africans living in limbo in their own separate townships and suburbs.

So when De Klerk and others say the initiators of apartheid 'meant well' but it turned bad, I cannot but reject that with contempt. How do you 'mean well' yet restrict the black majority to 13 per cent of the land and treat proud fathers and mothers like children?

De Klerk angered many South Africans when he told CNN's Christiane Amanpour in May 2012 that, as a young politician, he believed 'that the problems of South Africa could be justly resolved by recognising the right of all South Africa's constituent peoples to self-determination through Nation States situated mainly in the areas of the country that they originally occupied.' (This quote comes from a statement he issued on 16 May 2012 in which he tried to contextualise his remarks to Amanpour.)

It was never 'separate development'; it was always subjugation and selfishness. It was always a violent doctrine, because the majority that was supposed to 'develop separately' rejected and resisted it. I cannot shake the suspicion that the real disappointment among those who promoted apartheid, and eventually tried to reform it, was that it didn't work. It didn't work because whites wanted to be wealthy and grow the economy, and they could not do it without black labour. It didn't work because black and brown South Africans refused to be oppressed and humiliated forever.

There were many chances for the leaders of white South Africa after 1948

to come to their senses and introduce measures that would correct the wrongs and lead to democracy and equal rights. Think of the pleas by that mild-mannered man of peace Chief Albert Luthuli in the 1950s. As president of the ANC he declared that the struggle in South Africa was not so much about the ANC coming to power, but about the recognition and human dignity of black citizens. Think of the letters and requests for talks with the government by the young Mandela and Walter Sisulu in the same decade. The aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 must have made the NP government think of alternative solutions. But they consistently responded with violence, bannings and the jailing of leaders and activists.

Even during the heated political climate of 1960, the ANC was still remarkably pragmatic and prepared to compromise. Mandela, by then already the commander-in-chief of the fledgling MK, demonstrated this when he spoke to the court during the Treason Trial in August 1960. He said the ANC would even have been prepared to accept a government offer of a limited franchise for black South Africans as a starting point.

'In my view,' he told the court, 'that would be a victory, my Lords; we would have taken a significant step towards the attainment of universal adult suffrage for Africans, and we would then for five years, say, suspend civil disobedience, we won't have any stay-at-homes, and we will then devote the intervening period for the purpose of educating the country, the Europeans, to see that these changes can be brought about and that it would bring about better racial understanding, better racial harmony.'

Justice Simon Bekker asked Mandela, 'As a matter of fact, isn't your freedom a direct threat to the Europeans?' Mandela responded: 'No, it is not a direct threat to the Europeans. We are not anti-white, we are against white supremacy and in struggling against white supremacy we have the support of some sections of the European population ... It is quite clear that the Congress has consistently preached a policy of race harmony and we have condemned racialism no matter by whom it is professed.'

Four years later, during the Rivonia Trial, he spoke again with these famous words: 'I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities.' He added: 'It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I'm prepared to die.'

When the NP government's representatives eventually did talk to Mandela in jail twenty-four years later, they found him the same reasonable, pragmatic

and democratic man. He could have applied the same reconciliatory, unifying magic and brave leadership that we witnessed after 1990 a good ten, fifteen years earlier if it hadn't been for the triumphalist and pig-headed clinging to white *baasskap* by the NP and its supporters in business and the Afrikaners churches.

After they banned the ANC and most of its leaders went into exile, where they could find a sympathetic ear only from the Soviet Union, the Afrikaner nationalists had a new excuse not to budge: the black political leaders would turn South Africa into a godless, communist state under the heel of Moscow.

The revolt of the youth of 1976 was the next clear wake-up call that the 'natives' didn't much like 'separate development', but the NP government responded with more repression. Then came the formation of the UDF in 1983, a true non-racial movement with prominent Christian leaders such as Allan Boesak, Desmond Tutu and Frank Chikane as part of the leadership. The government of P.W. Botha responded with more repression and by trying to co-opt the coloured and Indian communities into the white political system, but insisted the black majority had to rule themselves in the 'homelands'.

Two years later, as internal resistance was growing and international isolation was increasing, Botha had another chance. His cabinet and caucus were ready for a major jump to start unravelling apartheid and initiate moves that would lead to democracy. In fact, some of his ministers promised the world that it was going to happen. But on 15 August 1985 Botha delivered his famous Rubicon speech in which he rejected the new ideas and wagged his finger at the world.

Most of the torture and killing of political activists by state agents happened between 1985 and 1989. If the NP had started the process of negotiations five years earlier, it would have saved many lives and a lot of trauma. Roelf Meyer, a cabinet minister under Botha and De Klerk and the NP government's chief negotiator with the ANC after 1990, has told me his greatest regret was that his party didn't release Mandela in 1985 and start negotiating a peaceful settlement.

Some Afrikaners writers and commentators are making a living out of rubbing the notion of whites needing to acknowledge the wrongs of the past and to show contrition. Their message is proving very popular among ordinary folk. They point out the achievements of the white regimes of the last decades before liberation and revel in documenting the chequered history of the ANC in exile and its communist allies.

These revisionists are indirectly aided and abetted by those who continue

to compare apartheid with Nazism and genocide, simplistically playing the 'crime against humanity' game. It is too easy to dismiss these arguments as invalid, and they simply shift the focus from the real debate.

These are difficult waters to navigate. South Africa today has indeed benefited from the presence of people of mostly European origin, although balancing these benefits with the negatives is a whole other question.

They brought technologies with them that didn't exist in Africa at the time. Many of them were industrious and innovative. They helped to build an impressive infrastructure that is one of democratic South Africa's greatest assets.

They are part of the reason South Africa was the only sub-Saharan African country able to host international events such as the 2010 FIFA World Cup successfully. They should get a lot of the credit for making South Africa's economy the strongest and most sophisticated on the continent.

I have no doubt that apartheid was inherently evil, but I honestly cannot state that all white people were evil. It's not that simple. I'm not referring only to those white people who stood up against slavery, colonialism and apartheid; I'm talking about ordinary people, even people who voted for the NP all their lives.

My father was one such person. He supported apartheid and the NP virtually until 1990, but he was, I can assure you, a thoroughly decent human being. At his funeral I looked upon his brothers, cousins and friends, the same people who excommunicated and defamed me as a traitor and a communist for opposing apartheid, and told them: 'You say you loved this man, but let me tell you, it was his sense of justice and human decency that made me into what you hated.'

It's all very complex, contradictory and schizophrenic.

But however much whites contributed to development in this country and however decent many of them may have been, the stark reality remains that they and their ancestors inflicted immeasurable psychological and developmental damage on generations of black people and that we are still feeling the effects of this in 2013.

I don't think white South Africans who had no active, direct role in apartheid should grovel or be paralysed with guilt. But we should acknowledge the hurt and damage it caused, and the direct and indirect ways we benefited from white domination; we should acknowledge that the legacy of apartheid still affects our communities; we should communicate that to the people

who were so hurt and damaged, and we should take responsibility for our past and that of our ancestors.

That also means we should be more careful with our utterances and interactions, and actively assist the process of undoing the damage caused by those who came before us. It means all responsible white South Africans have the duty to fight racism among their own ranks.

The bottom line is that black, brown and Indian South Africans were deeply humiliated on a daily basis for many generations. One can put all the lipstick one wants on apartheid, but no one can ever deny the deep humiliation it brought.

We Afrikaners still talk about the injustices of the South African War of 1899–1902, about the inhumane concentration camps, the scorched-earth policies and the after-effects of the war. Some right-wing Afrikaners still prefer to call themselves 'Boere' instead of Afrikaners and still wave the flags of the old Boer republics.

That war ended more than a century ago. How can anyone expect black South Africans to forget and not talk about the injustices and humiliation that ended little more than twenty years ago?

I thought it was crucial to start off with this backstory, because everything we look at in today's South Africa was influenced by this history and these experiences and attitudes.

2

The Mandela factor

An ailing Nelson Mandela spent more than two months in hospital in mid-2013.

Despite a prevailing bout of national depression, 18 July 2013, the day the old man turned ninety-five, was probably the most positive, sharing Mandela Day yet, possibly because of a suspicion that it would be the last one while he was alive.

It would be inappropriate not to consider Mandela's role in our national affairs and his legacy if one is taking a broad look at the state of the nation.

During the many interviews with local and foreign media during the days we thought were going to be his last, the first points I came up with were these: Mandela brought an integrity to the highest office in the country that we had not seen before or after. He brought out the best in the nation he was leading. And he demonstrated to us and the world what real leadership looks like.

One of Thabo Mbeki's closest advisors told me in 2002 that Mbeki's biggest problem was that he was Mandela's successor; Mandela served as president for only the first five years after the liberation election. He basked in the sun of the 'South African miracle' and never had to face the difficult realities of running the government of a state faced with the terrible after-effects of apartheid. He was right. While Mandela was president, he left the day-to-day running of the country to Mbeki and instead focused his time and energies on Project Rainbow Nation and on being an international symbol of anti-racism, hope and reconciliation.

When Mbeki took over in 1999, the national emphasis had to shift quite urgently from reconciliation to reparation and empowerment of the frustrated black majority. This was an unpleasant surprise to the white minority and the white-dominated business community, made worse by Mbeki's aversion to engagement, his lack of charisma, and his own racial and historical demons. Mbeki started talking about 'colonialists of a special kind' and of the 'two South Africas – one white and rich, the other black and poor'. It gave whites the jitters and encouraged frustrated and impatient black citizens to believe