

**ON BEING SOUTH AFRICAN TODAY:
The Politics of Identity and National Consciousness**

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DRAFT ONLY: Check against delivery

In December 1992, my wife and I returned to South Africa. We had been living in England and Europe since 1978 having been granted asylum in the United Kingdom after years of political repression under apartheid in our native South Africa. We settled and made our home in England, took up British citizenship, made friends, and we were developing careers in British society. And yet, we remained intensely South African. We did not so much yearn to return to apartheid South Africa, as much as we cared enough for the country to campaign against apartheid together with many of our compatriots and with the world wide anti-apartheid movement, and to seek actively a liberated South Africa under a new dispensation which the ANC as our liberation organization of choice promised.

On 2 February 1990, then President FW de Klerk announced the unbanning of our liberation organizations, the release of political prisoners, ultimately including Nelson Mandela, and the repeal of many of apartheid's restrictive legislation. In other words South Africa was on its way to dismantling apartheid, and to becoming the normal society that it had never been since the European settlers landed on our shores in 1652. Those were the beginnings of realizing the dreams of the liberation struggle.

The call for the return of the exiles evoked a great deal of soul searching in our family. It was not an easy decision to return home in December 1992. There was a great deal of uncertainty. There was hardly any reason to believe that the architects of apartheid had surrendered, violence was raging in parts of our country, and no political settlement had been negotiated at that stage. We might have returned in trust and to obey the call of our liberation movement. In our case, I can say that we returned because we believed that we had a moral duty to do so. We argued that since the basis for which we sought political asylum no longer prevailed, we had no moral justification for staying in the comfort of exile, and by staying we would undercut any possibility for our active participation in the creation of the new post-apartheid South Africa.

We have now lived in South Africa for almost as long as we had lived in exile in the United Kingdom. It is useful to pause here, and to look back on the phenomenal progress that has been made since then, reflect on the beacons we have placed along the journey and the challenges we

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face as we move towards the future. Reflecting on that, it struck me that the seminal or defining idea of the new South Africa has to be identity and national consciousness as we are engaged in the relentless task of national reconstruction and development. This paper, therefore, examines the debates currently underway in South Africa about identity and identities, and the nation-building project.

II

Then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki delivered a speech in the National Assembly on 8 May 1996 in a debate on the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. His speech, *I am an African* was an elegiac poem, extolling the cultural, religious, historical, and linguistic diversities of South Africa. It is a poem in praise of all that has come to make up the new South Africa, almost suggesting that South Africa can no longer be itself without the affirmation of its various formations with all their histories and origins. In doing so the Deputy President was reminding South Africans of their origins and how we have become who we are. Sitting in the public galleries of parliament that day I remember both how proud I was to be South African, and just how complicated it was to make something out of all these identities. I also thought that it was all very well to boldly affirm this new expression of an inclusive national identity; in reality one wondered whether indeed there was enough goodwill, and openness especially on the part of some of our white South African compatriots, to receive this gesture of commitment and common nationhood. Well, no sooner had Thabo Mbeki sat down, than the next speaker, former President FW de Klerk, then second Deputy President, speaking on behalf of the National Party in the government of national unity, stood up to say, *I am an African*. He was also followed by Mr Tony Leon, Leader of the Democratic Party (now the Democratic Alliance after merging with a section of the National Party). In such a convivial atmosphere, of course, no one was asking the hard questions, no one would upset the applecart. Indeed, Thabo Mbeki's essay was popularized, became the subject of talk shows, and the new South African was the one who identified with the sentiments in Thabo Mbeki's statement.

As I observed the Statement did not make any moral judgment on the past; it did not dwell on the history of oppression since a succession of European colonizers and settlers set foot on our shores; it did not rage against some 50 years of atrocious apartheid minority rule in our country, nor the circumstances of the indentured labourers brought to South Africa by British settlers a mere century before, or the slave trade, especially those brought as slaves from the Indonesian/Malaysian archipelago. It made no statement about the circumstances for the near total extermination of the indigenous San and Khoi people, and the subsequent relentless campaign to rob them of any kind of national identity. The Deputy President, may also have failed to state how colonialism had failed the people of South Africa through the imposition of European

religion and cultures, and the privileging of Christianity above all other forms of religious expressions, including African traditional religions and eastern religions. Even more, the Statement did not seek to determine how this new inclusive South Africa formed out of these diverse cultures and traditions was to be forged afresh and re-created. It was, i'd like to believe, an open statement, an invitation to join in the project of national reconstruction, something that Steve Biko so eloquently stated in his celebrated essay, *Black Consciousness and the quest for true humanity*. In his essay, Biko used the image from Aime Cesaire of table hospitality, that we shall invite you to join us in making up the table in true African style, when we meet in the "rendezvous of victory".

Dr F van Zyl Slabbert, a former leader of the democratic opposition party during the dying days of apartheid, has recently published a book, *THE OTHER SIDE OF HISTORY*. He calls to question the sincerity of the government in its failure to live by the sentiments expressed by Thabo Mbeki. He says how much he and many other white South Africans embraced the Deputy President's statement, as it assured them a sense of belonging and a place to belong. It also said to him, he believed, that no more would South Africans ever be judged on the colour of their skin. Instead Slabbert says that ten years post apartheid, colour is becoming a very vital determining factor in society and in government policy, many white people, men and women of goodwill, now despair of their future in the new South Africa. Perhaps because President Mbeki's statement was short on detail, it allowed others to fill that detail according to their various sentiments and aspirations. Somehow, the African identity had become so inclusive as to lose all meaning. The unique identity of being African had become reducible to an identity of place, and choice. But the slaves from the Malaysian archipelago and the indentured labourers from India had no such freedom of choice. By dint of circumstances they found themselves in a foreign land, and they have had to make their homes there.

III

Perhaps the place to start in understanding the identity politics of South Africa is the Constitution. Adopted by Parliament on 8 May 1996, the Constitution then became law by the signature of then President Nelson Mandela at a ceremony held at Sharpeville in December 1996. Sharpeville was a location full of symbolism for the new South Africa. It was there that some 69 protesters were killed by the bullets of apartheid police. The Constitution marks a qualitative break from the past. The Constitution is the supreme law of the land. As a constitutional state, the sovereignty of parliament is no longer constitutional doctrine. Instead all law or conduct inconsistent with the Constitution is invalid. Since the Constitutional Court is the final arbiter in all constitutional matters, the validity of legislation is subject to constitutional scrutiny. Indeed, the Constitutional

Court itself is bound to interpret constitutional dictat against the 14 Constitutional Principles adopted at CODESA.

The Constitution defines the Republic of South Africa as “one, sovereign, democratic state founded on the following values... human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms...” (Section 1 (a)). The aspiration to national unity is affirmed. This was important to state very clearly that South Africa eschews the politics of separation that had become the cornerstone of apartheid dogma. It was important also to clarify that South Africa was not a federation, as some sought to do in order to entrench forms of apartheid separation. The democratic character of the state is further defined in terms of “values”. These include regular elections, a multiparty parliamentary system, and universal adult suffrage, separation of powers “to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness.”

But it is when the Constitution elevates some democratic principles to the status of values, as it does with “human dignity”, the “achievement of equality” and “the advancement of human rights and freedoms” that one begins to take notice. To clothe these constitutional principles with the mantle of “values” is to give them a moral significance that is compelling. It says that moral values are to be the organizing principle of this society, which all may assert and defend, and which the institutions of state must honour, apply and defend. These values are inherent in society’s self-understanding, part of that body of principles which we often take for granted but which we must be highly sensitive to. These are values which have their genesis in the history and cultures of South African people, and they have become exceedingly valued because of the recent history of violations of such values.

Human dignity speaks to the principle of *ubuntu*, being human. It is the knowledge that no one can ever be truly human in isolation, and that somehow, we become fulfilled as human beings through the respect for and assertion of the humanity of others. Much has been said in South Africa about this *ubuntu* principle² which, I believe, has been popularized as a philosophy of life by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Equality, we believe, is something that can be achieved. It is possible to progress from inequality to equality. It is also imperative that deliberate steps be taken to advance towards equality so that all vestiges of our apartheid past may be removed. Inequality is a grim reminder of lingering apartheid in our society. Such inequality is not simply unlawful discrimination on the basis of gender, race, disability or sexual orientation- abhorrent as all of those are. It is pre-eminently the maintenance of inequality between the rich and the poor, persistent and debilitating impoverishment of the many, the extremes between the rich and the

² Kwado Appiagyei-Atua: *A rights-centred critique of African philosophy in the context of development*, African Human Rights Law Journal; Vol 5 No 2 2005; pp335 – 357. and *Exploring Ubuntu: tentative reflections* by Drucilla Cornell and Karin van Marie; pp 195ff above

poor that continue to be the sad fact of life in our society³. Human rights and freedoms must also mark lessons drawn from our ignoble past when the humanity of the majority of our population was trampled upon on the basis of colour, where women occupied a subordinate position in the societal hierarchy. Human rights and freedoms, therefore, have become prized possessions which we have by reason of our Constitution. It is something no one should ever again be allowed to take away from us.

Chapter 2 of the Constitution is the Bill of Rights, “the cornerstone of (our) democracy”. The Bill imposes obligations, especially on organs of state to “respect, protect, promote and fulfill” the rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights. The Rights are justiciable in the courts of our land, and are constituent with South Africa’s obligations in terms of international treaty law. The effect is that international law has domestic application as set out in Section 233 of the Constitution, in that the courts must seek an interpretation of law that is consistent with international law. To give effect to some of the provisions of the Bill of Rights legislation has been passed by Parliament and includes the *Promotion of Equality Act, 2000*, the *Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 2000* and the *Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000*. The courts apply the law, arbitrate disputes, and make government accountable. Chapter 9 institutions, on the other hand, referred to as the “independent state institutions supporting democracy” have been established to mediate complaints of human rights violations, investigate such complaints and ensure protection from violations of human rights. Among these are the Public Protector, the Human Rights Commission, the Auditor General, the Electoral Commission and the quaintly named Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities.

Ten years since its adoption, one is bound to get mixed reviews of the functioning and status of our Constitution. For one thing the independence of the courts and the application of the Constitution are widely upheld. The Court has made major judgments on the role of organs of state, including the President, in the exercise of power and their prerogatives, on the application and enforcement of the socio economic rights in the Bill of Rights, in the promotion of equality (lately especially changes in the Marriage Laws in order to make possible the “marriage” of same-sex couples), and in the affirmation of civil liberties, as in the abolition of the death penalty, the protection of freedom of the press, the rights of detained people, and latterly, the rights of asylum seekers.

But questions invariably do arise as to the extent to which courts should reflect in some measure the essence of the society it seeks to serve or to move ahead in such an advanced fashion at the

³ Danie Brand & Christof Heyns (eds): *SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS IN SOUTH AFRICA*; Pretoria University Law Press; 2005; and 6th *ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS REPORT 2003-2006*; South African Human Rights Commission, August 2006.

risk of many feeling unable to identify with what the courts rule on their behalf. There is, of course, another question. To what extent should the courts be engaged in activist law making, and what are the dangers inherent when courts seem to get drawn into the political conflicts that are the measure of any democratic society? I would imagine that the South African courts must be asking themselves some hard questions in recent times.

IV

In a recently published essay, *The Rainbow Nation: constructs of national identity in post-apartheid South Africa* Peace Kiguwa explores the meaning and search for identity in the new South Africa. She posits this in terms of the prevailing culture and race differentials and examines ways of avoidance; especially that the race factor often leads to denial and inchoate identity structures. In some respects it is much easier as Thabo Mbeki did, to make a defining statement of multi-culturalism, or for Van Zyl Slabbert to envision an ideal of non-racialism, but, as Kiguwa affirms “the emphasis on culture and ethnicity as opposed to race as primary signifiers of identity cannot be ignored (2006:319).” Somehow when the writers of the Constitution refer to “non-racialism” as a value to be accorded constitutional protection, it is a kind of romanticism that denies the fact of race as an organizing principle in society. What, then, is it that the people of South Africa hold together, that binds them together, that arouses with equal intensity their passions and state of belonging? It is hard to say, because just about every signifier of identity is contested, and differentiates rather than unites. In pursuit of reconciliation, there has been an inclination to deny race and racism as a factor in society.

Kiguwa, citing a study by Benedict Anderson observes that “The nation is imagined in the sense that notions of citizenship and belonging to a broader community allow for the creation of boundaries that are very often more symbolic than physical realities (324).” Identity is also the recognition and identification of boundaries: who is in and who is out. But such communities, evoking a Weberian “iron cage”, are frankly non-existent. Communities are much more interlocking circles depending on the organizing principle of any one community. It is accordingly possible for one at once to belong to many types of communities. Identity communities are much more symbolic signifiers of value and beliefs, ways of living and believing and they appeal to the inner being in ways that cannot always be expressed, a common understanding of idiom and language and an appeal to shared belief systems⁴. Reflecting on his upbringing during colonial Nigeria, award winning author Chinua Achebe recalls laconically:

As it happened, it was only these foreign aspects of my upbringing that we dignified with the title of education. For us that word was not about Igbo things; it was about faraway

⁴ Vide Kwame Anthony Appiah: *IN MY FATHER’S HOUSE* – Africa in the philosophy of culture; Methuen 1992 @ p289 ff

places and peoples; and its acquisition was generally painful. Igbo things did not vanish from our lives; they were present but taken for granted, unacknowledged (2000:20).

As Kevin Durrheim and Xoliswa Mtose put it “identification is an activity that involves locating oneself in a matrix of symbolic similarities and differences and, quoting Bhabha, ... it is always the product of an ‘image’ of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image (2006:157).”

Such a construct it must now be obvious, is hardly going to bring about the national consciousness that so many yearn for today. Even as we speak the character of South Africanhood is changing and undergoing reconstruction; not always for the better, but nonetheless it does. National identity can best be formed and re-formed out of “porous” boundaries. The point that van Zyl Slabbert misses, I would argue, is the fact that non-racialism should never serve as an alibi to gloss over societal fault lines founded on race and translating into prevailing racism. Somehow, therefore, non-racialism can only have currency to the extent that active efforts are taken to address all forms of prevailing racism, the legacy of racial and other forms of inequality, and to lay the foundations for a future that is inherently more equal and more just.

I have come to believe that as society evolves, it is vital that the organizing principle be set, as it is in South Africa, through a constitutional principle. The Constitution demands fidelity to its constructs, as interpreted by the courts. In that sense there is no room for equivocation, and there is a guiding principle that all may be subordinate to. With all the complexities of that statement, and inasmuch as the Constitution is a “living instrument” of life as it is lived, it will always grow to capture the imaginations of the people.

The Zuma Affair:

Having said as much as I have above, however, it has become my conviction that the constitutional consensus referred to above, which I have argued is the one central pillar of our South African identity, is currently under strain. I have had reason to address this matter in various South African platforms. The reason for addressing the Zuma Affair in this essay is so that one can both survey the strains South Africa’s social system experiences, and whether the Constitution is any longer a vehicle for the expression of shared values and for social and political cohesion. Ultimately, of course, the Zuma Affair speaks to the question of leadership in South Africa: the quality of leadership, of relevance, transformation and of visionary leadership.

There can be no doubt in the mind of any rational South African that Jacob Zuma is not a fit and proper person to occupy the highest office on the land. And so the President acted most appropriately when he removed him from office as Deputy President upon a judicial finding that he was implicated in the corruption activities of Shabir Shaik. It was also correct for the National Directorate of Public Prosecutions to charge him on various counts of corruption. He has the opportunity to appear before the courts to make his defence. What has then happened, however, is that what would have been a straightforward criminal investigation has been turned into a massive political campaign. I submit that the reason is simply in order to intimidate and to suborn the course of justice. As I submit, he is entitled to put his case before the courts, he has challenged every avenue of the investigation, he has strained the resources of the state, and he has created for himself the image of victim. None of this is consistent, however, with someone keen to have his day in court, as his supporters have often protested.

That may be bad enough, but what is unsightly, is judges writing letters to the press, correcting what they regard as misrepresentations of their judgments. One used to believe that judges only spoke through their judgments and only then on a matter before them. I find it difficult to understand how it is that judges discuss their cases while *functus officio*, as has been happening recently. The resultant response has been so fierce that the Chief Justice intervened in a media statement recently. Far from settling the issues, the Chief Justice's statement appears to lend credence to the view of some that the Supreme Court of Appeal may have erred in making reference to the disputed statement that Jacob Zuma and Shabir Shaik had a "corrupt relationship." This is unprecedented, and clearly the judges are feeling the heat of the political maneuvering around the Jacob Zuma matter. This is to be regretted.

In fact what is happening in my view is a very simple matter. At one level it is an expression of the internal politics of the Congress Alliance. It is clear that two parts of the Alliance, COSATU and the SACP are intensely unhappy with the leadership of Thabo Mbeki, but having not persuaded enough votes in the decision making structures of the ANC, they now work their purposes in the streets, in campaigns against the organizational structures in which they actively participate. That, surely, is a perversion of democracy. Not being ANC, one may presume, they have no means of effecting or influencing a change of leadership in ANC and government, but as the Alliance with the ruling ANC, they participate actively policy formation. Or another way of looking at it, the partners in the Congress Alliance are now very vocal about what they disapprove of and will not take the leadership of ANC without question. The second element of what is happening is that the ANC Youth League in particular, is challenging some of traditional ways of doing things, which have become embedded in the ANC over its 90 years of existence. They challenge the mechanisms for the emergence of leadership. In other words, it appears that ANC

should take notice that the Youth League is engaged in a struggle for the modernization and reform of the ANC. The above two scenarios do not necessarily find expression in what Jacob Zuma stands for, but he has become a convenient fall-guy, or cover, for some radical challenges to the politics of the dominant party. There is, however, a third factor. One cannot be oblivious of the fact that many with agendas around Jacob Zuma, view him as a means of protection. To campaign for his election as President would be to take out an insurance policy against the certainty of prosecution, and of course, for the continuation of corrupt or other forms of unlawful activities.

I sincerely believe, however, that the history of liberation, the culture and ethics forged in struggle are strong enough and pervasive enough in the ruling party as to make any break from such culture and tradition - especially if the effect is to discredit the entire history of liberation - result in the ANC as a whole rising up in defence of its identity, culture and history. Contrary to what many may believe, I am not persuaded that the recent events suggest a major lowering of the standards of public accountability, and I can go so far as to hazard the guess that Zuma standing in a free election, will not be elected by an ANC Congress today. I believe, however, that the ANC should open up the contest for leadership so that other candidates may emerge. What discredits the process so far, is that the impression is being created that Jacob Zuma has become the anointed candidate. I dispute that.

In the event he gets elected, however, then I have grave forebodings. We shall be in dire straits. One possibility is that many sincere and serious members of the ANC and other ANC supporters will simply become indifferent and take no further part in politics. There will be a huge abstention vote, and some might be persuaded to vote for one of the opposition parties. In that scenario ANC will lose votes, and with a much reduced majority, may become weakened or form alliances. The logical extension to that is that that might be the beginnings of the breakup of the ANC as we know it. It is argued that we could see the formation of a new centre party, or new alliances among erstwhile liberation movements, and a new left party might also emerge, with the possibility of taking on board the left flank of the ANC. My conviction is that such a view is farfetched on present analysis.

Crime and Corruption:

We are fortunate in that the Presidency of Thabo Mbeki has shown consistent leadership on the matter of crime and corruption. Last week, the President was addressing the Eastern Cape Provincial Conference of the ANC and he once again, spelt out that ANC members must desist from joining the party in the expectation of privileges, of power and material gains. It would seem to me that he was signaling that the government will continue being tough on corruption, and will

take stern measures to reverse the tide of rampant crime. Amazingly, the President made the statement at a time when he is, rightly in my view, being accused of inaction in the matter relating to accusations against the National Commissioner of Police, Jackie Selebi who has declared his friendship with a man accused of running a crime syndicate, and of the murder of Brett Kebble, the multi-millionaire who died a year ago in the wake of massive corporate scandals.

Through a relentless investigative campaign, the *Mail & Guardian* has produced evidence that Mr Selebi may have been accessory to these crimes, and certainly, that he may have been aware of the criminal activities of Glen Agliotti, but cast a blind eye to them. It is being revealed that Selebi may have received bribes, and that other members of the government may have been business partners of the late Kebble. It is accordingly perplexing to many that the President has not taken the logical step in the face of mounting evidence, however, untested, to seek the removal of Selebi from the high command of the South African Police Services, at the very least until all investigations are completed, and the Agliotti trial where his name might feature, is completed. The President has told religious leaders who sought an assurance from him, that appropriate action would be taken to investigate the allegations against Selebi. The President is reported to have said, "Trust me!" but to date he has taken no action. I believe that religious leaders should have told him that that was not good enough in a country where safety and security were adversely compromised, the last thing that South Africans need is to have a police service led by someone against whose name serious questions about integrity are being raised.

The concern, of course, is that at an time when the government appears to have no credible strategy to deal with crime, when there is evidence and some suspicions, that too many people aligned to the ruling party are embroiled in various forms of crime and corruption, when some ANC luminaries like Tony Yengeni, the former ANC Chief Whip, Winnie Madikizela Mandela and Allan Boesak have all faced the wrath of the law, government is sending mixed signals about crime and criminality. For one thing the visibility of many ANC leaders in demonstrations outside court during the various Zuma trials, and the superstar treatment that the likes of Yengeni and Shaik appear to be receiving in prison, do not encourage ordinary citizens to abhor criminality and to value the integrity of the criminal justice system. The allegations against Agliotti are serious – the man charged with protecting the security and safety of citizens should not be playing golf and having regular meals with the National Commissioner of Police.

There is a trend that is worrying to many of us, in terms of which too many of those benefiting from the slush of business deals are somehow linked to government or the ruling party. It was revealed recently that the leading lights of black economic empowerment are people associated with the ANC; some of these are ministers or senior civil servants. The problem is that nobody

really knows unless someone can get to the bottom of this trend. Civil servants and ministers possess privileged critical business intelligence, and at least, the suspicion and perception of corruption is never far from the surface - especially where they have to make decisions affecting bids by others. Somehow, government must take steps to clean up its act and ensure strict adherence to Codes of Conduct, even if retiring senior civil servants will receive a healthy pension, in order to counter a predilection to corruption.

Social Cohesion:

The Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that the Constitution would lay the foundations to “improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person...” South Africa has inherited a chronically unequal society. Notwithstanding a much improved economic performance under the ANC government, extremes of wealth and poverty remain; unemployment is still unacceptably high even though this matter is receiving urgent attention under ASGI-SA and JIPSA, which the Deputy President is driving. Through a system of grants the elderly, the chronically sick and children receive assistance. But grants in themselves, it has been acknowledged, will not free people from the poverty trap, hence the move to deal with the skills shortage in South Africa, which is responsible for at least some of the unemployment. Education, health services and social welfare are all receiving much needed attention.

To increase its capacity to address the chronic problems of society, government has in recent times been resorting to the notion of a “developmental” state. Under this rubric a great deal of activity is being devoted to transferring resources to local communities, strengthening the capacity of local authorities to dispense their budgets in infrastructure developments and community services, so as to grow small and medium projects and enterprises, attract many of the young to school and encouraging them to remain in school, and to improve schooling. In other words, we are experiencing a state-centred path to development.

At the heart of this is surely a desire to create a fair, just and compassionate society. This statement speaks to the core of what the ANC stood for throughout its existence; as expressed in the Freedom Charter and in the statements of its leaders like OR Tambo. There can be no doubt in my mind that any expressions that suggest that ANC is uncaring about poverty, about those who are HIV positive, or suffer from AIDS, about the orphans of HIV/AIDS, about the elderly and even the unemployed and the poor, would be ignorant of the stack of evidence about compassion in ANC that has drawn so many of us to its political embrace. One gets told again and again of the strides that South Africa has made in housing the poor since 1994 – some 2m public housing units have been built and in the private sector there is undoubtedly a housing boom underway. And yet development is about inculcating a sense of human security, and about the freedom and

capacity to make choices about matters affecting one's life. People wish to have the freedom to make informed choices, and government is there to extend opportunities and unlock the potential in every person, as the Preamble to the Constitution puts it.

There are many though, who argue that the ANC in government has not done enough to attack the prevailing economic consensus which is based on market fundamentals. John S Saul, a Canadian political scientist is particularly scathing in his attack on the ANC in government, accusing it of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds, pandering to Western interests in the hope that its role as the acknowledged spokesperson for third world interests can be acknowledged. He calls this "the post-apartheid neo-liberal apostasy". Saul harbours the forlorn hope that the failure of African governments like that of the ANC would spawn radical grassroots movements which could pose a challenge to African governments that have been incorporated into the Western capitalist project. In this regard Saul appears to reject the notion of a "unifying conception of society and transformation" in favour of "workable sense of cohesion to emerge out of seemingly irreconcilable modes of resistance waged from below..." (2005:263). Perhaps I can advise Prof Saul to get real. The truth is that many ordinary poor people in our country have never followed the dictates of the radical elements in election after election. At each election, the ANC has increased its majority. My sense is that there is greater appreciation than many would concede that the government is serious about eradication of poverty, the provision of basic services to people like fresh water, education, and health services. The reversal of the RDP and the institution of GEAR since 1996 are hotly contested in South Africa but nobody has been able to show that an RDP project was a workable proposition at a time when the economy itself was in the doldrums.

What actively militates against the social cohesion project though, are crime and corruption, the persistent apartheid spatial geography, racism, ethnicity and xenophobia. Crime is a worry to all South Africans. There is enormous public support for the police and for the efforts of the National Directorate of Public Prosecutions in addressing the all-pervasive culture of crime and criminality. South Africans want to live in peace. The enormous investment in private security services that ordinary South Africans have to indulge in, in order to protect their meager possessions and for their own safety and security, may well signal a lack of confidence in the capacity of the official security forces to protect people. Crime inveighs against all elements of our cherished democracy and our system of human rights. Corruption is theft against the common wealth, especially public resources allocated to meet the needs of the poor. Crime undermines the project of social cohesion.

South Africa, ironically, has not addressed adequately the taboo subject of racism and ethnicity. Generally, white South Africans are very defensive about prevailing racism, and in the very tense political situations, ethnic rivalry often resurfaces. But somehow we do not have the language and mechanism for dealing with this scourge. Xenophobia is of a similar element. South Africa has become a magnet or honey pot to many Africans who migrate south and from Asia, in search of a better life. There are many who have done so legitimately, to seek asylum, but there are many others, often illegal migrants who visit and stay in the country for criminal purposes or to seek employment illegally. Sadly, though, South Africa has not devised mechanisms to tap into the rich resource created by those who bring with them skills, often ones not available in South Africa at this point in time. One would have thought that a moratorium that begins by allowing in those who bring skills from the SADC region would be implemented, enabling them to exercise their professions. This could serve to isolate those whose sole activity is crime.

VI

As I bring my paper to a close, I pause now to share some thoughts on the moral imperatives that would translate our society into one of the most desirable to live in; one that succeeds where others may have failed.

I often ask myself why on earth a people who have been through so much suffering, who understand the pain of injustice and of violence, would not learn some lessons - however hard they might be - from their own recent experience? Ironically, it was part of our tactic of struggle to render the apartheid state ungovernable. Again, during those times, our children lost their innocence; they had to grow up fast in an environment of struggle where life and death decisions had to be made. Family life and family upbringing in some instances was put under strain. The reality is that today, too many parents have lost their parental authority, and the variety of expressions of family are not able to hold together. There is ignorance about cultural values, and indeed, about what it means to be African; the joys and beauty of family life, the notion of parental responsibility, and the innocence of childhood. In an environment where teenage pregnancies have become common and teenage parenting the norm, last week the Minister of Education rightly dismissed calls from some politicians and educators to introduce maternity leave for school children.

A Markinor survey in South Africa published last week to mark World AIDS Day has some chilling statistics. Some 23% of young South Africans between the ages 15 – 24 do not believe that AIDS exists, while 21% believe that it is an insignificant and unimportant matter. We know that new infections are not decreasing significantly enough in South Africa and that fields of death from

HIV/AIDS are clogging up spaces for the habitation of living humans in many of our townships. Behaviour like that of ANC Deputy President Jacob Zuma simply does not help in remodeling human behaviour. One does not hear enough of our leaders, politicians, church leaders and other community activists, for example, speaking strongly enough about sexual behaviour. In the face of so many new and different ways of being family, the high rate of divorce, polygamy, same sex unions, child-headed households, or grandparents taking responsibility for the rearing of their grandchildren, South Africa is strangely silent about the emerging trends in family life and their implications for public policy and public morality. It seems to me that a society like South Africa should be investing in its children in ways imaginative and innovative enough to stem the tide towards becoming a people devoid of all moral understanding.

It seems to me that if the government can muster enough resources to launch just one public policy initiative, that has to be it. It will create a new brand of South African, establish a new identity of being South African, and ultimately influence the way in which society as a whole functions.

Ends

London, 5 December 2006.

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