

New series aims to dissect attitudes around race and identity in the new SA

Fanie du Toit

THE CAPE Times, in conjunction with the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), today launches the series "Race and identity".

Few topics have been discussed so frequently, and yet, one senses, with such limited progress. So why give it another try? Should we devote time and energy to identity debates when we face the kind of material and economic challenges that we do?

Perhaps the simplest answer is the most obvious. We need to keep talking until we change the way we think and act – and that, clearly, is some way off. IJR's South African Reconciliation Barometer shows, for example, that South Africans have not changed much since 2001 in the way they view people from other race groups. We know attitudes are not likely to change until towns and

Who are we? Race & Identity

cities have become more integrated – and more equal across socio-economic lines. This, of course, will take time.

This is not to say that many ordinary South Africans have not experienced profound and positive changes in racial relations since 1994. It is to claim that these changes are not yet enough, and that we need to find more creative and effective ways to overcome the exaggerated impact of race on identity formation – over other experiences accumulated at work, school, in social circles or faith communities, to name but a few. Indeed, can we identify specific areas, even abroad, where

significant progress in this regard has been made and from which we can learn?

On the other hand, we will also be asking if and how the quality of our debates on race are taking us forward or keeping us hostage to past paradigms?

Minister Trevor Manuel's widely-publicised letter to government spokesman Jimmy Manyi after his comments about coloureds' place in South African society certainly implied frustration about the quality of current race discourse.

The letter seemed to capture some of what remains unsaid in our many race debates. To Manuel, Manyi's inference that coloured people are somehow a "special case", in "over-supply" in the Western Cape, and "in need of redistribution" hinted at something that has gone very badly wrong.

One often hears these days that people are worried about resurgent ethnicity, racism and xenophobia and that all is not well in our communities. Talking about race in the way Manyi did not only misses the point, Manuel seemed to say, it messes things up even further.

But Manuel's suggestion that Manyi's thinking permeates the "highest echelons of government" should make us think beyond social transformation alone. It hints at political power: How are our leaders really thinking about race, ethnicity and identity? Does the constitutional vision of a non-racial, non-sexist society find bearing in the way South Africa is governed in practice, or is there a disjuncture between our professed and practised values?

The post-apartheid state, at least officially, has been resolutely non-

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racial and non-ethnic. Leaders have spoken about building a nation and not preserving bantustans, about fostering integration, not federalism, and about reconciliation, not victor's justice.

South Africans should not rest too comfortably on their considerable laurels. For one, race will sadly remain an important factor determining who South Africans will vote for during the next round of local elections, just over a month away. In this regard, Michela

Wrong's book about Kenyan whistleblower John Githongo, *It is our turn to eat*, is instructive reading. The book sets out to describe corruption, but ends up describing ethnicity.

The central theme that emerges is: ethnicity corrupts and corruption ethnicises. British colonial policy left Kenya a deeply ethnicised society, with one tribe periodically replacing the other at the "trough", as Wrong puts it. Consequently, corruption and ethnicity became inseparable, two sides of the same post-colonial coin. Ethnic networks, not democratic parties, took control of Kenyan state power and used this to steal billions in foreign aid and tax money at the cost of ordinary citizens. Eventually, deeply disillusioned citizens lost interest in politics and turned on one another to vent their frustration.

Ugandan, Rwandan and Burun-

dian history have all displayed similar patterns – all with very violent consequences. What makes South Africa different?

We see signs of growing ethnic tension "in the highest echelons" – and consensus seem to be spreading that the scourge of corruption is becoming increasingly pervasive. Are these factors linked, and if so, in what ways?

The series over the next coming weeks will allow voices from different perspectives to explore the continuing impact of race on identity formation, politics and social transformation in our country – and hopefully spur us on to work more concertedly to align what we do and think with what we say we believe.

● *Dr Du Toit is executive director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. For more information, see www.ijr.org.za*

APARTHEID DÉJÀ VU

Race is skin deep, humanity is not

Neville Alexander

THE FURORE about the racist remarks attributed to Mr Jimmy Manyi and to a few other would-be pacesetters in the aspiring leadership cadre of the new South Africa is without any doubt one of the defining moments of our country's history.

Enough has been written and more than enough said in "jest" or otherwise about what these people actually said or wrote, about why Solidarity, with its not-so-hidden agenda, suddenly sprang this revelation on an "unsuspecting" South African middle class public, and about the positions taken by various professional politicians, especially those in and around the ANC.

I shall therefore spare myself the agony and the embarrassment of commenting on the disgusting crassness and the latent brutality of the utterances and passages attributed to Mr Manyi, Ms Kuli Roberts and the others.

This is all the more justified since the general sense of outrage, cathartic as it might be, is not the real point. Whether some, or all, of the critics and commentators are more or less "racist" than Roberts, Manyi and Co is not worthy of serious discussion.

The very fact that "race" and racial labels can become a point of contention in what is no more than a rather childish name-calling exercise is indicative of the profound ironies of the "new" South Africa. Indeed, I intervene in this matter with a sense of shame.

Shame, because all of us who have advocated and fought for so many decades and even generations for the goal of a non-racial South Africa have so patently failed in our mission. Shame, but not defeat! This "debate" merely underlines the fact that the struggle for the total liberation of the people of South Africa continues.

In my view, we need to restate the underlying issues involved in "the race debate" and stop making things worse by dwelling on what are no more than superficial features of actual and potential conflict deriving from vested economic and political interests.

Let me begin by saying again, as I have done a thousand times in many articles and speeches on this issue: race thinking is real and it has real consequences, which will not disappear overnight.

Most South Africans will continue for a very long time to see themselves, and see one another, as "Africans", "Indians", "Coloureds" and "Whites", simply because these identities were constructed in terms of ruling class agendas and interests over decades and centuries.

These people have a right to see themselves as such but, given the history of racial conflict and inequality, it is the duty of those who have the power to do so to create conditions in which the need to identify in this way becomes unnecessary and undesirable.

While there are many things we can do in the short to medium term to create a more tolerant and tolerable social climate, it will take generations of consistent and patient work to alter the underlying structures that cause and entrench racial prejudice and all the awful expressions of hatred and ignorance that inevitably go with racial stereotyping.

I want to deal briefly with three fundamental issues involved in this debate. Many South African scholars, starting from different points of view, have written on these issues and anyone who is seriously concerned about understanding the complexities of the racial order could do worse than to go back to these sources.

First and foremost we have to confront the question: is a raceless society possible? Should such a society be our desired destination? Is this what we all mean when we speak about a "non-racial South Africa"? If, when using these and related terms, we mean minimally the kind of society where the colour of one's skin, the texture of one's hair, etc is irrelevant in terms of one's human dignity and life chances, we have to face a few stubborn facts not only of South African society but of all racist societies.

Given the tenacity and the apparent solidity of the colonial-apartheid social and economic structures and their ideological underpinnings that



BORDERS: Is a raceless society our desired destination, asks the writer, or should we be aiming for better understanding. Picture: MICHAEL WALKER

have shaped all our lives, how realistic or feasible is a non-racial South Africa? Is it not an even more utopian notion than the "classless society" that many of us continue to carry around with us as our political GPS?

The short answer to this question is that if you can believe in heaven and other notions of a life of perfect harmony after death, it ought not to be difficult to conceive of the possibility of a raceless or a classless society here on earth.

If you cannot envision such a society, you are saying to all of us, among other things, that biology is fate and that there is nothing much we can do about improving our conditions of life, depending on which

"race" or "class" is on top. Such fatalism is antithetical to any society that is bent on social transformation.

The longer answer to the question is that because we are human beings, we create meaning for ourselves, and a social goal such as a "non-racial South Africa" is not only conceivable but eminently feasible.

To make it happen, we have to do many things in the short, medium and very long term.

What Roberts, Manyi and Co seem to have done, or seem to be doing, as far as I am concerned, points in the opposite direction, ie the kind of South Africa from which we thought we were ready to escape in 1994.

The second issue we have to confront is that of human worth or dignity. If Mr Manyi has been quoted correctly, he has done no more than take to its logical conclusion the implications of any human capital theory ie a way of seeing people as assets and in terms of their exchange value.

Once you are on that road – and most capitalist business ideologues are on that road – it is very easy to fall into the kind of discourse where one or other group of people is considered to be "superfluous", "over-concentrated" etc.

The Hitlers and the Fronemans of the world eventually forced these people into railway trucks or lorries and transported them to their death

in the gas chambers or to their last graves in the many Dimbasas of our beloved country (Frank Froneman was the former deputy minister of Bantu administration who referred to the wives and children of black workers as "superfluous appendages").

The dehumanisation of language and discourse corresponds to the dehumanisation of stigmatised persons. Once the commodity value of people displaces their intrinsic human worth or dignity, we are well on the way to a state of barbarism.

Unless and until we bring back into our paradigms, and thus into our social analyses, the entire human being and the ways in which human beings can live fulfilled lives

beyond their mere economic needs, we will continue to promote anti-human philosophies and policies that ultimately tend to work to the benefit of those who have, and to the detriment of those who do not have.

Thirdly, and finally, it is time that we admit publicly and without any qualifications that you cannot fight racial inequality, racial prejudice and race thinking by using racial categories as a "site of redress".

Among many others, I have written about alternatives to affirmative action policies; so I shall not repeat those points here. Suffice it to say that fighting race with race is bad social science and even worse practical politics.

Besides tackling the structural economic and social inequalities that we took over without much modification from the apartheid state, we have to do the hard work of exploring, researching and piloting alternative approaches to those based on the apartheid racial categories to counter the perpetuation of white and other social privilege.

It is a fundamental theoretical and strategic error to try to do so by perpetuating racial identities in the nonsensical belief that this will not have any negative or destructive social consequences.

The Employment Equity Act and all related legislation should be reviewed, not in the direction that the Department of Labour seems to want to do but in a totally different direction, one that moves away decisively from any notion of "race" and looks specifically at "disadvantage".

Seventeen years into the new South Africa, we can afford to interrogate even our most dearly held views about things. In South Africa, because we do live in a liberal democracy, we can actually ask these questions without fear of losing our limbs or even our lives.

The Manyi affair is much larger than the few individuals involved. It is a matter that, unless we look beneath the verbiage, may ruin any future of peace and prosperity our children may hope for.

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Taking on a brand new stand

THE search is on for a new name for our national soccer team. According to Sports Minister Fikile Mbalula "The boys" is just not intimidating enough. He suggested finding a new name that would strike fear into the hearts of our opponents.

In addition to the tame name, Bafana Bafana has been trademarked so it comes with a price tag.

Perhaps we should find new names for some of our other national teams. The Proteas could become the Amachokachoka. It would bring with it new sponsor possibilities. Amachokachoka brought to you by Vicks VapoRub – now there's no need to stutter when you're about to splutter.

To widen its market Amabokoboko could change its name to Amabokoboko and get Exclusives to back it. Isn't that a novel idea?

It's time for a new sponsor with naming rights for Bafana Bafana. But who? The ANC Youth League has received a lot of bad press lately and maybe this is an opportunity for the Young Lions to score some points with the public. In a gesture to promote racial reconciliation the team could be renamed the ANCYL's Boerfana Boerfana. It would be the PR coup of the decade.

I can see it: Boerfana Boerfana take on The AfriForum Black Aces.

Angry Utterances (10) Jonathan Ancer



It's a tense match even though it's a friendly. AfriForum Black Aces lead one nil. Boerfana gets a goal.

"LaZuuuuma," the crowd roars in acknowledgement of a fellow who really knows how to score.

One-all with a minute to go and the ball is passed to a charging Boerfana striker. Boerfana Boerfana fans jump to their feet. "Go, Boerfana," they chant. The striker is close to the goal. "Shoot Boerfana! Shoot Boerfana!"

Hmmm, maybe that's not such good PR after all.

Being on trial for hate speech is not the best PR either... or is it? Heavies in suits made an impressive splash with their assault rifles at Julius Malema's trial in the Equality Court this week.

(By the way, Wednesday's Business Day crossword published this appropriate clue: **Shows disapproval of farmers' enemies taking in rubbish (8)*.**)

There was much speculation about who funded Juju's bodyguards. I put my crossword skills to the test and worked it out.

Over the weekend a major cellphone company spent a lot of money rebranding itself red. All the bodyguards wore red ties. Coincidence? I don't think so. Vodacom knows all about the subliminal power of product placement.

Don't be surprised if you have a sudden urge to make a cellphone call the next time you see Juju on TV.

The local government election is the perfect time for coy political party funders to come out of the closet and enjoy the brand exposure they deserve.

ANC is proudly presented by Mr Delivery – we deliver (*terms & conditions apply). The president, of course, has his very own sponsor – SAA: 10 Times A Day, 7 Days A Week, Both Ways.

Presenting the Nando's DA – it's not just the president who has the right to hot chicks.

Cope is brought to you by Billy Gundelfinger... you never know when you'll need to split from your partner in a hurry.

The Freedom Front Plus is sponsored by Toyota. Everything keeps going right!

*PROTESTS: ROT ("rubbish") inside ("taking in") PESTS ("farmers' enemies") gives P+ROT+ESTS, which is what you do when you "show disapproval".

What is the *real* reason for bombing Libya?

Johann Hari

MOST of us have a low feeling that we are not being told the real reasons for the war in Libya. We are told that David Cameron, Barack Obama and Nicolas Sarkozy have turned into the armed wing of Amnesty International. They are bombing Libya because they can't bear for innocent people to be tyrannised by the very tyrants they were arming and funding for years. The best guide through this confusion is to look at two other wars the British government is deeply involved in – because they show the claims made can't be true.

Imagine a distant leader killed more than 2 000 innocent civilians, and his military commanders responded by joking that the victims "were not the local men's glee club". Imagine one of the innocent survivors appeared on television amid the body parts of his son and brother, and pleaded: "Please. We are human beings. Help us. Don't let them do this." Imagine that polling from the attacked country showed that 90 percent of the people there said civilians were the main victims. Imagine there was then a huge natural flood, and the leader responded by ramping up the attacks. Imagine the country's

most respected democratic and liberal voices were warning that these attacks seriously risked causing the transfer of nuclear material to jihadi groups.

Surely, if we meant what we say about Libya, we would be doing anything to stop such behaviour? Wouldn't we be imposing a no-fly zone, or even invading? Yet, in this instance, we would have to impose a no-fly zone on our own governments.

Since 2004, the US – with European support – has been sending unmanned robot-planes into Pakistan to illegally bomb its territory in precisely this way. Obama has massively intensified this policy. His administration claims they are killing al-Qaeda. But the intelligence guiding their bombs about who is actually a jihadi is so poor that, for six months, Nato held top-level negotiations with a man who claimed to be the head of the Taliban, only for him to later admit he was a random Pakistani grocer. The US' own former senior military advisers admit that, even when the intel is accurate, for every one jihadi they kill, as many as 50 innocent people die. And almost every one in Pakistan believes these attacks are actually increasing the number of jihadis, by making the young men so angry at the killing of

their families they queue to sign up.

The country's leading nuclear scientist, Professor Pervez Hoodbhoy, says there is a significant danger that these attacks are spreading so much rage and hatred that they materially increase the chances of the people guarding the country's nuclear weapons smuggling fissile material out to jihadi groups.

Then there's the war in the Congo, the deadliest war since Adolf Hitler marched across Europe. When I reported on it, I saw the worst things I could have ever conceived of: armies of drugged and mutilated children, women who had been gang-raped and shot in the vagina. More than five million people have been killed so far – and the trail of blood runs directly to your cellphone and mine.

The major UN investigation into the war explained how it happened. They said bluntly and factually that "armies of business" had invaded Congo to pillage its resources and sell them to the knowing West. The most valuable loot is coltan, which is used to make the metal in our cellphones and games consoles and laptops. The "armies of business" fought and killed to control the mines and send it to us. The UN listed some of the major Western corporations fuelling this trade,

and said if they were stopped, it would largely end the war.

By contrast, when the Congolese government nationalised a mine belonging to US and British corporations, there was a burst of fury in the press. You can kill five million people and we'll politely look away; but take away the property of rich people, and we get really angry.

So why are our governments really bombing Libya? We won't know for sure until the declassified documents come out many years from now. But Bill Richardson, the former US energy secretary who served as US ambassador to the UN, is probably right when he says: "There's another interest, and that's energy... Libya is among the 10 top oil producers in the world."

For the first time in more than 60 years, Western control over the world's biggest pots of oil is being rocked by a series of revolutions. The most plausible explanation is that this is a way of asserting raw Western power, and trying to arrange the fallout in our favour. But if you are still convinced our governments are acting for humanitarian reasons, I've got a round-trip plane ticket for you to Pakistan and Congo. The people there would love to hear your argument. – The Independent

● *Tony Weaver has gone fishing.*