

THE WORST FORM OF GOVERNMENT EXCEPT FOR ALL THE OTHERS

The Genius of Democracy and Our Part in it

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by

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I have been asked to speak about democracy – our young and fragile South African democracy in particular. Since the invitation came to me, developments in the cradles of democracy – the UK and USA – as well as in Europe, indicate that this notion is under a widening threat - possibly the most serious since the rise of Fascism in the 1930s. People with deeply anti-democratic ideas and methods are at work across the Western world, undermining the foundations upon which free nations have thrived for more than 200 years.

What is this thing I am talking about? In South Africa, until very recently, people were dying for democracy, others gave the better part of their lives to achieve it and millions suffered dreadfully for it. So, twenty-three years after finally achieving it, we need to be very careful about what we do with it. I was listening to a young theological student at Stellenbosch *Kweekskool* last week. He took issue with a lecture I gave there, in which I praised Nelson Mandela. 'I have no respect for anything that has happened since 1994,' he said. 'My parents are just as poor as they ever were. Nothing has changed.' Now of course he is wrong: many things have changed. But he is also right: his parents still live in abject poverty. That has *not* changed. The populist revolution that is sweeping the UK, USA and probably Europe this year roots in a deep frustration: people increasingly see democracy as a system that protects the interests of the haves, while their lives have remained static or even slid backwards. Certainly it has nothing to offer Falon's 'wretched of the earth.' So, it is becoming common for people to scorn democracy, abuse its longstanding customs and courtesies, and endanger its future.

Those who struggled for democracy in South Africa didn't do so because it sounded nice, but because it is the best guarantee of decency and dignity that nations have to turn to. If this lecture is to be any use this morning, my hope is that you will leave here not only informed, but angered and determined to act to defend our democracy, because if we let unscrupulous, manipulative, self-serving and venal people take it away from us, it will be our own fault and our children will curse us.

Winston Churchill famously called democracy: “*the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.*” Significantly, he spoke those words on Remembrance Day just two years after the end of World War II. How strange to describe what millions had fought for with their lifeblood as, “the worst form of Government except for all those others ...” Is that worth dying for?

Well ... *yes*.

Let me try to suggest why, and as I do so, please note that I come at this subject not as a political scientist, but as a theologian. My sources will include the Judeo/Christian Scriptures, where there are recorded some of the earliest attempts to work out how to live in community. Writers in the Hebrew Scriptures regarded the politically powerful in their history with deep ambivalence. They oscillated mostly between wistful hope and despair. Listen to Isaiah:

‘Some day there will be a king who rules with integrity and national leaders who govern with justice. Each of them will be like a shelter from the wind and a place to hide from storms. They will be like streams flowing in the desert, like the shadow of a great rock in a barren land. Their ears shall be open to the needs of the people.’ (Is: 32: 1-3)

Hearing those words, many amongst us will feel some nostalgia, we will say that for an all too brief five years, we knew a ruler who was like a “great rock in a barren land,” someone who broke the mould of mediocrity, hubris and self-interest, someone upon whom power sat lightly and gracefully, someone in whom, although he was flawed in many ways, the world saw true greatness.

My Scriptures regard such a ruler as an exception. Rulers, whether Pharaohs, or Nebuchadnezzars, or Sauls or Davids, or Herod’s or Pilates, or Agrippas or whoever, are seen as problematical or downright dangerous. It is not as if Scripture neglects to give guidance to rulers: it offers clear precepts to govern our expectations of them. Here are some of them:

Ten Biblical Precepts for Good Governance ...

1. Rulers are accountable, not only to the people, but to a more ultimate Authority. God will not ask them whether they went to church, but whether they ruled with

justice and compassion. The ultimate Biblical accolade for a king was. “He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord;”

2. Service, rather than self-aggrandisement, is required of rulers. (John 13: 12-17).
Let the Blue Light Brigade and the builders of grand *Nkandlas* take note;
3. So are integrity and morality. Immorality and corruption erode people’s respect for public office. “Don’t be surprised when you see that the government oppresses the poor and denies them justice and their rights. Every official is protected by the one over him and both are protected by still higher officials.” (Eccl: 4: 8).;
4. Righteousness exalts a nation. The English word righteousness, however, doesn’t do justice to the Hebrew *chesed* – which is properly translated, “compassionate fair dealing” - what Micah calls “doing justly and loving mercy ...” (Micah 6:8);
5. Economic justice is paramount. Long before Marx the Bible understood that most political struggles are about control of land, money and resources, that economic liberation is as important as political liberation, (Micah 2: 1-3, Leviticus 25:8-10, Amos 8:4-7).. That is why Jesus spoke more about money than almost any other subject. He knew this was the bottom line of most people's lives;
6. The strong and rich are most in danger of judgement. In the Bible, the sins which flow from strength are more harshly judged than those emanating from weakness. Abuses denying a poor person bread will always be a greater crime than the theft of bread by a poor person. When theologians say that God is on the side of the poor, it is not because the poor are sinless, but because they are most sinned against. (Exodus 3:7-10, Proverbs 31:8-9, Luke 4:16-21);
7. Society will therefore be judged by how the most vulnerable are treated. In Biblical days, the most vulnerable were widows, aliens and orphans and the first recorded welfare legislation of any kind is to be found in Leviticus 19: 9-11, instructing that a portion of each harvest was to be left for their needs. In Matthew

25, it is not individuals, but *nations* that stand before judgement, and the criteria are whether they visited the sick and prisoners, clothed the naked and fed the hungry, housed the stranger and refreshed the thirsty;

8. God has no favourites (Acts 10:34-35). Each person has intrinsic worth, based not on our wisdom, performance or wealth, nor any accident of skin-colour, gender, sexual orientation, culture or creed, but because each carries within them the image of God. (Gen 1: 26, Rom 5: 6-11);
9. Policies of Government are judged not by intention but by outcome: every political or economic blueprint must be judged by its impact on the lives of ordinary people, because people are not “ordinary” at all. If it damages family life, robs people of their rights, demeans human dignity, stunts growth, silences conscience, foments war, encourages exploitation or perpetuates poverty, it must be judged as wrong and displeasing to God;
10. Leaders must seek reconciliation and unity rather than enmity and division. Those who exploit and manipulate division and prejudice for the sake of gaining or maintaining power are disobeying God (Eph 1:1-10, 2 Cor 5:18-20).

This cursory exploration of just two religions’ precepts about good government cannot be misunderstood. It will hopefully explain again why the South African Council of Churches, the Christian Institute and the Inter-faith forums of the apartheid era opposed and defied the regime: they were not ideologically driven, but simply being obedient to their theological convictions. In any case, as my father used to say, “Everything begins in theology and ends in politics.”

What of Democracy ...?

The coming of democracy to South Africa was rightly a moment of rejoicing. None among us would choose to return to the dark night of *apartheid’s* brutalities. Nevertheless, twenty-three years of democracy show that its coming was not the arrival of the Kingdom. Democracy will always be

imperfect because it is at heart a massive compromise between conflicting forces and interests, always with imperfect outcomes.

Does democracy have any justifying theological rationale? I would want to offer a qualified “yes,” not because Scripture endorses *any* particular form of government, but because democratic systems, at heart, do seem to take seriously the two primary truths that the great religions teach about humankind: the first is *that we are made for something better – for goodness and for God*, and the second is *that we’re always losing the plot and screwing up*. Democracy is predicated on the optimism of the first, and on the inevitability of the second. Reinhold Niebuhr puts it this way: “Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man’s inclination to injustice makes it necessary.” Thus democratic institutions, while representing the nobility of our aspirations toward the good, perhaps even more express our suspicion of the utopian vision. We lend people power, but always on the understanding that it will be temporary. We design systems to enable them to rule, but also to reign in the powerful, to subject them to public scrutiny and to hold them accountable to the people.

Obviously one of democracy’s virtues is that it offers a framework in which contending parties and ideologies can seek power without bloodshed. The oldest symbol of this, of course, is found in Britain’s House of Commons, where the distance between government and opposition benches is just a little more than two sword-lengths. Instead of fighting each other, they make speeches and campaign and vote. Elections gauge the peoples will, bringing to power those whom the people choose.

But the greatest lesson democracy teaches *is* not about how to *gain* power – any tyrant can tell you how to do that - *but how to give it up gracefully*. It permits us to get rid of rulers in a non-violent and reasonably civil manner. I would argue that the noblest moment for democracy is when a country’s leader says, “The people have spoken,” and then he or she begins to pack their bags.

Last year we witnessed a good example of this: Prime Minister David Cameron looked like he was set for a long tenure. Then he bet on a horse that lost by just 4% points. In many countries such a narrow margin would be a recipe for civil strife, but not in a solid democracy: soon, he was gracefully conceding defeat and resigning. It didn’t matter how passionately he felt his position was correct, and how wrong he felt the outcome to be: *the people had spoken*.

The same might be said for the ugly and utterly unprincipled election campaign waged by Donald Trump in the United States: in spite of all sorts of evidence, including manipulation by a foreign power, in the end Hilary Clinton, the defeated candidate, stood with everyone else on the steps of the Capitol Building, to watch Trump take the oath of office. Even though the winner is an ignorant, bullying narcissist – and probably the biggest danger to world peace to ever hold the office, no shots were fired. The people had spoken and for better or for worse, he has entered the White house.

[Incidentally, evidence is emerging that Trump's victory was engineered primarily by a company called Cambridge Analytica, that claim to be able to 'influence elections,' and which also drove the equally surprising victory for Brexit in the UK. The company uses psychometrics or psychographics to measure psychological traits and taps into the so-called 'big-data' collected by Facebook and others. When psychometric scoring is married to Facebook profiles it is possible to get near 100% certainty about the political attitudes, likes and dislikes, fear and hopes of millions of individuals, ensuring that that a candidate's message presses the exact emotional buttons needed to influence them. This explains why many of Trump/s speeches appeared to be disjointed, with certain mantras repeated over and over again. These were the phrases determined by the company to press the buttons that would create followers. At the same time, using what they call 'microtargeting,' the company could ensure that canvassers knocked only on doors of persuadable people, those with personality traits that would be responsive to Trump's message. It is a deeply scary development that could itself endanger democracy as we know it, but that is not the purview of this lecture.]

South Africa's Ominous Signs ...

Returning to South Africa, however, we are *not* a mature democracy. We need to nurture this 23 year-old very carefully, because already there are ominous signs that many of our compatriots either do not understand, or more likely no longer want, a genuinely democratic South Africa. Since our President has begun to lose court cases more often than he wins them, and since the local elections last year, we have heard a new cry about the Constitution that protects our democracy: it is a foreign notion, it is un-African." Well, of course it is! But democratic systems are not just un-African, they are "anti-human-nature." It is precisely because they run so strongly against the grain of our natural instincts that we need them so badly. Without them we would kill each other much more often.

Another, even more problematic chorus I am hearing is that our Constitution, is undemocratic because it impedes the will of the people. Mzwanele Manyi calls for our Constitutional Democracy to be replaced by what he calls a Parliamentary one. Why should an elected Government with a strong majority be frustrated by eleven judges in green robes - or even more annoying, one woman called a Public Protector? It is a fair question. It puts impediments in the way of the people's will. So why put up with it?

We put up with it because we've learned that *Vox populi* is not always *vox dei*. In fact it can be *vox diabolis*. Even the voice of the people needs some constraints. The preacher in me reminds you that we are not by nature good people: under the thin skin of just a few centuries of civilization, lies our ugly primal nature. We claim to be creatures of reason, but as Karen Armstrong says, "reason may tell our minds what is needed but it has no power to move our wills away from self-interest." She reminds us that in the deepest recesses of our minds we are driven, like our primeval ancestors, by the notorious four Fs: feeding, fighting, fleeing and – as she puts it delicately – reproducing. We may have evolved, and reasoning powers may now moderate our conduct, but put simply, unconstrained majorities can still become mobs – and often do.

So, even the voice of the people needs constraints and only entrenched constitutional clauses can do that. Just as religions accept certain non-negotiables as commandments from their God, I would suggest that our Constitution is the *secular scripture* of our democracy, and its constraints upon our behaviour should assume something of the weight of sacred writ. Of course, constitutions don't come down from Mount Sinai: they are imperfect documents, but when a Constitution emerges out of years of struggle between contending parties and when it represents the best efforts of all of them, it becomes our most precious national treasure. When it is adopted, it is crucial that it be honoured, and if honoured, protected, because as sure as God made little apples, the people we put into power will test it to the limit. Hence the doctrine of the separation of powers, with Legislature and Judiciary and certain Chapter Nine institutions such as the Human Rights Commission, and the Public Protector, expected to monitor and if necessary restrain, the actions of the Executive and yes, *the majority*. The existence and the independence of these checks and balances must be protected at all costs.

In addition, no democracy can stay healthy without a vigorous, free Press and an active Civil Society. Channels for free discussion, information sharing, publication and association, are all crucial to the wellbeing of a democratic society. Every citizen must feel that there is a way open to her/him

to express an opinion or voice a grievance. Because privately funded media houses will express the biases of their owners, it is entirely appropriate that public taxes should fund a Public Broadcaster whose task is to be such a free channel, without fear or favour, offering an impartial platform for the national conversation. Its task will be to give fair voice to all because it is owned, not by Government, but by the people. The *apartheid* regime sabotaged this vision by making the SABC a cowardly servant of their racist ideology. After a good start in the Mandela years, our present regime is busy doing the same; they have completely gutted the SABC of any believability.

Now I said earlier that I hoped you would leave this lecture angry and determined. Angry about what? About President Zuma for the bad things he has done? Well, yes, he is a bad man, he no longer pretends anything different, but he should not be the primary target of our anger and determination. He will disappear from the scene. What should really mobilize us is what he wants to leave behind: *he is doing his best to leave us a broken Constitution no longer able to protect our freedoms or hold our rulers accountable*. His contempt for the Constitution is bad enough, but he has also systematically weakened the institutions designed to keep him and his Government honest, **such as the National Prosecuting Authority, the Office of the Public Protector, the Treasury and the Public Broadcaster. In a carefully calibrated strategy, he has planted pliable and servile yes-men/women to run the very institutions meant to constrain him, then we are in big trouble.** *Right now, your freedoms and mine are dependent not on Parliament but on a thin line of Courts and Judges across the land.* Those freedoms therefore can last only as long as public-spirited citizens, NGOs and some political parties can raise the enormous sums of money required to take the Government to court. This is not how our democracy was meant to work. The missing piece is Parliament, which instead of checking the power of the Executive, simply functions as its uncritical cheerleader.

The Missing ‘Moral Compass’

One of the phrases we hear *ad nauseum* is that the ANC has ‘lost its moral compass,’ and indeed it has. In its early years, the ANC was unashamedly a product of a combination of liberal democratic ideals and a deep Christian faith nurtured by the missionary churches and their outstanding schools and colleges. When I visited Nelson Mandela and his fellow Rivonia prisoners on Robben Island in the 1960s, we didn’t need hymn books. I would suggest a great Sotho hymn like ‘*Mele, pelo, le moea...*’ or the Mandela’s Xhosa favourite ‘*Lizalis’ idinga lakho...*’ and they would launch immediately into song, every word remembered. Ahmed Kathrada, the lone Muslim, enjoyed our services too and even learned some words. The only party-pooper was Govan Mbeki, the grumpy old

marxist, who hated religion. He sat in his cell and sulked. When I visited Robert Sobukwe in his lonely hut, there too was a Methodist lay preacher with a fine theological mind. These people had a refined sense of what was right and wrong, just and unjust, virtuous and unethical, and these values informed their political thinking.

Sadly, that has been largely lost. The passing of generations has brought us leaders with no such roots. Those who rule us now are mostly the products of *apartheid's* barren Bantu Education Curriculum. If we think some cabinet ministers say dumb things, those of you who used to vote for the National Party – you are at least partly to blame. Nor do they have the same deep roots in the churches. So, yes ... the ANC has wandered far from those great scriptural principles that I listed earlier, it has lied and cheated itself into a moral wasteland. Because of this it has lost the right to lead.

The White question ...

Looking out on this audience, I see that is it very, very white. Things do not look too good for white South Africans right now. We may feel shut out of any significant role in making our country work. We see a growing nativism that tends to portray not only our ancestors, but ourselves too, as colonial outsiders, and our nation not as a rainbow nation but as a black republic. President Zuma's latest scapegoat for the failures of his corrupt administration has strong racist undertones: he will tell us repeatedly that his troubles are all the fault of White Monopoly Capital.

But before we get on our hind legs too much, let me ask this question: where is our moral compass? Are white South Africans committed to these great principles, to our constitution, to our democracy? Or do we, like Govan Mbeki, just get grumpy and sulk and move to the Cape? Let us remind ourselves that we whites owe the rest of our South African compatriots big-time. We have been dreadfully slow to get on board the new South Africa. Whites by and large pooh-poohed and boycotted the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and you have no idea how deeply that hurt black South Africans. When Beyers Naude pleaded with us to at least send R1000 each to a 'Reparation Fund' just to indicate our sorrow and contrition for *apartheid*, only a handful of us responded. We have not been very good at facing our guilt, which is real and deep. If I was a black South African I would be crystal clear that there is no place in this land for whites who deny their past guilt. I would want to see them gone.

Yet, the wonder of it is that even now most of our black compatriots are not asking anybody grovel in guilt. They just want us to acknowledge it, that's all, and then become constructive contributors to our nation. How shall we do that?

- First, we should stop 'othering' people. If we can be one nation when we win a World Rugby Cup or when we stage a World Soccer Cup, we can be one nation in the Supermarket, on our roads, in our daily encounters. Columnist Melanie Verwoerd reminded us recently of a lovely thought: when we look at those who are 'other' than us, we need to 'soften our gaze.' Desmond Tutu used to say something similar: 'When you meet another person – any other person, you should genuflect, because you are meeting the image of God.'
- Second, we should be careful of our words. What we say about each other, especially when we are frustrated, cannot be taken back. We either join those who pollute our dinner table talk, or our social media or the airwaves with racially charged language and opinions, or we determine to try and put ourselves in the 'other's' shoes before we speak – and we become willing to intervene when we hear destructive and racist talk.
- Third, we find ways to get positively and actively engaged in movements that strengthen and protect our constitutional democracy. It may be an NGO, a political party, or a social media group – it matters not – so long as those who wish the Constitution harm get the message loud and clear: 'that is the sacred text of our democracy ... don't you dare touch it!'
- Fourth, we become intentional about crossing the lines of the past. Too many white South Africans' engagement with the 'other' is still limited to the person who cleans their home. If we can't make the effort to build at least one or two friendships with people of colour, we should emigrate properly instead of living like foreigners in our own land.
- Fifth, when you emigrate, you cut all ties, you sell up, you leave nostalgia behind and embrace your new country wholeheartedly. Well, many white South Africans still need to emigrate *to the New South Africa*. It was my friend and brother-in-law, Allan Hardie who first taught me this idea: the nation whites ran for 300 years is gone; it is not coming back,

ever. We can try and live in a country that no longer exists, or we can emigrate properly to the new South Africa. It won't cost anything like moving to Australia.

None of these things is rocket science, but each of them requires effort and a new attitude – and that may be the toughest part ...

A few years ago, I had to address a gathering of US Senators and members of Congress about reconciliation. The other speaker that night was Roelf Meyer, former minister of police in the *apartheid* government. He and I had been on different sides of the struggle, and I had been an unwilling-guest in more than one of his prison cells. You can imagine that our greeting was somewhat stiff and formal!

But, then Roelf spoke and this is what he said:

I knew that we were travelling in the wrong direction, and I knew that would have to change. I just didn't realize how much I would have to change. I didn't change until I realized that it was not just my mind that was involved - I had to reach down deep inside to my soul. That's where it had to happen"

I was deeply moved by those words, because ... well ... that's where all real change has to happen. Roelf Meyer became the key negotiator on the government side in bringing us our new Constitution. Maybe we too have to reach deep inside our souls and change a few attitudes if we are to defend it.

And believe me, it is worth defending. After all, it is the “worst form of government there is, except for all the others ...”

Peter Storey

Simon's Town, 2017

I love the phrase that introduces the American Bill of Rights: it begins with the words, “We, the People ...” Here in South Africa, if we believe in our democracy, it is “We the People ...” who must defend it.

- **We, the People** need to discern what the growing struggle between Constitutionalism and Majoritarianism is really about. Is it a genuine debate about alternative understandings of democracy, or is it a struggle between our freedoms and those who want unchecked power? A question always worth asking about the incumbents in moments like these is: “If they had unchecked power, would I be safe?” Well, those of us with memories that go back more than twenty-two years have been there: we recall such a government and we know the answer: nobody should be trusted with untrammelled power just because they have a majority. We must choose the Constitution.
- **We, the People** need to decide whether our Constitution, hailed as a model for democratic societies everywhere, is a Western construct foisted upon, and inappropriate to, African culture, or whether it lifts up principles and virtues that are valid everywhere, challenging the darker potentials of all cultures. Again, we do not have to look far for the answer: the irony is that the very persons who had the last word and the deciding vote when designing and adopting our Constitution, are the ones who, after more than two decades in power, are now questioning it. There can be only one reason why they are doing so: it is cramping their style and they don’t like it. When a Constitution irritates even its designers, what better proof do we need that it is working? It is ensuring your freedom and mine by restraining those in power.
- **We, the People** need to decide whether Parliament exists to pander to party leaders or represent the people. I want an MP who is more afraid of losing my vote than of being dropped from the party list. The proportional representation system was perhaps rightly fashioned to be as inclusive as possible during our years of transition, but it has now become a barrier to genuine representation and responsiveness to the people. The Slabbert Commission gave us a good start suggesting a mix of proportional and constituency representation. A system more representative of the people than the parties should be our first major amendment to the Constitution.

- **We, the People** need to take note how the power of money is gutting the meaning of democracy in the USA, where money now buys Presidents, Senators and House Representatives and therefore their policies and votes. Ask yourself why political parties in South Africa are coy about financial transparency and the sources of their funds? It is completely appropriate that we, the people know where their money comes from. How can we fairly judge a party without knowing who is paying the piper? Party finance reform is necessary to protect our democracy.
- **We, the People** need to decide whether any person or body is above the law. In the main our Courts have not failed us, they have generally ruled without fear or favour. But recent findings against Parliament by the Constitutional Court have been all but ignored by the Speaker and the relevant ministers and committees who used their positions to protect the President rather than uphold the Constitution. We have yet to see whether the President will obey the Court's ruling and pay back the money he has been found to owe on Nkandla. In the midst of evidence of open defiance of the law, it is sad to see the citizenry of South Africa more obsessed with the trial of a celebrity murderer than with whether their President obeys the law or not.
- **We, the People** need to decide whether we will permit violence to be the arbiter of any election outcome? Many of you will recall the National Peace Accord, when we dragged all the political parties, kicking and screaming in to one room and wrote a Code of Conduct to force them to behave. We had to set up a national organization with regional and local Peace Committees to stop them killing each other. Without the NPA there would have been no 1994 "miracle." It *was* the miracle, but it is the best kept secret about those years because the politicians cannot admit that they behaved so murderously. Now we see ugly signs of inter-party and intra-party violence returning. Numbers of people have already died in pre-election political murders. We, the people need to make it clear *we will not tolerate intolerance*, that any party depending on violence to win these elections has already shown that it has nothing to offer, and should not be trusted to run even a municipality.

- **We, the People** need to decide whether the trending tendency to blame everything on whiteness, race and racism is as helpful as it is fashionable. Of course we need to face all stubborn white racism squarely and without compromise and whites like me need to take with utmost seriousness the many layers of privilege our whiteness has brought us and how it blinds us. However, unless I'm missing something, my impression is that the worst racists are mainly grumpy old white men of my generation, and they are dying out. Surely among younger whites, racists are significantly outnumbered by patriots who desire to make a useful contribution to the Rainbow Nation. Many of them have felt the effect of affirmative action on their personal futures, and have accepted its necessity without rancour. They deserve encouragement but I have yet to hear one word from this President even acknowledging their existence or praising their commitment to our common future. Instead, on the campaign trail President Zuma speaks of whites in terms very close to hate speech. Yes, the shift from white economic domination is slow, but it *is* happening and *will be* achieved. When some opinionistas return repeatedly to the white racism theme I admit to sometimes asking myself who benefits from this? Could it be partly a shifting of our attention from other national pathologies demanding attention?
- **We, the People** need to also question those commentators who inform us that the "Rainbow Nation" is dead. The drive for reconciliation, they say, was all a con, and now that Nelson Mandela is no longer with us, some go further and claim that he sold his compatriots out, and robbed South Africa of its revolution. I note that many who propagate these views are of a generation that wasn't there in the bad times. They reveal a deep (or is it deliberate) ignorance of what Mandela and his ANC negotiating team faced from 1990 onward. With a battle-hardened white army and nation-wide security state on one side of the table and a poorly armed, almost dysfunctional *Mkhonto we Sizwe* on the other, few liberation movements have confronted such intimidating odds. Given those realities, it is astounding that Mandela could deliver a Constitution so manifestly committed to full majority rule and freedom for all. Carping on the few "sunset clauses" that allayed white fears and prevented the flight of white money, is petty in comparison. With regard to the "Rainbow Nation," some commentators seem to wish it gone through their self-fulfilling prophecy. I wonder if they realize they are trashing the only unique gift South Africa has for the wider world? Our rainbow hope may be embattled by present trends but it's the only reason why the world is fascinated by our insignificant country. More than any other place in the world, they see in us

a nation that is staring down its racist past and seems serious about making a pluralistic, multi-cultural society work. Tarnished or not, that rainbow is the only thing that makes us special and the only vision worth working for. Pronouncing its obituary is tantamount to writing off the South African project.

These are some of the larger issues overshadowing the body politic today. They are linked to the health and perhaps the survival of our democracy and therefore they loom much larger than any party loyalty. None of us can afford to be lazy thinkers and just vote as we've always voted, or stand aside from the process. The implications of these issues should make us angry and determined. How dare anyone scorn our democracy, abuse it, cheapen it or endanger it? How dare they?

After all, it is the "worst form of government there is, except for all the others ..."

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