

The SABC, folks, is the real state of the nation

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25 Feb 2014

In the days I used to defend Jacob Zuma, I often said we should not use education as an indicator of leadership potential. Well-meaning as I might have been, I now take that back.



There is a certain discipline that comes with waking up in the morning, making sure your uniform is ready, that you are not late, that you complete assignments on time and that you respect the rules of an institution.

Even better if you should have the benefit of a university education where different perspectives are the order of the day.

While education is no guarantee of good leadership, there is something to be said for the social experience it provides. I-sikolo sinendawo yaso

If you were a black kid growing up under apartheid, education also instilled excellence as a cultural principle.

I do not mean excellence just in terms of mastery of subject matter but the excellence that comes from the knowledge that your performance is inextricably linked with the fate of your family or the nation. I suspect Machiavelli would have called it virtuosity.

We competed in our classrooms in the knowledge that we would be rewarded for such virtuosity, not through money but through social recognition.

It is this relationship between effort and reward as professional and social recognition that is being subverted when feckless "amandla functionaries" are deployed to take over important public institutions such as the SABC.

A dream deferred

I was part of a generation of black student leaders who looked to the democratic era as the time in which we would take the cultural principle of excellence - this virtuosity - to the next level. We dreamt of South Africa as a black-led, advanced industrial economy.

I left the country to further my studies because I thought that even the Masters degree I had from Wits University was not enough. In pursuit of this dream of excellence, I went to Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Cornell where I got my PhD in city planning.

But I might as well have never dreamt. I came back to find a president distracted by pointless, points-scoring over a deadly disease, party leaders splashing on ill-gotten gains from the arms deal, and municipalities that were feeding troughs for the "amandla functionaries".

The truth is that SABC acting chief operating officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng is the excrescence of a long festering sore that started with the "blacklists" of the Mbeki era and has now metastasised in Nkandla, the Guptas and the daylight robbery unfolding each and every waking day, while we sit and look, to paraphrase Bob Marley's Redemption Song, except there is no redemption in sight.

We have suspended our moral judgement and mortgaged our responsibility to Public Protector Thuli Madonsela, as if she is the only one with the responsibility for the cultural patrimony of excellence.

They simply don't care

A friend chillingly told me "these guys don't care anymore, man. They do not go to bed thinking about the country. That is just not how they're wired."

Like robber barons have always done in history, they dole out welfare payments to keep them mollified. "See, the people are happy", they tell us. When it emerges that the people are actually unhappy they say "see, the people are impatient". They have the script ready for every eventuality.

What the "amandla functionaries" do very well, though, is to walk the red carpet.

I have never seen such phoney-ness as the opening of parliament - black people trying so hard to become copycats of Hollywood, and being bad at it. They then give the president a deafening applause when he says: "There are now 15-million people with jobs in the country, the highest ever in our history."

Duh, that's because there have never been as many South Africans before, President.

Normally these things are usefully worked out by calculating the employed as a percentage of the labour force. That went over the heads of the "rent-a-crowd" parliamentarians.

And then here's the gem, which was also met with whistles and ululations: "We are better than we were before."

'Galloping ignorance'

Well, so is the rest of humanity, President.

When I point these things out to a friend, he simply says in despair, "Eish, my broer, galloping ignorance"!

The SABC is a metaphor of the real state of the nation. You know you have fallen from grace as a country when you move from Zwelakhe Sisulu to Hlaudi Motsoeneng without batting an eyelid.

It's like putting the cultural principle of excellence on the floor and stamping on it with both feet, to a point of non-

recognition.

Madonsela's report on the SABC is thus much more than a legal document. It is an act of cultural restoration. It may be a thankless task, or it could be the negative that becomes the basis of a photograph.

You can have the photograph retaken a million times but it will not produce a different image of the reality. You can even smash the cameras if you like but that won't change the reality.

And then, when it's too late, the children will ask us why we lied to them and said all was well in the State of Denmark.

Source: Sowetan, via I-Net Bridge

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