

Earlier this century, representing 'pure' Afrikaner nationalism, General Hertzog said: "As against the European, the native stands as an eight-year-old against a man of mature experience – a child in religion ..."

In the novel, *Disgrace*, J. M. Coetzee represents, as brutally as he can, the white people's perception of the post-apartheid black man. This is Hertzog's savage eight-year-old, without the restraining leash around his neck that the European had been obliged to place in the interest of both the native and society.

It is suggested that in these circumstances, it might be better that our white compatriots should emigrate because to be in post-apartheid South Africa is to be in 'their territory', as a consequence of which the whites will lose their cards, their weapons, their property, their rights, their dignity. The white woman will have to sleep with the barbaric black men. Accordingly, the alleged white 'brain drain' must be reported regularly and given the necessary prominence!

J. M. Coetzee makes the point that, five years after our liberation, white South African society continues to believe in a particular stereotype of the African, which defines the latter as:

- immoral and amoral;
- savage;
- violent;
- disrespectful of private property;
- incapable of refinement through education; and,
- driven by hereditary dark, satanic impulses.

Many practitioners of journalism in our country (including the foreign correspondents) carry this stereotype in their heads at all times. Accordingly, this informs the entirety of their work, including:

- the determination of what is news;
- the prioritisation of news items;
- the interpretation of the news;
- the presentation of the activities and the views of blacks in positions of authority; and
- the portrayal of blacks in position of authority.

As it became obvious, during the 1980s, that the apartheid system was nearing its end, a particular category emerged in our national politics. We refer here to the concept of 'white fears'.

Had this discussion taken place honestly, the point would have been made that these fears arose because white South Africa was convinced that the stereotype of black people, indicated above, in fact reflected the truth about black people.

To address these white fears, consistent with the longstanding policies of our movement, we placed high among the challenges that face our people the objective of achieving national reconciliation. The consequences that white South Africa expected, consistent with their black stereotype, were not realised.

Thus Nelson Mandela's success as a leader came to be measured by the white media according to the degree to which what he said and did was consistent with what this media considered as necessary to allay white fears.

The white media resolved that the way to resolve this problem was to proclaim Nelson Mandela as exceptional relative to the rest of the black leadership in our country, especially the black leadership within the ANC.

He was atypically good whereas the rest of his colleagues were, necessarily and by definition, primitive and the very cause of white fears.

This was clearly stated in a *Sunday Times* editorial on February 18 1996. It argued that

stereotypes

steer the news



once President Mandela stepped down in 1999, we would have "to overcome the dreadful image of African venality and incompetence ..."

Having correctly understood the intent and meaning of the editorial, President Mandela wrote: "Further, we should all be proud the (South African) success of worldwide significance has come out of a downtrodden people – out of Africa! Yes, Africans, with their supposed venality and incompetence, have achieved this feat! Thus, I find quite distressing any insinuation that I do not belong to these African masses and do not share their aspirations."

By attributing exceptional (national reconciliation) qualities to Nelson Mandela, which it was said the rest of his ANC colleagues did not have, the point was being made that the latter would behave in a manner consistent with the white stereotype of black people.

Consistent with what this stereotype dictates, the formation of an African government can be expected to result in the following:

- crime will increase, especially all forms of theft, with murder thrown in in abundant measure;
- rape will increase, with white women being the most threatened, the jeopardy doubled by the

'fact' that rapists are likely to be HIV-positive; ■ corruption will become the norm rather than the exception; and,

■ democracy and human rights will be subverted and ultimately destroyed.

It is true that, like all other countries, we have to confront the problem of crime, the challenge of rape, have to fight against corruption, and be vigilant in defending and advancing democracy and human rights. Accordingly, there is nothing racist about the reporting of crime, rape, corruption and issues of democracy and human rights in our country.

However, racism, driven by the white stereotype of the African, informs such reporting. The racist paradigm dictates that facts seen to be inconsistent with the white stereotype of the African savage should not be given such weight as would negate this stereotype.

Many contemporary African journalists help to sustain the racist images. Accordingly, they too become part of the media establishment which necessarily must portray the 'new South Africa' in as negative a light as possible, because they too have absorbed into their consciousness the white stereotype of the black savage.

The stereotype directs that the news that must be found and reported is precisely of the events and occurrences that the stereotype prescribes as being typical of the behaviour of the African barbarians 'once the whites have departed' from their positions of power. The news must therefore be about crime, corruption, government ineptitude, moral decay and economic collapse. It must show that when the African barbarians took over from the civilised whites, the rot started and is escalating beyond control.

Within this paradigm, facts must not be allowed to stand in the way of the propagation of the white stereotype of the African barbarian.

The truth is that violent crime, a serious problem in our country long before 1994, has been declining in our country since 1994. The fact is that the figure of 'a rape every 26 seconds' is entirely false. Corruption has been endemic in South Africa for very many years, deriving from the fact of white minority rule, and is now only being confronted, precisely by our democratically elected government.

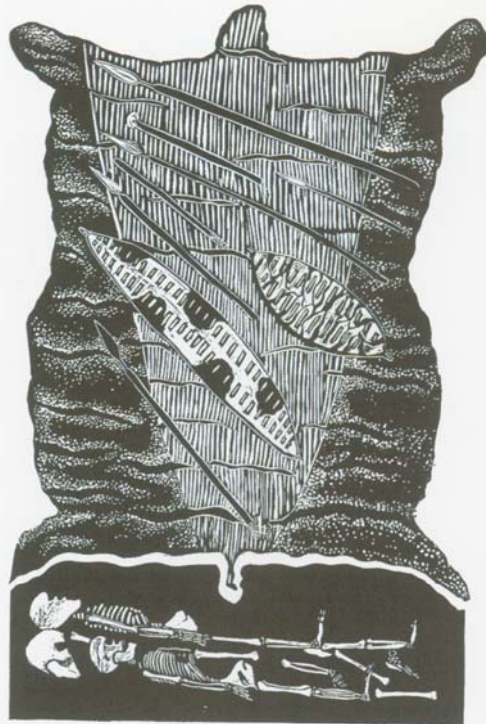
The truth is that for six years we have had a democratic government which has governed according to a democratic constitution and worked very hard to defend and promote human rights, whereas all previous white governments have upheld tyranny and oppression most brutally.

Since none of these truths are consistent with the racist stereotype, at best they must not be reported and, at worst, they must be denied. South African society continues to be structured according to the racist prescription that the whites are superior and the blacks inferior. There is a need to conduct a systematic and protracted campaign to destroy the white stereotype of black, and especially African, people – and publicly to challenge the expression of this stereotype whenever it raises its head.

Stories are prejudiced right from the start, says the ANC in its submission to the HRC Inquiry.

The ANC proposes that serious and transparently monitored efforts must be made to:

- Deracialise the ownership of the media in our country;
- Deracialise the management of the media organisations;
- Deracialise editorial control in our media organisations;
- Improve the professional capacity of especially the black journalists and deracialise especially the echelon of the senior journalist corps;
- Deracialise the "panel" of outside (non-media) commentators on whom the media relies for "independent" comment;
- Discourage an "advertisers boycott" in response to black ownership, management and editorial control;
- Convince everybody working in the media that they, like the rest of our society, have a responsibility to contribute what they can to the achievement of the constitutional objective of the creation of a non-racial society.



CHUMANI XONXHA
b. 1984

Umlom' awashaywa – The mouth is not struck.

People who lived near the battlefield told me that the way the amaXhosa recorded this history was by burying personal items and bones at Egazini – the place where the battle took place. I know that one day this will all be uncovered and we will see this history at last.