

## **PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA'S DOUBLETHINK HERITAGE DAY STATEMENT**

*By Dave Steward, Chairman of the FW de Klerk Foundation*

In his dystopian novel "1984" George Orwell introduced us to the concept of "doublethink" - which he described as -

"...the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them... To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just as long as it is needed, to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies - all this is indispensably necessary."

We saw examples of doublethink in President Ramaphosa's statement on Heritage Day last week.

He announced that "we are a nation of eleven official languages" - knowing full well that English is, increasingly, the sole *de facto* official language - and that his own government has done little or nothing to implement the "Use of Official Languages Act" of 2011.

He boasted that "We are a nation that steadfastly protects those indigenous languages that are facing extinction" - while knowing that virtually nothing has been done to elevate the status and advance the use of South Africa's indigenous languages - including his own Tshivenda language - as is required by section 6(2) of the Constitution.

He observed that "Heritage Day is a time to appreciate the many facets of our cultures, customs and traditions. It is the time when we put them on display to appreciate and celebrate and share our cultures and traditions with others."

However, this clearly does not include the cultures, customs, and traditions of white South Africans - and particularly of Afrikaners. According to the President they should not be put on display to be appreciated and celebrated with others. Instead, the "naming and renaming of towns and cities" should be used to expunge the contribution that they have made to our collective history - and their monuments "glorifying our divided past" should be repositioned and relocated" away from public view.

In the world of doublethink, the negation of the culture and history of part of the population is apparently intended to promote "social cohesion" and "national unity".

So what was left for white South Africans to celebrate on Heritage Day?

Was there nothing in their history since 1652 that is worthy of commemoration? What of figures like Jan van Riebeeck, Wolraad Woltemade, Piet Retief, Paul Kruger, Jan Smuts and Louis Botha - are they to be viewed only through an oppression/liberation prism? What of the legacy of the Second Anglo-Boer War - which was one of the greatest anti-colonial struggles in the history of Africa - during which the Afrikaners lost almost 10% of their population in British concentration camps? What of the enormous contribution that white people have made to the development of the country? Must we discard the Constitution's call to "respect those who have worked to build the country?"

In response to the President's statement, Dr Danie Langner, CEO of the Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Organisations, regretted that "...the President spoke from on high about the Afrikaners' cultural heritage, but not with us. There has thus far been no discussion by the government with the

Afrikaans cultural communities about their culture.” He added that the Afrikaans cultural community would like to speak about the statues that still stand in public spaces - especially because some of them had been vandalised or used as political punching bags. He said that a new heritage strategy was needed - but it would first be necessary to consult with all communities.

There is, unfortunately, nothing new in President Ramaphosa’s rejection of white culture and history.

In January 2014 President Zuma said that Jan van Riebeeck’s arrival in the Cape was the beginning of all South Africa’s problems. “A man with the name of Jan van Riebeeck arrived in the Cape on 6 April 1652... What followed were numerous struggles and wars and deaths and the seizure of land and the deprivation of the indigenous peoples’ political and economic power.” The arrival of Van Riebeeck “disrupted South Africa's social cohesion, repressed people and caused wars.”

In 2016 - in *City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v AfriForum* our highest court appeared to reject the idea that white people have a right to culture. In their dissenting opinion, Judges Cameron and Froneman observed that, “the implication that may be drawn from the first judgment is that any reliance by white South Africans, particularly white Afrikaner people, on a cultural tradition founded in history, finds no recognition in the Constitution, because that history is inevitably rooted in oppression”. In his separate judgement, Judge Jafta was even more explicit and insisted that “any claim to the enjoyment of culture may not include an entitlement to racist and oppressive cultural traditions of the colonial and apartheid era.” “Such traditions” he said, “belong in the dustbins of history where they ought to be buried.”

On 14 April last year, the Minister of Arts and Culture, Mr Nathi Mthethwa announced, during the ANC’s presentation of its manifesto on “cohesion and nation building,” that the government intended to rename all public spaces currently named after “colonial and apartheid masterminds”. He said that “We cannot have public spaces named after those people. That would not be reconciliation. It would be capitulation. Our project is the project of reconciliation. This is like asking the Germans to have Hitler in their public spaces.”

In the conclusion to his Heritage Day remarks, President Ramaphosa continued blithely along the doublethink path:

“We will continue to support every effort to preserve our common heritage, as well as those of individual communities. As much as we celebrate our customs and traditions on this day, let us also appreciate that in practising our cultures freely and openly, and in speaking our native languages, we are reclaiming not just our heritage, but our pride and our dignity as South Africans.”

Does the President really accept that the culture of white South Africans is part of our common heritage? Does he really believe that they have a right to practise their “cultures freely and openly” - or should they be permitted to do so only to the degree and in the manner that he - without consultation - determines?

These questions should be addressed in a culturally inclusive manner and through discussion. Surely such an approach would be more in line with the constitution’s requirement that we should work together to “heal the divisions of the past”. Reconciliation is not a unilateral act that can be forced *upon* communities - it must be fostered *between* them.

This is the spirit that Nelson Mandela showed in the comments he made on 15 April 1999 on the role of Afrikaners in South African history:



“I do not know whether Afrikaners fully understand the unique position that they occupy in South African history. And how that history equipped them to work on the development of our country. Afrikaners were at various stages of their history conquerors and conquered; victims of repression and perpetrators of repression. With that background and historic experience, and with their expertise, they can play a special role in building up the country to one of progress, justice and peaceful coexistence.”

The negation of this role and of the right of any people to enjoy their own culture and history is profoundly at odds with our constitution. More seriously, the right to culture is an essential component of the foundational right to human dignity. There can also be no question of a right to equality if some people are regarded as morally inferior because of their history and culture.

It is extremely dangerous in multicultural societies for governments to target language, cultural or ethnic minorities for opprobrium. This inevitably leads to scapegoating - and to the current leitmotif that, because of apartheid, whites are responsible for the problems that continue to afflict the country - including poverty, unemployment and inequality. Or as Mathole Motshekga, a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee, opined in April last year “...the current social ills and degeneration of morals - including corruption, femicide and substance abuse - were a result of the legacy of apartheid.” Scapegoating, in turn, justifies ‘remedial action’ - including the progressive elimination of the offending culture from the national identity, the ratcheting up of reverse discrimination and expropriation without compensation.

The problem with doublethink is that its practitioners fervently believe its contradictory premises - on the one hand that their anger and remedial actions against the offending group are absolutely justified - and, on the other, that in harming the offending group, they are somehow promoting inclusivity, reconciliation, non-racialism and the human dignity of their intended victims.