

POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY

Everyday screams silenced by chug of failed system

Tristen Taylor

Last week, a comrade on the Cape Flats sent me a text: a 10-year-old girl had been abducted and raped. Last week, President Jacob Zuma went *Umshini wami, umshini wami / Awuleth'umshini wami*. Someone complied and, in the dead of the night, Cabinet members fell in a hail of Gupta lead.

So much happened last week. In the hours before former finance minister Pravin Gordhan was recalled from London, someone bet heavily against the rand on the JSE and walked away with a profit of about R73m: the inside tip of the century.

Shell was granted its fondest desire – to turn the Karoo into a fracked wasteland. The ANC's Thebe Investment Corporation must have held a party since it owns 28% of Shell SA.

Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa didn't join the ovation at Ahmed Kathrada's funeral because, as a friend said on Facebook, it's hard to stand when you don't have a spine.

But all I could think about was that 10-year-old girl.

Why didn't Premier Helen Zille tweet about her abduction and violation? Too busy with her day job as Queen Victoria's

mouthpiece, I suppose. Minister for Women Susan Shabangu should have climbed into her R926,007.61 BMW GT 550 and blue-lighted it down to the Cape Flats.

If her car was in the shop, perhaps being equipped with ejector seats at the president's behest, she could have borrowed Deputy Minister Godfrey Oliphant's R1.3m Porsche Cayenne GTS, because everyone knows the blokes at the Department of Mineral Resources have the sweetest rides.

Our politicians have stopped talking about the everyday human suffering that blights our land. About 10-year-old girls and gogos afraid to ask the neighbour in for a cup of tea because the kettle makes the prepaid meter run so fast.

I'm trying to figure out why. There is, of course, the obvious answer. Political parties, factions and egos are much too busy using the judiciary and parliamentary punch-ups to wrest power from each other to worry about ordinary tragedies. The chaos over the last month has provided plenty of opportunities for political gain and the subsequent spoils of war.

If it wasn't for the DA's sudden love affair with pith helmets and country-club gins, last week would have been its



Poster girls: While politicians are point-scoring and driving fancy cars, the vulnerable are being neglected. /Sowetan

week – triumph, glory and maybe a new province to establish dominion over.

Despite being written in 1513, Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* is one of the finest handbooks on politics and, unfortunately, applies to SA's current state of governance.

For example, "Never do any enemy a small injury for they are like a snake which is half-

beaten and it will strike back the first chance it gets."

This is a lesson former president Thabo Mbeki forgot.

And as for last week, Machiavelli nailed it when he said, "a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil".

Yet, I think there is another

reason. Under the leadership of former finance ministers Trevor Manuel, Nhlanhla Nene and Gordhan, the country's basic economic paradigm has remained intact. And it hasn't worked.

The financial liberalism of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution plan, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for SA and the

National Development Plan has resulted in an almost doubling of unemployment since 1994 and the destruction of SA's manufacturing base. The government's economic policies have not eradicated poverty and social ills.

SA remains an embarrassingly unequal society. Politicians, business leaders, stockbrokers and

skilled professionals have done quite well for themselves, but at a cost. The economic policies that have benefited them for the past 20 years haven't helped the poor.

If the ANC admits that its financial policies haven't worked, then it has to take responsibility for the subsequent effects of those failures. Just to be clear, the DA's economic paradigm is no different from the ANC's: liberal capitalism with just enough social welfare to prevent a revolution.

SA's politicians own the social consequences of poverty, inadequate housing and dysfunctional social services, but they're not going to point that out. So, best not to talk about it. Best not to talk about a 10-year-old girl's screams.

Corruption is a serious issue. Those involved in corruption are hollowing out the state for the benefit of the few, which is a grave political and moral ill.

There is, however, another sickness brewing within SA's body politic. Citizens may become so focused on the idea that all the country's problems are due to graft that they will lose sight of the pressing need to overhaul the economy.

Whether you belong to the left or the right, no one outside of the South African Broadcasting Corporation can

say the economy is working for all of us. To minimise corruption is one thing, something Gordhan seemed to aim for, but to institute a new economic strategy is another. Even if Gordhan was miraculously reinstated, we'd get more of the same.

With regards to new Finance Minister Malusi Gigaba's push for radical transformation, time will tell. Yet if I had to place a big bet on the JSE, I'd double down on radical looting. The odds of him talking about tears and blood are somewhere around a thousand to one: it will all be white monopoly capital and imperialist ratings agencies.

Given the crime rate, I should be numb to everyday violence and terror, but that 10-year-old girl is my daughter. She's your daughter. She's SA's daughter.

While the country twists and turns on the foul winds of a political storm, I brood about her – about how her trauma will never go away. There is, deep within me, a soft but frightening voice that says there is another reason why our politicians don't talk about her.

Maybe they just don't care.

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