

Hello there,

Here goes with my new Newsletter. It's a follow-up on the previous one. Besides the essay below I invite you to go to my website (www.horstkleinschmidt.co.za) where I added new images with texts. (see cover page and the 'Schmelen' pages especially).

Please keep writing back.

Loving fathers whose sins befall their sons.

The emotional burdens passed on to children.

If the past imposes trauma on those descending from oppressive, violent and murderous regimes there surely is emotional weight also, if acknowledged, for the descendants of those who executed the inhumanness in the past? Whether as perpetrator or beneficiary! Seeing, knowing and feeling the inherited burden of complicity could be a powerful part of a journey for a new togetherness between the two opposites. To say 'I acknowledge' or, 'I am sorry' is a language and a sentiment Germans and white South Africans (or Namibians), in general avoid. Their perceived silence communicates itself as the refusal to admit complicity. For reconciliation to be a prospect the children of wrong-doers or passive participants Nazism and in apartheid would do well to examine the emotional baggage that is theirs.

'I had to do it' I heard an apartheid prosecutor defend himself on radio recently. The words 'I am sorry for what I did' (sending people to prison) seemed for him impossible to say. The same holds for the story I tell below of my encounter with former SB cop Paul Erasmus. I prompted him to express the emotion of sorrow for the terror he unleashed on Beyers Naudé or Ilona and my daughter Zindzi in the 1980's. He managed to go as far as saying 'I've told the truth' for which the TRC gave him amnesty. For him too, the word 'sorry' seemed one step too far.

Thank you all who engaged with me after my last Newsletter. It centred on what I knew and have come to know about my own father's part in the fascist Germany and here in South Africa.

Why? Why did you not feel remorse?

In his defence I observe that his identity was shaped by the absence of anything else to embrace as the means to escape dire circumstances he faced as a young man. The circumstances are complex, but his pursuit to gain self-worth, to gain Identity had much to do with it. He was looking for a place to better survive and then thrive. This was fertile ground to 'other' those who were not like him – or in our family instance, even othering his own kith and kin.

The 20th century taught us that nationalism, including imperialism, is invariably brutal and afterwards leave behind brokenness and divisions the children of the victims and those from the perpetrator group have to navigate. My definition of perpetrator is broad and I include not only the Gestapo or the Special Branch cop in the service of the apartheid machinery, I include those who indirectly derived benefit. It includes those who became complicit through their silence. And I include those whose fortunes collude to create perverse outcomes. Racist nationalisms thrive not least because of royalty, nobility, economic oligarchy and monopoly and the über-rich. It is they who dig the schisms between us and them. It is in privilege that hate politics thrives. Present-day South Africa is no exception to this. Our political elite, in collusion with the former upper class, whose greed condemns the majority to wretchedness.

“The injustice of inequality is not that one lives in a shack, but that the shack sits in the shadow of a palace” writes Wahbie Long in his book *Nation on the Couch – Inside South Africa’s Mind* (2021), borrowing from the sentiment first articulated by Karl Marx.

What some of you wrote to me after my last Newsletter made me jump to my father’s defence. His morality and ethics were not that different from my own – or that of my friends. He was kind – and though patronising, he was not any worse than those who bathed in the privileges apartheid brought. I never saw him act violently toward the people he ‘othered’. But, but, but ... twice in his lifetime he unwaveringly supported authoritarian regimes – and they did the violence – in a way – on his behalf.

Why do I keep asking him? Why can I not leave this past behind me?

And ... I am not doing this ‘to keep beating myself up’. I was fortunate to have broken with the perpetrator class at an early age; I lived and live for the full meaning of egalité. Whether successfully or not I helped break the wall, the barrier of white silence.

I seek to confront this: The beneficiaries of class and racial power, ordinary white South Africans, need to know the trauma that apartheid left us all with and then find words that give meaning to a conversation yet to be had. The offer of reconciliation and forgiveness by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu does not absolve us. De Klerk said nothing that bridges the divide. Kader and Louise Asmal co-authored a book in 1996 called ‘Reconciliation through Truth’. It justifies a re-read in the present time when the Black Lives Matter/Rhodes-must-fall calls ring again. They demand an engagement – part of which I seek to construct through these lines. When the Schmelen-Kleinschmidt-Bam-Uirab-Rautanen clan met in 2014 and again in 2016 there was an elephant in the room: Those wronged in the past spoke of their loss and pain. They spoke as ordinary South African and Namibian citizens. In our own family Truth and Reconciliation gathering a vital question was: what would we, from the former other side of the fence, say? Had we the words to express shame or remorse or sorrow even if we opposed apartheid but still derived untold benefit from it?

Even now – my father died fifty years ago - I thunder at him, pounding my fists on his chest shouting: ‘how could you have thought that why could you not see and admit the error of what you supported? Grandpa Jatow (on my mother’s side) called his association with Nazism “a monumental mistake” and resorted to silence after six years in South African internment camps. His son, my uncle, Hermann (Männe) called it ‘the shit that robbed him of his youth’. Being trained as a pilot in the Luftwaffe, he flew the first sorties into the USSR in June 1941. He was promptly shot down and spent until the end of the war in a POW camp – Siberia, I heard him say. After the war they walked home enduring the indignity of shame, spat at by Russian, Ukrainian, Polish villagers to a Hamburg in ruins. Dad, you spent the war years, not interned, selling British Lever Brothers products from Swakopmund. You were not interned; were not a POW. Is there something more I should need to know? Why did you not regret? Was it pride? Would it have cost you your fought-for identity? Was our ‘playing white’ when we have Nama blood relatives contingent on being 150% behind the Aryan or white cause? Did you fear us being re-classified from ‘white’ to ‘coloured’?

My pursuit is not to ‘prove’ that you had an evil heart. Instead I want to understand how people like you – today - who see or perceive themselves to be driven downhill politically or economically, are tempted to ‘other’. Ultimately I think it destroyed you, in an alternation of negativity and nostalgia rooted in defeat, both personal and your ‘Weltanschauung’/ worldview.

The comparison may irk some but listen to the countless calls on radio talk shows by people who feel our 27 year-old democracy has not delivered what it promised. They feel cheated, alienated, marginal and are poor. Like my father they point their collective finger at the affluent elite ‘up there’ in in Pretoria or Bishopscourt or Stellenbosch flaunting their riches and power over the political establishment. My unemployed father – ten years after WWI - pointed his finger at a rich cabal in Berlin. The Weimar Republic was a sham his mentors told him. Similarly today, SA’s status as the most unequal country globally has the potential to galvanise

nationalism parading as socialism. EFF demagogues may well be a political veneer also born out of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Hate speech is already their stock in trade.

The lesson I draw from this: Unless the rich and powerful yield of that which they have we are handing the disaffected majority in South Africa to hateful nationalists only because we left the centre-left space empty, while the sum of our political parties crowd out efforts to please the centre-right (speak unfettered capitalism). The reason this has not come to pass yet is because the ANC can still rely on the poor to vote for them. But their gamble is close to expiring.

Paul Erasmus: The former apartheid cop who got amnesty from the TRC.

On 14 July 2021 Paul Erasmus died; not of Covid. He was 65. He got amnesty for 500 acts of terror and torture by the TRC in 199x. His name is associated with the SB (Special Branch), Soweto 1976, Vlakplaas, Koevoet and Stratcom.

I called him in February 2021. Mark Kaplan, a friend with whom I am making a documentary film on Beyers Naudé, had saved his phone number since the TRC days when he first interviewed him. Now at the end of his life, would he confront his ghosts and finally admit to more? I rang the number. "Is that Paul Erasmus? My name is Horst Kleinschmidt." His instant reply, "oh the man from 65a 5th Avenue, Melville, Johannesburg". Indeed I lived there from 1974 to 1976 after which I fled to neighbouring Botswana. He agreed to be interviewed at his comfortable small-holding outside George in the Eastern Cape.

For the next four hours I tried to get more from him. Why, as opposed to nearly all others, did he spill *some* of the beans about apartheid's most notorious and violent repression machineries? Besides telling some of 'the Truth' and getting more Reconciliation than was his due – brought about by a conversion to Christianity – could he say sorry to the Naudé children or indeed to my former wife and our daughter Zindzi? As it turned out – even when we went back for a second visit and another four-hour long interview – saying 'sorry' was one step too far. For telling the truth, Winnie Mandela forgave him. He had been part of the dirty tricks campaign to implicate her in the murder of Stompie Sepei. Amnesty, forgiveness and bits of the truth does not yet amount to saying 'sorry' to someone.

He admitted that he used to get pleasure out of hurting other people emboldened by being given the license to do so by his superiors and mentors, FW de Klerk etc. He says it suited his predisposition. "From your brown VW beetle you saw Ilona and my daughter enter and leave at 65a, on more nights than you can count, you knew how vulnerable they were, especially after I had to leave in April 1976. Was there nothing in you that said stop painting slogans on the garden walls, pouring paint over the roof of the car?" No, he was on a mission: "We wanted to chase all the lefty whites out of the country; just like we achieved with Dr (sic) Kleinschmidt. It was the white left that made Blacks rebellious and if we were rid of them South Africa would be at peace". The racism of his ilk was that Blacks could not think for themselves – they needed white mentors. The big prize would be to get Beyers to leave, or to kill him. "Beyers was number two on my list of fifteen people to get rid of ... but we were told not to leave any evidence ... that opportunity never quite came".

It was deeply unsettling to sit for hours in the home of this man, with his son Dylan and his wife Gretchen constantly at his side taking in every word. "Oh we have firearms here – unlicensed – (why?) – because my former colleagues have still not forgiven me for spilling the beans". "I will not go down without a fight" I hear him say. The more I listen to him the more I dislike the man. Since seeing him I ask myself, do I feel revenge, does he conjure up hate in me, do I think he should suffer more than he patently already does? This tragic trio, one clinging on to the other in a seemingly lonely psycho-drama who have no sense of belonging, no destination worth going to – just reassuring each other, ad infinitum led by Paul himself. He needs them and has made them need him. Dylan refuses to be interviewed. Gretchen might one day, but she was not there when it happened, is still a newcomer to the father-son embrace. I don't wish them ill – but despite them nearly begging for acceptance, even for support, I cannot give them that. I cannot do what Winnie Mandela and her daughters did - embrace him and - it would seem - forgiving him. Paul is smart and articulate – we

even share a funny clip on WhatsApp but I'm glad when our second interview is over and we are back on the road to Cape Town.

Paul tells us that as much time as he spent outside 65a, he also spent outside of "26 Hoylake Road, Greenside", the home of Ilse and Beyers Naudé, the place where Beyers endured nearly eight years of his banning order. What did you expect to happen in the night, I ask? We had instructions, stupid as they seem today, to see if communists visited these homes or if they went off to report to communists somewhere. "After Braam Fischer of the Communist Party died we were convinced that Beyers Naudé took over the SACP". He accepts today that this was far-fetched and showed up the poor levels of knowledge or analyses.

"One night we stood outside Beyers' house. As usual we had a flagon of Lieberstein – cheap, sweetish white wine in a gallon jar – and we were bored, especially when the flagon was empty. So we syphoned petrol from the tank of our car into the flagon and put a wick into the opening. We threw this Molotov cocktail at the back window of Beyers's Peugeot 404, or was it a 504 – and he rattled down the registration plate number - standing in the drive-way. When our bomb exploded and with it the car, we imagined Beyers coming out (*correct??*) and in the mayhem we would shoot him and disappear. The next day we would spread news that this was internecine warfare between different ANC factions. This seemed pretty primitive I venture to say. Well, alcohol and dare-devil was our modus and I was pretty good at it, including writing the press releases the liberal press would pick not knowing they came from us. As it turned out the flagon did not break, nor did the back window of the car, but exploded in the garden after rolling off the back of the car. No mayhem and they scrambled.

Why did you not kill Beyers? - He explains that the Beyers case had to be treated with sensitivity. What he does not know is that the files from the Security Branch, which are now accessible, reveal that Beyers had two formidable factors on his side. Within the Afrikaner establishment, including his Dutch Reformed Church, he continued to enjoy important support. And the support Beyers enjoyed in Western Europe was such that the SA Foreign Affairs Department kept advising that any adversarial action against Naudé would have a negative effect on their lobbying politicians in Europe they hoped would support apartheid. This was most valuable strategic support, but something Beyers could only have guessed at the time.

You followed Beyers when he left home, notably on late Friday afternoons. (Beyers' banning order was not house arrest and he was not confined to his home at night). "Yes, and we knew that he knew he was being followed. He was on his usual Friday night visit to the Westcliff home of Ernst and Petra Kahle – we raided their place on occasion – but on his way Beyers would stop at different places to enter shops or supermarkets. We'd follow him but this was tedious and we went back to our car to wait for him to emerge". I say: Beyers would look as though he went shopping, maybe for a bottle of wine to take to his hosts, but at an appointed time he would stand at a cluster (every week at a different cluster) of phone call boxes awaiting my call from – different - call boxes in London. We'd exchange information in coded language. "Even when we found out that this was going on we could never tap the wires because we did not know which call box he would be heading for". Beyers had, long before, walked the streets of Braamfontein, Hillbrow and the City to take down all call-box numbers and write a time and a date against each one. This was one of the ways in which we got messages into and out of the country. Beyers' SB files reveal no interception of the calls despite suspecting him of intense communication with the ANC abroad. The communication endured for a decade, until it was no longer needed in 1990.

I ask Erasmus if they ever intercepted written communication? Oh yes he says. From upstairs in his home he produces what he called the stolen log book of intercepted letters the SBs kept. He shows me entries of letters intercepted: from me, astonishingly, to my daughter and Ilona, steamed open, re-sealed and categorised into non-intelligence and thus for onward transmission or intelligence "in which case it would go upstairs for analysis". He can't remember if anything ever went 'upstairs'. The entries in his log book reveal nothing. In fact the regular mail between Ilona and myself that he intercepted dealt with divorce matters we were communicating about.

I ask him if he knows about micro-film and tell him that we never communicated through the post. Had he ever seen the micro-film images that served our communication? I showed him an actual micro-film strip

smuggled from Beyers to me in London. He shakes his head, he's clearly never associated micro-film with the cross-border communication between Beyers and myself in London. The strips were hidden in 'gifts' we sent each other, carried by the endless string of different clergy visiting South Africa at the time – generally sent on 'fact-finding missions' to assess what sanctions their respective denominations might advocate to isolate the apartheid regime. I had a network throughout Europe and North America who let me know about upcoming visits. Although the SBs suspected many clergy to be messengers it was considered diplomatically unwise to search men and women of the cloth on entering or leaving Jan Smuts airport in Johannesburg. Some knew they were messengers, others carried a 'gift' for Beyers, or a 'gift' for me without knowing that it concealed micro-film images. Over at least ten years hundreds of messages were safely transmitted (I was relieved to hear),² the Naudé and Kleinschmidt SB files reveal no detection by them of this link. Naudé's means of communicating with London constitutes one of the longest successful underground linkages during the height of the struggle until the time when the regime was begging to negotiate.

Since Beyers could not type, he wrote most of his letters by hand. Today evidence of this communication remains safely in the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology in the Theology Department of the University of Stellenbosch.

Erasmus freely admitted – on camera – that the SB agents lacked skills, efficiency and a real grasp of how to counter the enemy they sought to defeat.

Apartheid's perpetrators are rapidly disappearing. The damage and trauma they leave behind remains a deep scar on this nation's history and unless acknowledged and dealt with will forever undermine a more democratic future. The dysfunction in our young democracy is in large measure due to them and those who enabled them, justified their privileges as if they had a birth right to carry out such deeds, to live the lives they did cossetted in luxury while the neighbouring shacks sit in their towering shadow. That is what created the foundation of one of the most unequal societies on earth that endures to this day.

Dylan Erasmus will live the burden of his father's deeds. Will he retreat into sullen silence or might he seek to do what Wilhelm Verwoerd, grandson of the 'architect' of apartheid has done and continues to do: speak and act the truth about where he comes from, who is able to engage the Black Lives Matter debate, who continues to love the members of his family AND in all this retains his integrity?
