



Address by Horst Kleinschmidt.

Thank you for asking me to share this wonderful event with you.

A while back I attended an event at the local Museum. I got talking to an old man arranging the chairs for us. Although we had never met he told me his story. He went to the local Catholic primary school – a ‘mixed’ school at the time. One day he came back from school to find his mother sitting on the sidewalk, her feet in the gutter and the family cupboard next to her. Behind her was only rubble where that morning their home had stood. Bulldozers were still busy breaking the remaining walls. He and I, both with grey hair were standing, making eye contact as he spoke. He then sat down on one of the chairs and turned away from me. I noticed that he was wiping tears from his face. I felt helpless, unready and ill-equipped for that moment. I want to learn how to conduct myself, know the appropriate words to say, when next I am faced with such situation. What he experienced never happened in my life. My family was White, his was not.

*It pleases me very much that **you** the people once evicted from this town will have a new tangible way that connects you to your past here in Simon’s Town. The crime committed against you is of course also commemorated with a small cairn next to a power sub-station. And there are the beautiful stained-glass windows made by artist Peter Clarke – himself evicted from Simon’s Town - at St Francis Church.*

This project was five-years in the making. There are three heroines in this: Mary-Ann Kindo (Phoenix Committee), Tazneem Wentzel and Cathy Salter-Jansen (both from the Simon’s Town Museum) and the artist Reagan Rubain with the others young artists. And, we are grateful for the generous help from Greatmore Studios and Thupelo Trust.

Wag ‘n bietjie, Umphafa, Buffalo thorn. Latin Ziziphus Mucronata. The tree has straight and hooked thorns – in pairs. To extricate yourself from it demands a step back, before you can go forward. And so it is with our colonial and apartheid history: We need to know what happened, we must understand what happened to those who were wronged and hopefully we learn from it as we build our young democracy!

How did we get to these benches? Of course they memorialise the terrible injustice right here in this town. Racism was at the core of it. Physical pain and material destruction was used to evict all people of colour from Simon’s Town, now some 50 years ago, with the scars still visible and pain still felt.

Compensation for land is one part of restitution and justice. Emotional pain and hurt is another. Besides robbing people of livelihoods it left trauma – also inter-generational trauma. The benches are tangible memorialisation to be reminded that injustice once was done here in the heart of Simon’s Town.

It takes two to tango, they say. And today this tango is a solo act only. I will return to this. (I know the image of a tango is not right, but it suggests two people acting in unison, each knowing what to expect of the other with each small and each sweeping step)

My attention was drawn, twenty years ago to German *Stolpersteine*, Stumbling Stones in English. A Cologne artist, Gunter Demnig sought a way to come to terms, in some way, with the troubling truth that he lived in a house in which once lived a Jewish family. The Nazi's arrested, deported and then killed them, as they did millions of times in countries across Europe. Demnig replaced one cobble-stone on the pavement outside his house with one covered in copper that stood slightly higher than the other cobbles. Inscribed on that stone are the names of the family forcibly evicted and then murdered. He wanted to be reminded every time he left home in the morning and every evening when he returned that an injustice was committed here once and that he shared in the guilt for what happened. His aim is to deal with German national guilt, not in the abstract but personally; the shame that **allowed** Nazi rule, WWII and the holocaust. Tens of thousands of Germans have followed his example and put similar cobbles outside their homes or places of work. Guilt belongs not only to those charged at Nürnberg. Demnig's example speaks to collective responsibility, **WHEN YOUR OWN INACTION ALLOWS A TYRANT TO PREVAIL**; When neutrality is not an option but amounts to complicity.

John Newton was a captain on a British slave ship. His morals, his ethics, led to his conversion to Christianity. He wrote the famous hymn Amazing Grace 'I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind but now I see'. In 1797 he wrote that Britain's African slave trade was (as it still is!) a national sin, And he said: though perhaps the greater part of the nation would be pleased if slavery were suppressed, yet since it does not immediately affect their own interest, they stay passive.' He became a foremost abolitionist. A different example of someone coming from the perpetrator class, seeking to put right what is abhorrent.

White USA and all countries with a slave and colonial past do not like it but the past remains the present. The George Floyd trial is another example.

What is the context for White South Africa?

To date white South Africans, in general, do not FEEL CHALLENGED. They appear to be CONTENT THAT A GOOD DEAL WAS struck FOR THEM WHEN FW DE KLERK NEGOTIATED ON THEIR BEHALF BEFORE 1994.

So what is wrong here? (Here in Simon's Town this morning?)

In Germany the perpetrator class are putting in place the stumbling stones. The British and American abolitionists were from the perpetrator class. In South Africa Dominee Beyers Naudé (and others, including war resisters) – also from the perpetrator class - joined the resistance. But they did not buy white South Africa the free ticket it might be looking for.

Let me make the point: The benches here today are the work of former victims. Where or how is the former perpetrator class represented without religious, social, professional, historic White Simon's Town having made a marker that could have shown contrition. The moral failure of white Simon's Town citizens to be represented formally here could not be more dramatic. (I am not from Simon's Town)

I hear the Whites say FORGET THE PAST, LET'S MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER.

NO, MY FELLOW WHITE South Africans. This nation is not one and it is not at peace until you, the majority of you, who call yourself White, will one day acknowledge your fathers, grandfathers, maybe your own part in letting the injustice of apartheid prevail. Even if you voted DA (or PP) in that time, your privilege cemented the privilege you enjoy to this day.

The post-apartheid state may have compensated some but my point pivots on white citizens putting their name to a collective or symbolic act of contrition.

What might that look like?

It might be that the citizenry of Simon's Town, one day, put their names jointly to a statement which speaks to acknowledging the failure to have done more to stop the racial tyrant and, that they derived untold privilege and accumulated riches at the expense of those oppressed on the basis of the colour of their skin.

Particular failure belongs to faith leaders who did not see the opportunity in the Wag 'n Biejie bench initiative. They failed in that they did not create the essential dialogue that marks our social divide to this day.

But – People of Ocean View, Gugulethu and elsewhere, may you be proud that today you have restored a part of the memory of who you were and are. Let us celebrate this event and may it signify you extending a hand into what for now at least is the heart of white darkness.

The idea of Wag 'n Bietjie has caught on in Kommetjie recently where benches similar to these were inaugurated. May Wag 'n Bietjie, may Umphafa flourish through our land and help heal the wounds!

Thank you.