



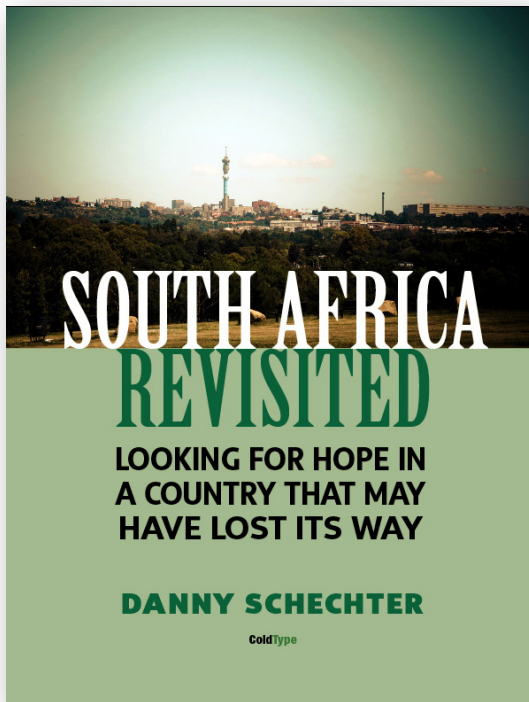
SOUTH AFRICA

REVISITED

**LOOKING FOR HOPE IN
A COUNTRY THAT MAY
HAVE LOST ITS WAY**

DANNY SCHECHTER

ColdType



DANNY SCHECHTER, the News Dissector, produced the globally distributed South Africa Now TV series for three years and then was a director of six films focused on Nelson Mandela. He first went to South African on an anti-apartheid mission in 1967. Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org. His latest book – with accompanying film – is **PLUNDER** The Crime Of Our Time.

COVER PHOTO: Johannesburg skyline with Hillbrow Tower in the background.

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ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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DANNY SCHECHTER looks for hope in a country that may have lost its way

INTRODUCTION

Shaping up for the next struggle – this time for real equality

A year ago, in a hot summer here and cold winter there, I was in South Africa almost every day watching the World Cup games on my living room TV. Suddenly, and after many years of our media's inattention, the spectacle thrust the "beloved country" back into global consciousness.

This year, those cameras were largely gone except for another sports-related event: the coverage of a meeting of the International Olympic Committee hosted locally by the activist who spent 20 years fighting to isolate apartheid South Africa from international sports competitions.

I was back in South Africa after a two-year absence to help out a local film company, hang out with old friends and write about a country whose fight for freedom I served as a participatory journalist.

I first went to South Africa as a student anti-apartheid activist in 1967, and then spent thirty years writing, researching, and doing solidarity work, trying to contribute whatever skills I had to assisting a process of change that seemed to take forever until it picked up pace with the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990.

I helped direct six films about his passage from prisoner to the presidency, and was back as frequently as I could be to follow up and stay engaged with one of the few successful "revolutions," if that's what it was, of my lifetime. South Africa's late poet laureate Mazisi Kennene told me once that the victories there were mine as well as everyone else's.

DANNY SCHECHTER

So I jumped at the opportunity to go back in the summer of 2011 to see what I could see, drink as many of the locally produced Appletizer drinks as I could, and get a sense of where things were going as South Africans continue their journey to become what they once pined for: a “normal country.”

Apartheid is long gone but in many ways it lives on in the enormous gaps remain between the rich – now including a black elite – and the poor. “Normality” lives on in stories about pervasive corruption that eats at the soul of the movements which sacrificed for the change that is both visible and incomplete as the economy falters, protests mount and political acrimony bursts off the pages of every newspaper.

As a blogger and writer, I paid attention to what I was seeing, who I was meeting, and how I was thinking. My tone is no longer the celebratory one of the early days of the transition.

Even though I don't live there, I am “proudly South African” in the sense that my hopes are still higher than high for the success of this great experiment in democracy. At the same time, I can't stand by and not speak out against trends and problems that are threatening to tear that hope apart.

One of my favorite South African writers, Njabulo S Ndebele, shares many of the concerns I express in a series of articles I wrote during this latest trip, and that has now been collected in these pages by Tony Sutton, the editor of *ColdType*, who spent many years working in South African media during more troubled times.

“We can see the exponential threats all around us: the decayed schooling system; ... the high probability of syndicated crime close to the center of the national police and intelligence systems; the unanswered public concerns regarding the condition of the national defense force; the decline in our continental and global prestige; the widespread protests of disillusionment; the stasis of vision in the annual drama of uncritical conflict between employers and the trade union movement; and the phenomena of organized political youth making demands, whose sources are understandable, but under the circumstances become no more than a “threat multiplier.”

For years, I worried about South Africa's future. Now I worry for the country itself. I am still in awe of the committed journalists and academics who speak out and the many activists at the community level who struggle for fairness and equality. Has visionary politics in South Africa ended or will its voice rise again to edify and inspire us?

I fear about the former and hope for the latter.

Danny Schechter
News Dissector
Durban, July 2011

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PART ONE

South African youth face grim future

I got into South Africa before I got there. I did so through meeting a young woman whose given name was Pony in the tradition of South Africans who call their daughters, “Beautiful” or “Truth” or other creative appellations.

She was on her way home to a small country town, after a year spent in Cuba where she is in a course teaching scientific sport. She was one of a number of scholarship students traveling on the plane with me from Madrid. Cuba had adopted the East Germans’ systematic training system of sports institutes and put it to good advantage in its award-winning state-backed athletic program. Now they are sharing their knowledge with other Third World countries.

Pony, in her late teens, was one of a large number of foreign students attracted to the idea, and was selected by the Cuban Embassy in Pretoria for the five year opportunity beginning with a immersive Spanish language course. She now speaks Spanish pretty well, and knows all the Cuban revolutionary songs and slogans like “Patria O’ Muerte, Veneceremos,” (“Fatherland or Death, We Will Win”) that tens of thousands of Cubans echo at huge rallies. She laughed when I chanted one at her as we unexpectedly sat next to each other on the Iberia jet.

As it turned out, I knew more about Cuba’s role in supporting South Africa’s liberation struggle, a gesture of solidarity that led to Fidel Castro being cheered the loudest of all foreign heads of State who attended Nelson Mandela’s inauguration as the first President of a Democratic South

On TV in South Africa, Oprah is better known than such lionesses of the freedom fight as Albertina Sisulu, revered by many as the Mother of the Nation, who died a month ago

Africa. I covered the scene in a film, *Count-down To Freedom* that I made about the historic 1994 election.

Cuba’s foreign policy has put a premium on backing revolutionary movements since 1960 and was the only country in the world to openly help South Africa militarily by sending its own troops – “internationalist volunteers” to Angola where they defeated the apartheid army in a crucial battle that accelerated the process of political change in Southern Africa. Many Cubans died alongside Angolan soldiers and South African liberation fighters in a war that has been largely forgotten.

Cuba has, in the years since, mellowed in its revolutionary ardor and is in the process of reforming its top-down Socialist economy.

After 19 years of “freedom,” post apartheid South Africa has also cooled its commitment to “struggle politics” and has become more of a “normal” African state, albeit an advanced one economically. It is now battling corruption within the ranks of its government and the ruling African National Congress (ANC) while coping with enormous challenges to create a new society so that youngsters like Pony, who are very ambitious and eager to learn will have a future.

She admitted to me she doesn’t know as much about politics or her own history as she would like, and says that’s true of many in her generation. That’s in part because the real history is not taught in any detail the schools or shown with any regularity on South African TV stations that are more into selling than telling by endlessly pumping out sports and popular culture shows.

Kids know more about Mandela than the movement he led, an expression of the celebrity worship that dominates youth culture. On TV in South Africa, Oprah is better known than such lionesses of the freedom fight as Albertina Sisulu, revered by many as the Mother of the Nation, who died a month ago.

When I asked a young white South African girl who the ANC leader and Mandela law partner Oliver Tambo was, she said, “you mean the airport guy?” Johannesburg’s principal airport was renamed for Tambo after years of honoring Afrikaner leaders. (This is all more anecdotal evidence for why South Africa needs its own History Channel of the kind being proposed by producer Anant Singh.)

In Durban, where streets are being renamed for other liberation heroes, vandals have blacked out the new street names with paint to protest the change. I was told that people are pissed off in part because it screws up the GPSs in their cars. (I was thrilled to see a highway named after my old friend and London School of Economics colleague, the South African journalist and feminist heroine Ruth First.)

As it turns out, Pony was flying home on June 16, the annual youth day holiday marking the anniversary of the Soweto uprising of 1976 where black kids Pony’s age and younger revolted against forced instruction in Afrikaans. (South Africans were recently scandalized when an iconic picture of a young man carrying a victim of that police massacre was mocked on Facebook. In the new one, the child who had been shot in the original was portrayed smiling and carrying a bottle of beer.)

At least Youth Day is commemorated, as it was this year with concerts and hip-hop shows. In Soweto this time, there was a riot when local kids felt excluded and fought their way into a stadium while private cops maced and beat them to the horror of many onlookers. The event turned into chaos when all many kids wanted to do was “krump.” the latest street dance craze.

South Africa’s President Jacob Zuma hardly made the ceremony a priority, showing up three hours late after most of the crowd left in the company of Julius Malema, the controversial head of the ANC’s Youth League. Malema claims to be

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a youth leader but he is more like a demagogic politician who has learned that the more outrageous his statements, the more “militant” his pose, the more publicity he gets. Sadly the media can’t get enough of his provocations.

He and his League are certainly not doing much of a practical sort to improve education or create jobs for tens of thousands of unemployed and perhaps unemployable young people who cheer his rhetoric while being stuck in lives of crime and desperation. They are not visible in the fight against pervasive child abuse, youth homelessness and even starvation in South Africa.

Here in Durban, one newspaper says “the youth today mistake nastiness, name-calling, crass materialism and the sale of political office to the highest bidder for revolutionary thought.” Some of those demanding more youth leadership are being dismissed as “Gucci revolutionaries.”

Their agenda to nationalize the mines without compensation, a demand rejected by the ANC, is seen as radical to some but analysts think it is a ploy to shake down patronage payments out of worried business leaders, some of whom have already made “donations.”

Even if you agree with it ideologically, the government’s track record in poorly running industries – so called parastatals – does not inspire confidence.

A new book, “Zuma’s Own Goal,” (Africa World Press) picturing the president playing soccer on the cover, details the miserable failures of the ANC’s poverty reduction strategies arguing its continuing loyalty to neo-liberal policies are responsible for a still widening gap between rich and Poor.

Another less academic work, Alexander Parker’s “50 People Who Have Stuffed Up South Africa,” is merciless in denouncing the pathetic job done by the electricity monopoly ESKOM.

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Does the government have the chops to run the mines? Apparently not!

South Africa was rebranded globally though last year's World Cup that brought the country so much world attention and its people so much good cheer.

But now, the people are left with enormous debts to pay off for the construction of fancy stadiums that are barely used. The global financial crisis has also now hit home with unemployment and poverty up and foreign investments down.

The "Rainbow Nation, the hope of so many with the fall of apartheid, faces enormous challenges from structural economic issues that are increasingly intractable, even as waves of new protests mount against a lack of government services.

My new friend Pony seems oblivious to this swirl of contradictions but is bound to be affected by them. I did appreciate her gift of a Che Guevara key ring

While the ANC's Youth League is demanding nationalization, its leaders like Julius "Juju" Malema have reportedly been profiting from what Archbishop Desmond Tutu called "the gravy train"

words members of the all white National Party used to scheme ways of stealing state resources to benefit themselves, a cozy reality overshadowed by the vicious racial policies that outraged the world.

As the ANC prepared to win power democratically, there was concern among leaders that a deprived black majority might feel it was "their turn" and thus, their right to cash in on their political victory. Some of their leaders would soon be adopting the deceptive language of making "plans" as well.

On election day in 1994, while millions were at the polls, I sat in the empty ANC Headquarters board room, in a building once owned by Shell Oil, and interviewed the late Joe Slovo, an ANC leader, a lead negotiator and former head of the movement's military wing, who worried even then about the dangers of his comrades seeking to profit personally.

"If we are seduced by the fleshpots," he told me for the film, *Countdown to Freedom*, that I was making on the election, "we will be finished."

Fast forward to 2011, in the post Mandela and Mbeki era, and Slovo's fears are now an acknowledged problem turning into a crisis that is splitting the ANC into factions and adding tensions to its long term alliance with the COSATU unions and the Communist Party.

While the ANC's Youth League is demanding nationalization, its leaders like Julius "Juju" Malema have reportedly been profiting from what Archbishop Desmond Tutu called "the gravy train." While they play the blame game seeking nationalization of the mines, youth unemployment skyrockets with youth leaders not making that a priority.

COSATU's chief, Zwelinzima Vavi, has been speaking out against a "predatory state on its way to becoming a banana republic." He denounces those who use the "levers of the state" to enrich themselves with high salaries, fancy cars and juicy

PART TWO

Cancer of corruption and 'culture of concealment'

Twenty one years after Nelson Mandela walked free, corruption has become the issue du jour in South Africa.

Even President Jacob Zuma who narrowly slithered out of a corruption trial before his election is blasting corruption in the ranks of the African National Congress which came to power as the morally superior alternative to an apartheid regime that shamelessly used the wealth it controlled to benefit Afrikaners and deprive the black majority of services.

"Let's make a plan," were the code

government tenders/contracts that has led them to be ridiculed as “tenderpreneurs.”

In several high profile cases, top ANC leaders moved smoothly from politics to the private sector without flinching an eye. They took care of their needs and their comrade cronies. Upward class mobility displaced racial justice as their key concern. A leader of the mine workers in the fight against apartheid now runs McDonalds. Others became CEO’s of conglomerates and investment groups.

While individual corruption is pervasive with a former National Police Chief found guilty of having been in business with a Mafioso gangster, and former ANC Defense Minister implicated in a multi-billion dollar arms deal with lots of illegal commissions and payoffs that have yet to be prosecuted, there are deeper institutional issues that are even more worrying because of what South Africa’s great writer Njabulo S. Ndebele calls a “culture of concealment,” the antithesis of transparency and accountability.

“The desire for and its concomitant culture or concealment are now spreading throughout the body politic, partly through proposed concealment legislation, partly through a militarized and brutal police force, partly through the patronage of cadre deployment, partly through the willingness of the voter to keep hoping, and partly through official self-righteousness in which truth is equated with government pronouncement.”

Mamphela Ramphele, a black power activist in her youth, who became a respected academic and World Bank official, fears that “South Africa’s young democracy is much more vulnerable and at greater risk than established Middle Eastern countries.” She blames the failure to transform South Africa’s educational system that has “left our young people at the mercy of those promising quick fixes.”

The youth culture here – as in other countries – showcases affluent life styles

While individual corruption is pervasive with a former National Police Chief found guilty of having been in business with a Mafioso gangster, there are deeper institutional issues that are even more worrying

and blatant materialism that lead many to take corrupt and criminal short cuts to finance fancy and unsustainable life styles.

Inequality has deepened. Johannesburg’s *Sunday Times* reports, “Despite being one of the poorest regions in the world, the number of super-wealthy individuals in Africa grew faster in 2010 than in any other region.” An official at the Daimler auto company told me that more Mercedes are sold in South Africa than Germany.

Egging all of this on are several big scandals in which the government is directly implicated as a key player barely enforcing conflict of interest rules.

- The Black Empowerment scams through which white-run companies co-opt a few blacks that get shares to advance their own agendas in the name of a phony racial balance and reparations. While some in the new black middle and upper class benefit, inequality is blatant. This has led to great cynicism and encourages greed. Money, not morality, is the driver in ANC sanctioned race to get rich quick.

- Big spectacles like the World Cup, subsidized by South Africa’s taxpayers, made for a big party that left the country with a huge debt that has requires cutbacks in public services. The soccer body FIFA called the World Cup in South Africa their most profitable ever, but they are the ones who got the most along with the local companies they favored. The games benefited corporate marketers with FIFA keeping TV rights money and paying no taxes. The press mostly covered the games, not the insidious wheeling and dealing behind it. TV stations refused to show a critical documentary.

- The biggest scandal, bigger than the corrupt arms deal, and “Oilgate” in which funds from oil sales were siphoned into ANC party coffers, is happening now with the construction of two multi-billion dollar coal fire plants that will not only increase pollution but benefit the ANC directly through a supposedly independent invest-

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ment trust partnering with Hitachi of Japan.

South Africa, which gave up its Israeli supplied nuclear weapons in the apartheid days is also now planning a huge new nuclear power plant, despite Japan's Fukushima meltdown. According to the *Financial Mail*, the leading business magazine, there are already "rumors of corruption and cronyism."

Of course, corruption is rife in other countries too, some born of revolutions like China whose President recently sounded like Jacob Zuma in denouncing crimes by officials. In China, they shoot many corrupt bureaucrats; in South Africa, they are largely ignored if not rewarded. In fact, anti-corruption police units and public prosecutors have been sidelined.

The US certainly can't lecture South Africa. I made a film, *Plunder The Crime of Our Time*, showing how our financial crisis is sparked by Wall Street crime in which U.S. bankers illegally transferred more wealth to themselves than the kleptocrats here could even conceive. The US now has more high net worth individuals than any other country.

I never imagined that the "new" South Africa, a country that I, and so many millions around the world fought for, would succumb so quickly to deep and blatant corruption. Much of it had its origins in the private sector's "helping"/bribing willing politicians.

It's painful for me to write about this because I have been a believer in South Africa's potential as a "Rainbow Nation" that has a lot to teach the world. It has improved the lot of millions even as poverty remains pervasive. There are great people here who sacrificed for their freedom and still struggle for the values and goals they believe in.

They know right from wrong.

An indictment of the corrupt few should not take our eyes off a majority that is conscious of where they have been and work

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hard to survive and prosper if possible.

At the same time, they too, are being put in jeopardy by what veteran journalist Allister Sparks calls "a corrupt game of greed." If it is not combated, he warns, "it will be all downhill for the promising new South Africa."

The faith in the promises of Nelson Mandela for a "better life for all" is running up against an avaricious and secretive clique in a party that operates like a "family" in the Cosa Nostra sense, putting its own interests ahead of the public interest. The line between party and government is often blurred.

Mandela himself spoke to this shameful situation, "The symptoms of our spiritual malaise are only too familiar. They include the extent of corruption in both the public and private sector where office and positions of responsibility are treated as opportunities for self-enrichment ... We have learned now that even those people with whom we fought the struggle against apartheid's corrupt can themselves become corrupted."

In South Africa, some activists have put their own twist on the slogan, "A Luta Continua" (The struggle continues) used by the liberation movement in neighboring Mozambique. They say here, "The Looting continues."

At least in South Africa, leaders and the press recognize the problem and speak out. Perhaps that's something that politicians and financial leaders in the West, especially the United States, can emulate.

Media take note.

PART THREE

Friday night at the movies

It's Friday night, and the motorways are packed with cars heading for the mall. Here in Durban, the Gateway Mall is the destination of choice. It's huge, the biggest of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere. It's stuffed with stuff, much of it upscale, calling itself a "theatre of shopping." (It is actually built over what was once a dump.) The parking lots are packed with late model cars, many of them high end.

I have to confess, I was invited there to see America's latest high culture import, the 3D version of the movie *Transformers 3*, based on a toy and cartoon, in a modern movie complex with 18 theaters and rows and rows of packed gates where you line up for endless popcorn and soft drinks.

Business was booming; the theatre was full. Most of the crowd seemed to be whites and Indians but there were also many blacks now firmly anchored in the consumer life style. As I found out a few years back at this same mall, but in a smaller theater, when I showed my film *In Debt We Trust*, many South Africans are deeply in debt to their credit card companies with inordinate amounts of money also flowing to their cell phone suppliers.

On the way out, past the beaches, past spanking new but underused stadiums built for the World Cup, past the Sun Coast Casino and past the ICC convention center where the International Olympic Committee was still meeting, we drove by what's called a settlement, a collection of tin shacks where destitute migrants from the countryside and other African states live in squalor. It was a reminder of the deep poverty that co-exists with the affluence of the mall culture.

This is a historical irony because in the

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dark days of apartheid, whites ruled the cities, and used the pass system and police to make sure that "the blacks," except, of course, for domestic servants, would be out of the city by nightfall.

They destroyed or "removed" stable black communities to new suburban townships such as Johannesburg's Soweto, against their will. The policy was called 'forced relocation.'

Now, it's the whites and affluent blacks who are leaving town for a spiffy "planned communities." When a low-income housing scheme was proposed for the area near the mall, it was actively opposed by affluent residents.

As in Johannesburg, this city has migrated to the Northern suburbs where the new factories, and gated communities are being built. The old neighborhoods like Musgrave are trying to give themselves a face-lift but many flats, houses, and businesses are empty, for rent or for sale.

The redeveloped scenic hills of Durban North and beyond in KwaZulu Natal seem to offer the escape path for the good life. A new billion dollar airport named after Zulu King Shaka was recently opened miles north of the city.

An Afrikaner lawyer tells me that years ago, there was a Jewish dentist in Durban who was so busy you could never get an appointment. His schedule was packed, mostly with fellow Jews. Now, he's easy to book because large parts of the Jewish community has migrated or fled to New Zealand and Australia, with a few trickling to Israel.

This "transition" happened in central Joburg a decade ago. When I first came here, the City of Gold, as it is known, was the centre of commerce. Today, the 120 year old Central Business District is, in part, a ghost town, a place for the poor and immigrants.

The action moved 20 miles north to Sandton, an area of fantastic shopping centres complete with Mandela Square,

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luxury hotels, and thriving businesses. The new multi-billion dollar Gautrain that runs from the airport doesn't even have a Johannesburg stop yet. It goes directly to Sandton. Stops at another mall in Rosebank and in Pretoria are coming, along with Park Station in Central Joburg where there will be no connection to working class trains serving Soweto and other black "suburbs."

The late Gill Scott Heron sang, "What's the word, Johannesburg!" Today, it's a word that has become a synonym more for an airport hub (Africa's largest) than a city. The city is still there but it seems to have disappeared in the consciousness of many who bypass it whenever they can although it still is home to the Market Theatre and many attractions. Locals prefer to call it Jozi.

The social divisions in South African cities were structured and imposed. They didn't happen naturally, although it was hard to understand that as you whiz by on first world freeways.

In some ways, geography is destiny. The English who eased out the Dutch in the first colonial collision had a keen sense of where they wanted people to live. The whites got the coastline; the blacks were driven into the interior.

Later, when the Afrikaners took over, their system of racial division and profiling pushed Africans further back into reserves set up to better control labor and then into ethnic homelands as part of what they called "separate development."

The architects of apartheid created a system where whites ended up with 87% of the best land, blacks only 13%, and there's been little land reform since the outbreak of democracy.

Today something else is going on. Landlords and real estate interests encourage blight as a way to drive people to leave for more expensive residences. The blight then lowers real estate values which allows a few to pick up large tracts for a song, and redevelop then.

Landlords and real estate interests encourage blight as a way to drive people to leave for more expensive residences. The blight then lowers real estate values which allows a few to pick up large tracts for a song, and redevelop them

First the artists and yuppies move in, followed by the middle and upper class. The city planners know this phenomenon well and manipulate it for commercial reasons.

Scholars Bill Freund and Vishni Padayachee recognize the way that planning from on high determines how South African cities have been organized, "These cities have strong traditions of forceful planning from above with considerable capacity to finance change. They witness industrialization, but they are also the site of massive squatter settlements and populations that fall outside the functioning of the "formal" economy."

Chris Brenner of the University California-Davis explains this is a global phenomenon:

"Cities are fundamentally shaped by inequality and conflict, as different social groups mobilize political and economic resources in an effort to improve their socio-economic circumstances. Rapid globalization and the rise of an information economy, however, are resulting in rapidly changing patterns of employment, economic opportunity and political power."

These divisions are intensified by policy decisions, and a lack of them, which, in turn, lead to conflict and even violence. A study by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Center for Civil Society in Durban blamed the rise of xenophobic violence on structural problems many years in the making as property rights were allowed to trump human rights.

These analysts showed that such conflict can be expected in response to blatantly unequal and structural social arrangements that are allowed, if not encouraged, to fester in a stressful environment compounded by poverty and other crises.

As urban analyst David Harvey puts it, "The response is for each and every stratum in society to use whatever powers of domination it can command (money, political influence, even violence) to try to seal itself off (or seal off others judged undesirable) in

fragments of space within which processes of reproduction of social distinctions can be jealously protected.'

The result was an upsurge of violence.

"May-June 2008 South Africa witnessed the country's worst-ever outbreak of xenophobic violence: 62 people including 21 South Africans were killed, 670 wounded, dozens of women raped, at least 100,000 people displaced, and property worth of millions of rand looted, destroyed or seized by South Africans and their leaders in the affected communities."

So here I am in one of the most beautiful corners of the world and yet under the surface, it is seething with conflicts far worse and much scarier than the ones I saw play out in Hollywood's apocalyptic *Transformers 3*.

It's not obvious. To "get it," you have to scratch deep to see its roots. Politicians will have to do much more to head off the social explosion and ugly violence the experts anticipate and expect sooner rather than later.

PART FOUR

Debating Mandela's legacy

At 93, Nelson Mandela is still kicking, inspiring an international day of community service on July 18th in his name. This seems to be an idea that Barack Obama borrowed for similar events in the USA.

While activists and athletes and entertainers, are honoring him by responding to his call for engagement, journalists in the obit departments of the world's news networks are quietly, even secretly, combing their archives for footage and tributes that will air when he moves on to the next world. They are getting ready and seem

In the United States civil rights icon Martin Luther King has, in the popular media, been reduced to four words, "I Have A Dream," as if that was the sum of his thinking and the extent of his contribution

to think it will happen sooner rather than later.

I have already seen a program length obit that a major network has ready to go.

Barring some major disaster at the same time, Mandela's death may receive more visibility than the achievements of his long life.

The question is: which Mandela will be memorialized? Will it be the leader who built a movement and a military organization to fight injustice or a man of inspiration with a great smile who we admire because of the many years he suffered behind bars?

Having spent many years as a network producer, I know that the TV News industry's instinct is to "humanize" the fallen by focusing on their symbolic importance.

He was a symbol of a commitment to forgiving his enemies and promoting reconciliation, a man who was cut off from his family and, in the end, lost storybook love story with Winnie Mandela after years of painful incarceration.

This approach also involves softening, celebratizing and depoliticizing a completely political person who said famously, "the struggle is my life" in the name of presenting someone who anybody can relate to, a big name to admire but not necessarily to learn from or get a balanced picture about. The idea is that Mandela will be likeable if he is like everyone else not that it is his stature as a leader that sets him apart.

In the United States civil rights icon Martin Luther King has, in the popular media, been reduced to four words, "I Have A Dream," as if that was the sum of his thinking and the extent of his contribution. Ask any school kid about him and you will hear a recycling of those famous four words with no context or background.

In South Africa Mandela has become a demi-God, he is seen as the man who unilaterally freed the country and who virtually walks on water. He is reated more in terms of a heroic myth than as a man who rose to an enormous challenge. He is cer-

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tainly not a mere politician.

His achievements – or lack of them – in office are not known while the story of how South Africa ended apartheid is reduced to the waving of his magic wand. There was lots of media attention on pressure from the Boers, not the banks. We heard about the public demands of Chief Buthelezi's IFP, but not the hidden pressure by the Washington dominated IMF and World Bank,

Little attention was paid to how he saw himself as an organizational man, a “loyal and disciplined” member of the African National Congress and the movements it inspired.

The accent on TV is always on top-down change by the great and the good, not the bottom-up pressure by freedom fighters at the community level who made the country ungovernable with help from armed fighters in exile, UN resolutions, economic and cultural sanctions, pressure by anti-apartheid militants the world over, and even the might of the Cuban army that defeated the South Africans in Angola.

Media likes to personalize the story but its complexities are rarely linked together or told.

Mandela's own trajectory of contradictions is also not fully appreciated. He was born to a Royal family in a tribal culture and was, in his early years, an apolitical aristocrat in South African terms who only slowly became a leader of the masses, who moved to the city to become a successful lawyer, who was initially part of an elite, a nationalist distrustful of radicals in a non-violent organization.

He was also known as a lady's man, uncertain of his direction.

But events and new friends helped transform him from a captive of the suites to a man of the streets, His law partner Oliver Tambo and the mild-mannered ANC colleague Walter Sisulu influenced his thinking. His exposure to the ravages and violence of apartheid on the lives of ordinary Africans radicalized him. He was soon

Mandela became a guerrilla fighter that the South Africans hunted along with the CIA. In fact it was the Americans who tipped the police off on where to capture him

working with communists and people of all races,

As a member of ANC's Youth League, he questioned the organization's conservatism and challenged its mass base by recognizing after massacres of his people, that they would have to fight back.

He became the leader of a group within his party committed to armed struggle, and traveled to other African states for military training. He was denounced as a terrorist but was careful to insure that that the bombs his comrades planted did not kill civilians.

In short, he became a guerrilla fighter that the South Africans hunted along with the CIA. In fact it was the Americans who tipped the police off on where to capture him.

There was no Julian Assange in his days to blow the whistle on their covert surveillance.

This is not a part of his history that corporate media likes to project for fear of what it could encourage. The corporates and foundations that fund his foundation prefer to treat him as an icon that everyone loves, not the agitator that the establishment hated.

His years in prison turned him into a non-person. He could not be quoted in South Africa and his picture could not be shown. The South Africans not only incarcerated him in their most remote and brutal dungeon, but they insured that he disappeared from public view.

Despite the isolation, he was not forgotten, organizing the men around him into a unit of resistance, and politically educating younger captives in what was called Mandela University. He and his comrades did not let themselves or the growing ranks of their fellow prisoners get discouraged. They stressed discipline to combat despair.

As one former inmate on “The Island,” told me, “We became prisoners of hope.”

How they did this, how he co-opted and befriended prison guards by speaking their

language and finding out about their families, weakened their hostility and violence. He was always very strategic. He learned to contain his anger and not succumb to hatred to insure survival.

Sure, he was lonely, but who in prison isn't?

He was so successful that, at one point, one of the prison chiefs asked him, "Mr. Mandela, may I have my prison back?"

As he mounted a protracted personal battle, he went inside, often hiding his personal feelings and vulnerabilities. He realized he was a role model and acted the part. On the outside, his comrades decided to turn him into a poster boy, to project him as the symbol of their struggle. The demand to "free all political prisoners" was replaced with the demand to Free Mandela." He was an easier to market brand that way, and quickly became the focus of media attention. Soon, there were songs, concerts, TV documentaries and marches.

He became the best-known prisoner in the world. As the world discovered his courage, South Africa had to take him more seriously as well after the regime was flooded him from people worldwide of all walks of life, with demands to release him.

He was a risk taker – from his vow that he "was prepared to die" – a strident view his lawyers counseled against – to his willingness to talk with his enemies even as his personal pre-negotiating initiative bypassed his organization and worried many of its members.

He had guts as well as charm. His stoicism and patience were legendary. He acted thoughtfully and leveraged his visibility to help his comrades who he insisted be released before him. He never lost his

As the world discovered his courage, South Africa had to take him more seriously as well after the regime was flooded him from people worldwide of all walks of life, with demands to release him

political focus.

All of his utterances seemed profound to his growing ranks of followers even if they weren't.

He went on to make deals with Apartheid leaders, to blast his negotiating partner F. W. de Klerk and then embrace him. He helped organize the country's first democratic election and didn't just run in it. All parties were welcome.

He built alliances across racial, political and tribal lines. He made compromises of his own principles in the name of avoiding a bloody civil war or reviving the economy.

He then stepped down after one term, a rarity in Africa, He recognized the scourge of AIDS early on when some his colleagues wouldn't. This was his genius. It is a story of great passion and perseverance over decades. It's the story behind his "long walk to freedom"

His love life, problems with his wife and his children and grandchildren may pull at our heart strings, but they are not as important as the epic battles he led against injustice and for freedom,

After his death, this fight for freedom that inspired the world that deserves telling but which story do you think the networks will tell?

Will they present him as victim or victor, as a flawed person, as he sees himself—or as a saint cleaned up and repackaged for mass consumption?

Will they give us the Hollywood one-dimensional picture of the soft and endearing gentle giant that turns him into a grandfatherly cuddly bear or the real saga of a liberation leader that won against the odds?

Which narrative will prevail?

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