

# Why black is no longer beautiful

IF WEALTH is a measure of success, then billionaires Solly Krok and his late twin brother Abe, and their heirs, are massively successful. The recent South African Revenue Service and Australian Tax Office claim for R228m from Abe's billionaire heir, Mark Krok, sheds some light on the extent of their wealth.

If good deeds are a measure of good citizenship, then the twins are South African heroes who used their money in 2001 to build the Apartheid Museum (which Solly says was inspired by his visit to a Holocaust memorial in Washington). It was, after all, their "good deeds" that facilitated their gaming licence for Golf Reef City Resorts.

If hard work pays well, then few were rewarded more than the Krok brothers, who lived longer than the African average life expectancy of 56 years and earned immeasurable wealth from gaming, pharmaceutical and property interests across the world.

Of course, the hard-working and "benevolent" Krok brothers made their money the good old-fashioned way during the good old (apartheid) days – off the weakness, insecurities and ignorance of naive blacks.

In the 1980s, while in America Michael Jackson was trying to out-do Little Richard by transforming himself from a lovable black teenager into a rather unrecognisable new race that was neither white or black, nor "coloured", in Africa the Krok brothers were concocting and peddling a toxic blend of hydroquinone that caused permanent blue-black pigmentation on the faces of many naive black users who wanted to bleach their faces (a rather cruel joke that left the rest of their bodies and features oddly black).

It's a tragic Krok legacy and a colonial rejection of black identity that is now making a return across Africa, with seemingly enlightened men and women such as kwaito star Mshoza turning in droves to former Miss India South Africa Sorisha Naidoo (wife of billionaire Vivian Reddy of the Edison Corporation) and her Pure Perfect concoction to permanently disfigure themselves and escape their black skin under the guise of gaining confidence and good looks.

Naidoo has herself dramatically evolved several shades lighter than the beautiful dark Indian complexion that won her the beauty title.

Throughout history, blackness has offered contradictory meanings and has been a universal shorthand to mark a range of desirable and undesirable states of being that have left many questioning their identity.

Colour psychologists say black is a colour of elegance or class, power, sexuality, sophistication, formality, wealth and mystery. Thus everyone goes out of their way for a "black-tie" event, and women will do anything to get their hands on a "little black dress" for special occasions.

But black is also the colour of the night, of sadness, remorse and

The obsession with skin colour has become a handicap and a currency for underachievement, entitlement and lack of ambition, writes Thebe Ikalafeng

mourning. In many cultures, black is a symbol of loss – and respect for the dead, the colour of a funeral. It is a universal symbol of bereavement and loss. It represents an unwelcome end.

"Black encourages the imagination of a different world from that of daylight realities," says Henry Dreyfus, author of *The Symbol Sourcebook*.

Black is a universal "colour of evil". In French, black is simply "noire", thus a detested person is a "bête noire".

The worst day on the stock exchange is "black Monday".

To reject is to "blacklist", and rejects are "black sheep". Serious trouble is a black hole. Even Henry Ford, in depriving customers of choice with his groundbreaking Model-T car, offered them any colour, "as long as it is black".

But in monetary terms, black is good. Being solvent is being in the black.

However, with a history of slavery in Africa and the caste system in India, "understandably" being dark or black has never had desirable privileges or connotations. But it has been a profitable venture for the likes of the Krok and Naidoo, who profit off black or dark insecurities or rejection.

Black is being rejected and has been reduced to anything but that which is desirable.

Black has come to mean anything but what is good.

On the contrary, white traditionally symbolises purity and new beginnings – a birth, a wedding, peace and baptism, particularly in Christian and Western-influenced cultures. It is a colour reserved for joyous and optimistic occasions. A white Jesus Christ and his disciples are the centre of many black Christians' worship.

White football managers in Africa are more revered and rewarded than black football managers. Without fail, white is often seen as symbol of a welcome beginning and a saviour.

In general, white is better rewarded and recognised than black, which is universally rejected and un/under-rewarded.

Statistics South Africa reported last year, almost 20 years after the end of apartheid and after 60 years of African independence, that there is a persistent wealth disparity between race groups.

While incomes for black households increased an average 169 percent over 10 years, their annual earnings are R60 613, or a sixth of what whites make, even though



**COLOURED:** Kwaito star Mshoza caused controversy recently when she appeared to reject her darker looks by enlightening her skin.

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80 percent of South Africa's population is black.

A few years ago, at the advent of the new South Africa, while I vaguely recall the Nigerian or Zimbabwean airline I boarded, what stood out was that the pilot was black. It was with the same joyous curiosity that I, like many, welcomed the first batch of black flight attendants and Mpho Mamashela, the first black SAA pilot and captain.

Mamashela obtained his commercial pilot licence in Germany because in South Africa, his colour prevented him from being admitted as a pilot. My admiration for the black Nigerian or Zimbabwean pilot was crushed when a fellow African asked me what's so special about a black pilot because in the rest of

Africa they've had blacks piloting everything for decades – as should be expected in a predominantly black Africa.

But in South Africa, black has become some kind of a "valuable" currency. And being the first black seems to carry even greater weight; a first black is some sort of achievement and standard.

The new South Africa has introduced a new vocabulary (and legislation) to complement or entrench this currency, such as previously disadvantaged, affirmative action, employment equity and black economic empowerment.

All of them have their roots in our identity as marginalised blacks, and the good intentions of correcting past injustices and imbalances.

But in an attempt to affirm black people since freedom, blackness has been brought into disrepute, maybe inadvertently.

At the cost of the majority, the few rotten apples on either side of the colour spectrum have reduced black to equal lowered standards, under and/or unqualified, inadequacy, entitlement, favouritism, nouveau riche, conspicuous consumption and tenderpreneurship.

Non-black South Africans have jumped on the "blackwagon" and responded with a vigorous courting of this new black currency, resulting in enrichment of the South African lexicon to include new terms such as fronting, where the previously advantaged lull the pre-

viously disadvantaged into believing they own anything in exchange for phantom shares and quasi-dividends with no strategic or financial input.

Despite the range of legislative and policy interventions, in particular in the public sector and related businesses, in general the previously disadvantaged have made negligible inroads in the economy.

The JSE recently reported that black South Africans hold a mere 21 percent of the Top 100 companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (which includes a minuscule 9 percent held directly, mostly through empowerment stakes, and 12 percent through mandated investments, such as pension funds and unit trusts).

Being black – and in particular BEE as it is practised – has produced a privileged few who in essence have created no new ideas or foundations for the next generations, except mindless riches limited to their inner circles.

While acknowledging the noble gesture of the Motsepe family to bequeath 50 percent of their wealth to charity, many have merely taken and brazenly paraded a negligible piece of the previously advantaged's pie, rather than grow it and inspire the next generation of previously disadvantaged.

In actual achievement, there are few if any blacks who are challenging the Ruperts of everything, Ackermans of Pick n Pay, Oppeheimers



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of De Beers, Gordons of Liberty, the Wieses of Checkers and the Dippenaars of First Rand – and the many other silent ones who operate under the radar of the JSE fanfare.

In the process, the black identity is under threat of being reduced to a permanent symbol of begging, borrowing and blaming and little else of lasting nature – other than under the symbolic renaming of apartheid-era institutions, instead of creating new institutions of the future.

Instead, the privileged few have taken pleasure in a being classed as black diamonds, emerging black middle class and the first generation of new blacks, while publicly debating and chasing the next black rugby and cricket captaincy and other unrealised black firsts.

The challenge for black South Africa is not in fighting for recognition of its blackness or being among the first blacks, but in being the first in a non-racial class of excellence.

It is not to have public debates about blackness, such as when as songstress Simphiwe Dana famously clashed with Helen Zille about being a "professional black" (whatever that means), or to be reduced to being labelled as a clever black.

It is not to debate, as MetroFM did a few years ago, "what makes you black?" It is not to enter into a competitive battle against each other, because as pan-African giant Julius Nyerere once observed, you cannot determine how healthy you are by measuring yourself against sick people.

There's no escaping being black – whether through the Krok or Naidoo science or social orientation. Focusing on blackness is a narrow ambition and identity, and a betrayal of past and future generations.

"Being black is not a matter of pigmentation", instead it should be

"a reflection of a mental attitude", as Steve Biko wrote in *I Write What I Like*. In fact, colour scientists say that black is not even a colour, strictly speaking, but the absence of all colour.

Blacks should fight against the black identity – as it is now. The greatest challenge is to rise above dependency, sponsorship and seeking validation by others. As Biko warned, "Black man, you are on your own."

In an age of mass individualisation, the challenge for South Africa is to celebrate individual talent, identity and purpose, and contribute to a greater South Africa without obsessing about racial differences, and to affirm its identity with the greater African race.

In harnessing the heritage of ubuntu, black South Africans need to seek to "lift as we rise" the next generation of black South Africans – the 58 percent of the population under the age of 35.

Our character, rather than our circumstances, Booker T Washington warned, should determine our destiny. Only then can we be judged by the content of our character, rather than the colour of our skin, as Martin Luther King Jr envisioned. The obsession with the weaknesses rather than the strengths of blackness is what enabled and emboldened the likes of the Kroks to profit off a gullible and self-doubting race.

But perhaps our obsession with being black and everything black underlines the impatience with progress in social cohesion in South Africa and a lack of a common national identity beyond race or creed.

As it is today, black is no longer beautiful, but a handicap and a currency for underachievement, entitlement and lack of ambition.

As we celebrate Heritage Month and the diversity of cultures, beliefs and traditions that make up the nation of South Africa, it's time to look beyond being black in itself and to reflect on how that indelible heritage enriches and inspires.

It's time to restore pride, dignity and honour in black as a distinctive identity and not a handicap or cap in hand.

Until then, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu hoped, it is impossible to be "a rainbow nation finally at peace with itself".

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## Forum

### UN is a diseased and toothless tiger that needs to be reformed

THE situation in Syria is helpless because the UN is impotent. Syria is in utter turmoil and a threat to world peace. Sixteen years ago, in the Bosnian town of Srebrenica, the Serbs massacred 775 Muslims, while a UN Dutch force stood by helplessly. An international judicial structure, independent of the power constellation prevailing in the UN Security Council, is needed.

The UN, in principle and practice, was the closest thing we would have had to a world government, coming together to tackle the challenges humanity faces. The UN is an utterly useless organisation when it comes to protecting human rights and enforcing security. It failed to stop the invasion of Iraq, which has

resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians, and made Iraq worse than it was under Saddam Hussein.

A nongovernmental organisation, it has no authority in itself. The UN's only purpose is to transfer wealth from the West to the Third World. Utopian ideals render the UN a toothless tiger.

The genocide in the Balkans occurred under the nose of the UN, which was incapable of protecting the innocent.

The sanctions on Iraq which led to the deaths of millions, mostly children, occurred in the name and with the collusion of the UN. The genocide in Darfur exposed its impotence. How can the UN promote democracy and human rights when members like the US won't

even acknowledge a world court?

The UN does need reform to adequately address the problems of the 21st century. In Winston Churchill's words, the UN was set up not to get us to heaven, but to save us from hell.

We must strive to apply workable solutions to the problems the world faces today. The UN must be restructured to bring a real sense of equity to the international forum. As long as the US is bent on unilateralism and ignores its international obligations as the world's only superpower, its security apparatus is in trouble.

Like the League of Nations that preceded it, the UN was doomed to fail as it inherited many of its predecessor's

functions and shortcomings.

On disarmament, very little has been achieved. It seems that today, more countries have nuclear weapons than before the Non-Proliferation Act came into being. Some permanent members of the Security Council are selective in who they choose to prevent from acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

In 1945, the UN was founded amid much euphoria. It was to be mankind's "last best hope" but has become an organisation that can churn out plenty of resolutions but is helpless in implementing them.

**Farouk Araie**  
Johannesburg

### Kirsten's move to IPL bodes ill for future of SA cricket

GARY Kirsten's Indian appointment to lead an IPL side, after his sudden departure from the South African cricket scene, citing family commitments, shows that the former opener had issues with his CSA bosses.

With handsome purses offered by the IPL a sure catch, Kirsten's return to that country would again pose a "family issue" – the very reason he left India. His coming back to South Africa after successfully taking India to Test success, then abruptly leaving after taking South Africa to Test glory, is indicative of a move to "indigenise" the sport with the appointment of a coach with no exposure to the rigours of international cricket.

With cricket having a protocol whereby its players are barred from saying much, this return move to India also highlights a serious problem between players and administrators – either over pay or the racial make-up of sports teams in the new South Africa – which could lead to an exodus of players to the lucrative Indian segment of international cricket. Whilst this augurs well for aspirant players in previously disadvantaged communities, the momentum maintained by senior players in establishing South Africa's world-class status will be compromised.

**AR Modak**  
Robertsham, Johannesburg

### Job-hunting red tape leaves people sad and out of pocket

IN LIFE all things happen for a reason. I am a Christian and believe in God. He stood by me throughout my life and no matter what, I still believe in God.

I am a 47-year-old white woman. I have 31 years of work experience in various positions and enjoyed every job I did.

However, I made a mistake that I have been paying for dearly for the past three years.

I worked for a company for 17 years and asked for assistance to make my life as well as my kids' lives worth living. They couldn't assist me with my own money, so I resigned to enable me to sort out my life. My life has been a living hell ever since.

The president said we must all study and empower ourselves – which I did, but all in vain. At the age of 35 I wrote my matric and I have two diplomas and 13 certificates in various fields. These are meaningless, however, because after three years of applying for various positions I am still unemployed.

When I asked people at interviews why I was not given the opportunity to prove myself, I was told that I am over-qualified and they couldn't afford me. All I want is a happy life with a job and a salary to support myself. I don't need a big salary or to be rich, I only want to live.

I was a caregiver and took care of a stroke patient. I enjoyed that. However, they couldn't afford to pay me anymore and I had to move on, thinking I could

get a job to enable me to start building up something for my old age. I realise now how the pensioners are suffering with their small pensions.

There are a few of the things that bother me and most unemployed people. When applying for jobs on the internet I have to send my CV, ID and all certificates to an 086 fax number.

These fax numbers cost a fortune. With my CV and everything attached it's 20 pages and costs me about R100 at a time, which I don't have.

Where must unemployed people get that money from?

Then when you apply people want photos of you. Why? Do they want to see the photo so that if they don't like your face they can decide that you don't get the job?

That is wrong because it's not what you look like that does the job; it's who you are and what you are capable of doing that is important.

It's your work output, willingness, hard-working ability, compassion and love for what you do. Not the way you look. You are invited for an interview then you are told that you must pay for a course, and then only you get placed in a position. Where do unemployed people get that type of money?

I think I can say this: most of our unemployed people feel the same as me – "broken" inside.

**Christine Kotze**  
Warner Beach

### Time to control the beasts of Field's Hill

ALTHOUGH born in Joburg, I grew up in Westville, Durban, and a long time ago lost track of how many horrific accidents have occurred on Field's Hill.

The Field family must hang their heads in shame that their name is associated with so much death.

Countless souls have lost their lives on that dreadful, twisting slope which has surely absorbed more blood than any other 2km stretch in KwaZulu-Natal.

Many years ago, there was talk about rebuilding the road to make it straighter and less steep.

But then the new freeway was built and the plans were scrapped.

And so the carnage rolls on. Research will show that most of the

accidents have been caused by large trucks, but unlike Town Hill in Pietermaritzburg, nothing has been done to control these beasts.

I believe the time has come to ban all trucks over a certain size from using Field's Hill.

They are almost certainly doing so to avoid paying toll fees.

But, like the money saved by not maintaining vehicles properly, the only yield is death.

And until some serious solutions are implemented, the many thousands of ghosts of Field's Hill will keep howling.

**Don Clarke**  
Howick

### The falling rand is bad news for the South African public

THE Business Report headline "JSE beats emerging markets" refers.

If you take into account the drop in the value of the rand since the beginning of the year, of 20 percent against the dollar, 16 percent against the euro and 12 percent against the pound, the 6 percent increase in the Johannes-

burg Stock Exchange means the public are losing out horribly.

I didn't bother to even read the first line of your article.

I don't waste time on BBB.

**Bernard Cole**  
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