



End of an ideal of racial purity

APPARENTLY the most popular internet search on the day after the majority of the British people voted to leave the European Union (EU) was: "What is the EU?" Put differently, the majority of the British people voted to take their country over the cliff on the basis of ignorance. In responding to their nativist sentiments they hardly stopped to think about the political and economic implications of their decisions.

In claiming their country back, they may have given away whatever was left of British power in the world. Little did they know that their decision would lead to the resignation of the prime minister, David Cameron, the devaluation of the pound, and the exodus of several companies.

Cameron is of course not entirely innocent here. He called a referendum in the hope that it would bolster his position against that wing of his party that wanted to get out of Europe. It may be premature to rank this as the worst political gambit of the 21st century but I am sure it will be the benchmark for generations to come.

Cameron should have known that racial nativism runs deep in the British culture, before calling for a referendum on such a hot button issue. As Edward Said brilliantly demonstrates in his classic work, *Orientalism*, the Orient, which invariably meant the Islamic world, was always a source of anxiety for the European, going back to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and Syria in the 18th century and all the intellectual projects that justified the region's ultimate conquest.

What made Islam such a threat was that "it lay uneasily close to Christianity, geographically and culturally. It drew on the Judeo-Hellenic traditions, it borrowed

creatively from Christianity, it could boast of unrivalled military and political successes."

So much for theories of racial and religious purity, or what Samuel Huntington called "the clash of civilizations".

For centuries Britain ran roughshod all over the world trying to do this history of syncretism in search of the pure white race, unspoiled by any contact with the racial and religious Other.

To be sure, the British did not invent race. The concept of race can properly be located in the Spanish inquisition in the close of the 15th century, where it originated as a religious reference to Jews and Muslims who refused to assimilate to the ascendant Christianity.

Religion and race became the toxic ideologies that ultimately led to the dismemberment of the "orient", a dismemberment that has continued well into the 20th century. It is indeed rather rich for the British to complain about immigration given this history of destabilisation of the Middle East – yet another linguistic construction of the Orientalists.

You destroy the social foundations of societies for generations, you prop up dictators of your choosing and topple them as and when you wish, and when the whole thing comes tumbling down, you act surprised. You not only wring your hands of your historical responsibility but you close the door not only to them but the rest of Europe, the very Europe with which you were co-conspirators in the construction of the Orient.

What is revealing about the Brexit vote is that it was overwhelmingly decided by the older people. Apparently 65 percent of those who voted to leave were over 50 years old, driven by ancient anxieties that they are now passing on to younger generations. That



BYE BYE: A woman expresses her views in Westminster in central London, England.

PICTURE: PHIL NOBLE

We are now privileged to witness the unscrambling of Euromegalomania, writes Xolela Mangcu

is how racism reproduces itself – when narratives about which human beings are worthy are passed down from old to young, both through direct racist comments but also through cultural practices that continue to put value on the least significant genetic variation among human beings skin colour.

I love the look on the face of my students when I tell them that skin colour is nothing more than a hormonal reaction to geographic conditions. Early humans developed melanin – the hormone that darkens the skin – in order to protect themselves from the ultraviolet rays of the sun. However, as some

of these early humans moved away from the equator their bodies had no need to produce the darkening hormone and they became lighter and lighter.

The students get shocked because they believe God created them black or white. Like Brexit, racism is premised on false and stupid premises.

What we are now privileged to witness is the unscrambling of what the historian Eric Hobsbawm called the era of Euromegalomania of the past 500 years.

The idea of a pure white race that is untouched and unspoiled by the presence of other people on

this planet is over. The resurgence of racism around the world is a panicked response to this changing reality. The responses are as dangerous as the last kicks of a dying horse.

The emergence of Donald Trump is an illustration of the United States' own anxiety about this reality. The United States will soon be a minority majority country. Hispanics are already the biggest majority in states such as California.

There is nothing either Trump or Brexit's Nigel Farage or France's Marie Le Pan can do to stop the clock of demographic change. For as long

as human beings continue to have sex then for that long will humanity in all its diversity confound theories of racial purity.

These demographic changes are in part the reason for the resurgence of racism in South Africa, where the white population consists of only 8 percent of the population. It is a matter of time before this becomes a minuscule figure – give or take a couple of decades.

What we are privileged to witness is the end of a particular ideal of racial purity. What will come in its place is the big question. So far the racist nativism has invited an equally dangerous religious and racial fundamentalism. Surely, there must be a way out, if those of us who do not buy into these ideologies are to survive.

The United Kingdom is now the Divided Kingdom. The silver lining may well be that Theresa May will most likely join Hillary Clinton and Angela Merkel as leaders of

the most powerful countries in the world. What this will portend for the resolution of these ancient quarrels is also an open question.

The Oxford don, Isaiah Berlin, described the test of leadership all these leaders must pass. This is a test of judgement Merkel has passed with flying colours and one Cameron has spectacularly failed: "If I am driving a car in desperate haste, and come to a rickety-looking bridge, and must make up my mind whether it will bear my weight, some principles of engineering would no doubt be useful.

"But even so, I can scarcely afford to stop to survey and calculate. To be useful to me in a crisis such knowledge must have given rise to a semi-instinctive skill." In short, leaders must think before they act, and think hard.

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Rogues, opportunists and hollow men, lend me your ears

WITH the local government elections just weeks away, the silly season is in full swing. The radio and television debates have been endlessly infuriating. I hanker for a bit of polish, if decorum is too much to ask for.

Some of our politicians approach the debates like street fighters. The odd few are statesmanlike.

The audience is another barrel of fish. Too often debates are turning out like reality TV, with panellists and the supporters forgetting there is an external audience.

Trading insults, shouting and drowning out speakers are more the norm than the exception. Dishonest and personal attacks have become routine. There is a great deal to play for, but does it have to degenerate into kindergarten hair-pulling?

My special irritation is with the DA. The more I see of Mmusi Maimane and his pseudo-Obama makeover, the more I bristle. At first glance, he looks just right. Young,



Imraan Buccus

black, well-educated and glib. The more one listens, the more one gets the impression of a big lie.

He is a special invention for a particular time and space in the DA's peculiar world view. Don't get me wrong. I share an irritation with Maimane that is rarely concealed across the black and white caucuses

in the DA. Maimane just doesn't cut it. He fits into the mould that the American make-over artists have conjured, but he lacks substance.

He lacks the confidence of a Helen Zille. There she was – female, middle class and straight-talking. There was no middle road with her. She knew what she was on about and she inspired belief among a niche audience of self-threatened minorities. She spoke to their fears and frustrations.

She cared little for the content of her public statements and even less about her tweets. Her constituency was stridently anti-ANC, anti-Zuma, captured by the pro-Israel lobby and determined to hold on to its material privileges. She was upfront.

Not so with Maimane and his merry band of praise-singers. He sounds duplicitous. Right from the start, it was the manner in which he ascended the DA throne, tramping over the corpses of DA stalwarts.

Then came the pseudo-Obama

haircut, open-necked shirts and furious hand gestures. Barack Obama, his frequent follies in world affairs notwithstanding, is a one of a kind.

You cannot simply pluck an ambitious black man from obscurity, dress him up and think that uGogo in uMlazi is going to give him her vote.

Maimane has nothing to say. It's all vacuous cliché. The DA remains the party of neo-liberalism. All they have done is replace the straight talking of Tony Leon and Zille with sugar-coated sweet talk that has no content. This is advertising over substance.

This aggressive wobble into the black vote is going to cost the DA. Already we're seeing its internal contradictions finding nasty expression. Its base among whites, coloureds and Indians is not as firm as under the Zille leadership.

The minorities who have been dedicated party workers, benefactors or supporters are

being overlooked while the black "refugees" (to use a Zillism) make a play for a piece of the pie.

Witness the torment in the Indian ranks of the DA in the overwhelmingly Indian and well-heeled suburb of Reservoir Hills, where the DA has put up an African newcomer and shack-dweller as its ward candidate.

In this suburb, once solidly ANC, the ruling party lost most of its middle-class Indian support when it dumped its Indian councillor for an African shack-dweller to try to see off the threat from Abahlali baseMjondolo.

The Reservoir Hills DA supporters have not abandoned the party quietly. Their threat is that the vote will follow.

This must worry another fast talker. Haniff Hoosen is the DA's mayoral candidate for the eThekweni Metro. He is in the Maimane jelly mould, but without the expensive suits.

The ANC has been having a

field day rattling the skeletons in Hoosen's cage. I recall him being violently anti-DA because he couldn't reconcile his Muslimness with the anti-Palestine DA position.

He was a faithful soldier of Patricia de Lille in the Independent Democrats and the promise she represented.

It has since emerged he was a paid organiser for the National Party. Those 30 pieces of silver he apparently earned while Nelson Mandela was a prisoner of the Nats.

Maimane and Hoosen have serious trust issues. The DA offers a solidly neo-liberal and pro-imperialist set of policy commitments with a public face that puts spin over substance. That spin is empty, saccharine and ultimately insulting to black people because it assumes all we need to be won over is a black face gazing up into the future.

There is a great longing for an alternative to the Zuma-Gupta version of the ANC. While there

are some decent people in the ANC, such as Pravin Gordhan and Mavuso Msimang, they are weak and on the back foot.

The EFF is able to seize the moment with real flair, but with Julius Malema's history of corruption and a set of policies that amount to little more than a crude statism, it just isn't convincing.

But the DA is not an alternative either.

It seems the days when politics attracted the talents of our brightest and best are long gone. These days it's dominated by rogues, opportunists and the condescension of marketing managers who think that all black people want is a pathetic imitation of Obama.

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HEADS UP

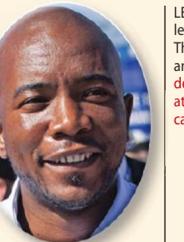
RAacists can insult me as they wish but my commitment to a non-racial, equal and quality education for all our children remains unshakable. Their children will study, dance and play with our children in one class and drink water from the same tap. If this hurts racists, hard luck. – Gauteng Education MEC Panyaza Lesufi in response to racist Twitter posts about him.



AS LONG as a South African artist wins this award, that's fine by me. Regardless of how much my people belittle me... I will still rock that SA flag with pride on stage tonight. Always and forever. Look, Black Coffee and me don't dig each other but I respect him and his art. I acknowledge him for the pioneer he is. – Musician AKA in response to DJ Coffee becoming the first South African artist to win a BET Award in Los Angeles.



HE (President Jacob Zuma) must stop wasting taxpayers' money by going to the Supreme Court of Appeal to delay this matter. We've wasted a lot of money. His lawyer, Michael Hulley, has made a lot of money out of this. – DA leader Mmusi Maimane after the high court refused Zuma leave to appeal the reinstatement of more than 700 corruption charges against him.



LET US not just leave Athlone for the DA and leave the people to be confused by the devil. They must understand the devil wears blue and the good people wear yellow. – ANC deputy secretary-general Jessie Duarte attacking the DA during her election campaign in Cape Town this week.

