

**The Immoral Landscape:
Can Moral Truths Transcend Cultural and Racial Boundaries?
By Lisa Nel**

Recently I had an idea of how to break through the landscape of shadows which obfuscate the perceptions and preconceptions of cross-cultural and racial objective discourse. Having lived and studied in South Africa as well as taught and supported non-denominational and non-profit teaching positions, I presumed or assumed that the 'perception' of me (I'm ostensibly white) would be different. So I conducted a series of interviews with black South Africans and some other people from sub Saharan Africa. They came from a collage of economic backgrounds and lifestyles, including 'squatter camps,' rural villages and suburban areas, but none being born into or remembering the apartheid regime in anything other than name and consequence; not to undermine in the least the lingering effects of that regime.

Initially my introduction of myself was met with a combination or weird mixture of obsequiousness, mistrust, respect and uncertainty. I Stated my intentions to conduct a series of interviews which I labeled, 'informal discussions,' usually over a cup of coffee or receiving a latte made by a barista, or taking loose notes while a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo was washing a deluxe Porsche cayenne owned by that same seemingly ubiquitous elite who somehow seem to remove themselves from the slings and arrows of everyone else's misfortune. White usually but not always. I pledged anonymity for them in exchange for the amnesty of confidence.

The first person to whom I spoke had travelled extensively all over the world, is huge in theater and extremely well informed. He told me he would speak to me because I "wasn't a typical white girl." I was different. Perhaps the longevity of my stay in this country; a combination of my education and experiences and smattering of personality were the catalysts of persuasion. Nonetheless, I felt flattered and taken aback, almost insulted, realizing trust is hard earned and hard to come by. The next item in the informal agenda was the sensitive issue of politics. A subject most people irrespective of their race do not really want to discuss other than recycling the news which has the same elements of propaganda as most publications imposing their 'good cop bad cop' articles upon the apathy of its subjects.

I asked my friend, "Do you ever think there will be a white president (again) in this country?" The response: a definitive "no." This sentiment, disparaging as it was both in the delivery and its confessional corollary, is the denouement of the combo effects of colonialism and apartheid: both inexhaustibly burnt out topics whose depth will never be fathomed and whose repercussions never be fully understood. I then - now bravely- asked, "why not?" And the response like all the others which followed from the sequential interviews, were the same although their origins differed. It makes sense in a mistakenly salient way. My next hurdle, after surviving the political bypass question, was trying to find out why the ANC with its endemic, epidemic and unassailable corruption, leaching money away from the very people it promised ideologically and culturally to restore and to educate, is unquestionably supported.

President Zuma is about to secure a sole mandate in the next energy venture with his new best friend Vladimir Putin. They plan to install 6 nuclear power stations throughout the country at a cost of 3 trillion rand. Where is the money coming from when the government can't even afford to upgrade its basic services? And if this morphs into an extended Czarist loan what will the long term political and geographic consequences be for this country?

Eskom is the power engine of South Africa but has more vacant offices and staff shortages than it can possibly explain away. It is continually stretched to its maximum capacity and it is not uncommon to be flashed throughout the night with warnings about electricity usage: if usage is too high we are subjected to 'load shedding,' the euphemistic phrase for power cuts. If we don't have qualified staff to man the existing rig than how possibly are we going to get qualified people to operate a highly sensitive nuclear system?

Reality check: South Africa is rapidly running out of power options due to a continuum of neglect, expertise drain and corruption. The existing infrastructure was neglected 20 years ago and has not been upgraded. Qualified people with years of experience and knowledge were unfortunately white. Years of experience cannot be replaced by handing over policies and responsibilities to people with no knowledge of its workings.

The government threw out all the babies with the bath water long ago. Although 20 years is by no means long enough to rectify the wrongs of a repressive regime, repression has taken instead a different form. The same people are suffering. South Africa (barring Botswana), is surrounded by countries who have trodden down the same murky path where elegant decay has been replaced by inelegant negligence.

As much as 'the truth that dare not speak its name' remains silent, the unresolved issue will always be 'black and white.'