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# noseweek

ISSUE 250 MARCH/APRIL 2021



## **JOBURG'S LATEST CELEBRITY CROOK**

**You've met Brett Kebble,  
you've met Glenn Agliotti  
and Radovan Krejcir.**

**Now meet  
Dr Mahendren Munsamy**

---

*The explosive state of  
SANDF ammunition dump:  
due for a blast that's  
bigger than Beirut?*

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*Kwasizabantu Mission:  
Rape-ridden cult or simply  
raped by the media?*

---

*Cape Town's Facebook trolls:  
a new twist in the tale*





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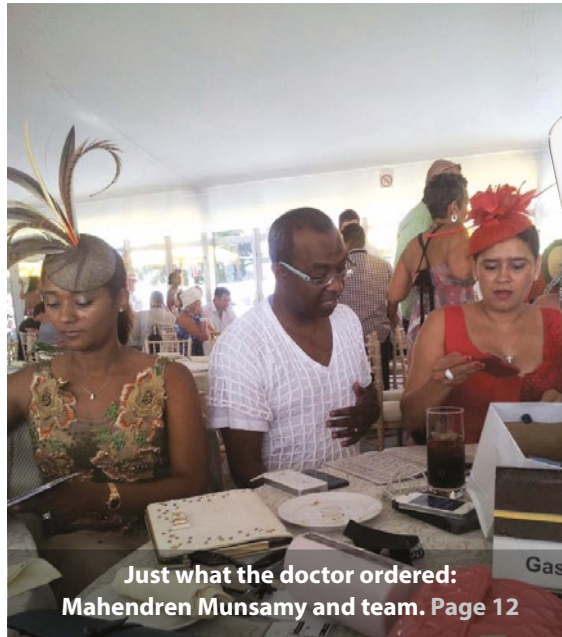
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# Letters

Letters to the editor should be sent by email to [editor@noseweek.co.za](mailto:editor@noseweek.co.za)

## Noseweek Fundraiser

Before we start, a special thank you to the anonymous donor who for the past six years has been making a monthly donation, ref 4 Love of Noseweek. In our darkest moments we are regularly reminded that someone out there cares! In the latest fundraiser he/she donated a distinctive R2,000.22, so you know who you are! – Ed

## Some responses to our appeal

Glad I could help! Your service towards a civil society is much appreciated.

**Lawrence Swanson**  
Pinelands

■ Thank you for your efforts to keep *Noseweek* alive and for the well investigated articles showing us the other side of the coin.

**KJ Lanser**  
Melkbosstrand

■ Would I ever forget you? Never, no really. I've been a subscriber since 1994, and I also have that one thing you mention: the conviction that there

is no free society without a free press. And I admire your courage in standing up to the brutes with fat wallets that want to annihilate you with legal fees because, I suspect, the truth is horribly inconvenient for them.

So yes, I will be contributing. I know it's hard, but please never give up, we have to maintain a free press.

**Nigel Mudge**  
Vyeboom, Durbanville

■ My resources have been stretched to the limit and I need to get back on my feet again before I'm able to assist anyone. My abject apologies and I do hope you receive the assistance you require.

**Paula**  
Rivonia

■ Keep up the Sterling work. (Put them in orange overalls!) Stay safe.

**Gary**  
Saxonwold, Johannesburg

■ I am really sorry that I cannot make a cash donation at the moment. I am experiencing cash flow problems myself,

due to this COVID stuff-up! In my property business, I have lost 5 tenants over the past 8 months, (their leases expired and they decide to not renew, and work from home.) No new tenants as yet.

Similarly, my Engineering Consultancy business is also suffering, as I cannot travel to Thailand, China, Bangladesh, Philippines, and African countries. These are where most of my Sugar projects take place, and at the moment all projects are on hold, Plus I would have to spend 21 days in quarantine on arrival. (Crazy, but true.)

By the way, have you seen the latest Political Research note by J P Landman which gives the prices of all of the Covid vaccines. S.A. was to pay (has paid?) US\$5.25 per shot, for 1.5-million shots from Serum Institute of India, as compared to the EU countries who are paying US\$3.00 a shot.

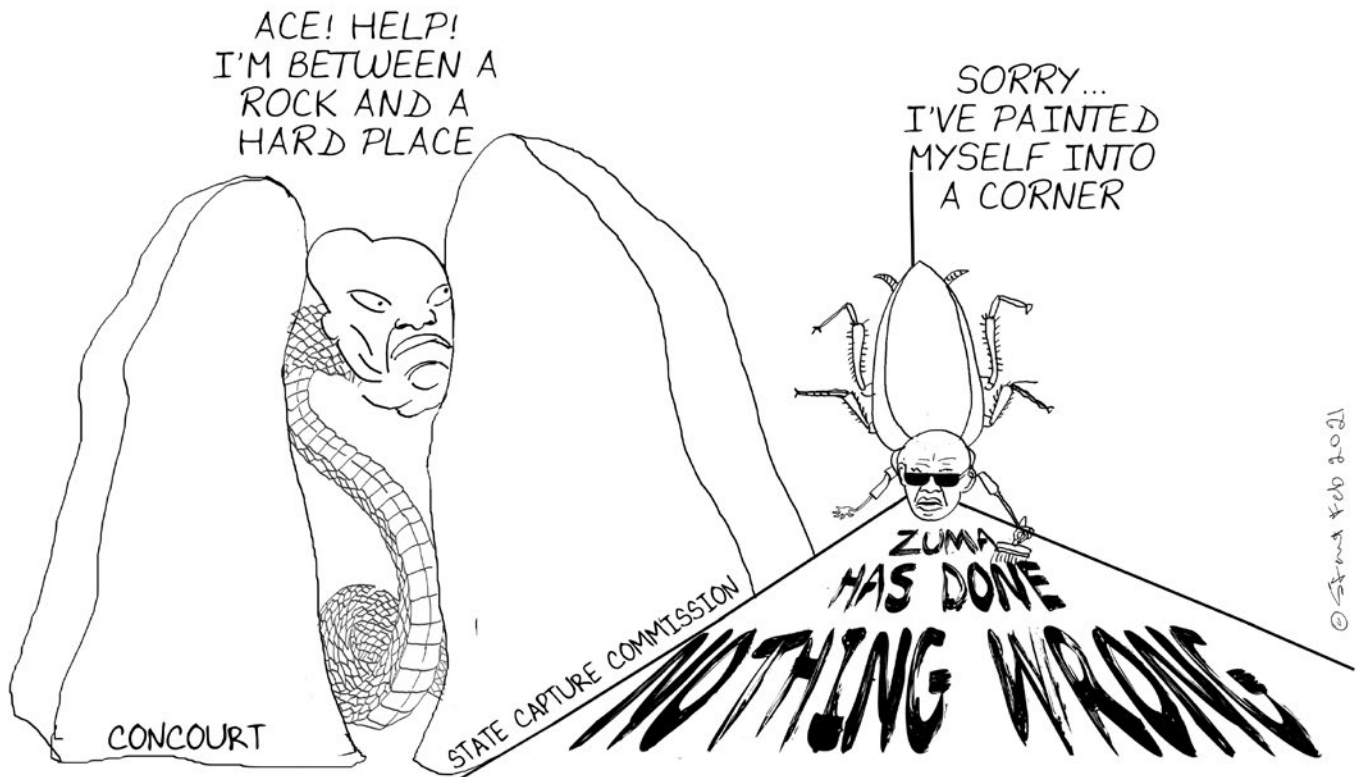
Our Health Dept Deputy DG, Anban Pillay said the SA price was based on our country's "Upper Middle Income Status". (What a load of "codswallop"!)

All the best of Luck and Health to you.

**Arnold**  
Umhlanga

Stent

## IDIOMS AND PROVERBS FOR POLITICIANS



■ I am sorry that I could not be one of the five or six figure donations. You and *Noseweek* deserve it.

Suffice to say, the economic devastation wreaked upon our clients (and concomitantly ourselves), with all of the emotional, social, economic and psychological damage that happened to our team, their families and our clients and their circles, made last year the annus horribilis of my entire life.

Strength to you all and (I say this hoping that it is not in vain) let justice prevail and not the bloody law.

**John CA(SA)**  
Tokai

■ No I didn't forget. Due to Covid I've been too busy scratching and hustling for work to pay attention to much else. I'm in the travel sector and have had zero income for just over a year now.

Prior to that, for three decades I took saltwater fly fishermen and women to remote destinations around the world, interspersed with marine research expeditions with various universities where I have assisted with some of the practical aspects of their work. So to get going again, I need vaccination/s like oxygen!

Meanwhile, if by some miracle you exceed your donation target, you know where to send the surplus!

**Richard Schumann**  
Via email

*Anyone need a guide for an exotic expedition?*

*Call Noseweek right away!* – Ed.

■ I'm a non-practising attorney, operating as a writer-researcher and corporate counselor. We're as out of pocket as you are, I'm sorry to say. Every expense is cut to the bone right now.

I hope you make it; you deserve to!

**Nicolette**  
Johannesburg

■ While I will admit to being amazed and appalled that you still support Facebook and Twitter, herewith my contribution.

**"Emptycapsules"**  
Durbanville

*I agree the social and political impacts of Facebook and Twitter are of grave concern everywhere (see pages 29–32). When I personally participate, I aim to temper and challenge the harsh attitudes and prejudices generally promoted, and*

*show myself interested in people with different opinions to my own. Which I am sure confuses the profilers!*

*Thank you for your contribution!* – Ed.

## Rot in the ranks

Having just read Susan Puren's article about the rot in the SANDF (*Nose*249), the following three factors became patently clear:

1) The calibre of person being appointed and then being promoted to positions of power in the SANDF is, in the main, substantially below grade. Many of these senior officers are thugs, thieves and criminals who should be wearing orange overalls, not the uniform of a disciplined soldier.

2) It is also quite clear that the rampant fraud and corruption committed by these officers was planned from the outset, judging by the large number of very senior officials involved.

It reminds me of the fraud, corruption and looting scandals which surrounded the "emergency" acquisition by the Government of PPE. Never has so much been stolen by so many in such a short period of time, leading me to believe that certain members of the ruling party orchestrated this grand theft from the start.

3) Judging by the names of the people who were implicated or who colluded in these criminal activities, Major General Sizani was justified in targeting so-called Black-owned companies in his attempt to root out the many corrupt activities that were taking place within Military Intelligence.

**Nick McConnell**  
Howick

## An open letter to Government Pension Fund members

*Re: PIC looks on while Iqbal Survé Inc burns through State pensioners' billions*

It is not only a matter of the PIC looking on while Iqbal Survé burns through state pensions billions; the PIC is actively involved. It should also be remembered that the PIC is supposed to be only the agent of the Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF). The entity merely looking on is the Board of Trustees (BOT) that is actually supposed to be in charge. Unfortunately it's a matter of the tail wagging the dog. The real question is: "Where was the

BOT when all this happened?"

How uninformed and absent the BOT is, was very clearly demonstrated a year ago at the meeting of SCOF on 19 February, 2020. Questions asked by Mr Hill-Lewis, Dr George and Mr Wouter Wessels could not be answered by Dr Mokate, chair of the BOT and Mr Abel Sithole, then still CEO of GEPF. They promised to come back with the required information on a number of issues. We are still waiting. Swept under the carpet again?

Perhaps it is time that independent asset managers are appointed on tender and that the monopoly of a government controlled body is broken. Also, that a Board of Trustees not controlled by a political party be put in place.

**AP Stemmet**  
Durbanville

## Pure poetry

I have just finished reading your May 2016 *Noseweek* edition with the article "Google is watching you". I do enjoy your magazine.

I have since been walking around with this short "poem" in my head and decided to send it to you.

## Evolution Conclusion

Eyes shut, arms open wide as humanity dances to the annihilation of sanity  
Ominous, fragile, and invisible  
The Cloud invites...

Trust me with your data  
Trust me...with your history  
Trust me with your future

Trust me to be the single protector  
of your civilization's knowledge.

I demand your privacy  
I demand your time

To me,  
relinquish your skills and creativity

In return, Oh humanity...  
I bestow a most noble gift – The SELF!

Gather around people  
put on this headset and experience true reality

**Dorothy Yvonne Hughes**  
By email

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## Banking on the power of prayer

This from the editorial in *nose236*, June 2019 (since then nothing has changed):

‘Noseweek has long suspected that the DA-led City of Cape Town (CoCT) has been so absorbed in politicking that it has neglected the job of ensuring the city will have enough water in years of drought to come. Perhaps they don’t believe in climate change, so they’ve done nothing other than repair a fair number of leaking pipe joints – and reduced water pressure on the system to slow down the leakage from those that remain. And, business-oriented as they are, they’ve upped the price of water. I have heard it referred to as “disaster profiteering”.

To give credit where it’s due, *Noseweek* accepts that some councillors and municipal execs have occasionally stopped to pray for rain. For now, their prayers have been answered. But what of those much-heralded desalination plants that failed? Those, they will have you believe, were a worthwhile R1-billion experiment – although it revealed nothing they had not been told in advance by various experts.

The plants are non-operative because the city’s problems are much, much bigger than we could have imagined. Cape Town cannot desalinate water from the sea that surrounds it because the Council has for decades neglected to build and maintain sewerage processing plants. Instead it has found it cheap and convenient to pump the huge and growing tonnage of raw sewage (and all its modern-day chemical and pharmaceutical concomitants) into the sea.

To fool tourists into trusting our “blue” beaches they’ve been fudging the pollution statistics – on a scale to equal Steinhoff. The sea is now so polluted that the filters of the desalination plants clog up within an hour. They are designed to take out salt, not sewage. CoCT admit their failure? Never! The game of pass-the-buck (and the bill) is still in full swing.

■ Following publication in *nose249* of the first installment of Prof Lesley Green’s analysis of the Facebook posts of a “troll” using the name “Mia Taylor” (probably set up as a propaganda device to deflect criticism of the DA-led council), I received a call from Western Cape DA leader John Steenhuisen.



Politely – he always is polite – Mr Steenhuisen wanted to know why the cartoon troll on the cover wore a DA T-shirt.

My reply: Because the CoCT is DA-controlled and the Facebook trolls identified in our featured article were, on the overwhelming balance of probabilities, set up to manage the political fallout from CoCT’s long neglect and mismanagement of the city’s water supply and sewage disposal systems, as had become very evident in the great drought.

Steenhuisen quite reasonably conceded that the failed desalination plants hurriedly built at a cost of close on R1-billion could not be explained away as “a useful experiment”.

But, he said, the DA would not endorse such underhand tactics as using social media trolls on Facebook and Twitter. To lend weight to this assertion he confided that when former DA leader Musi Maimane had once suggested to the party’s head committee that they should hire Cambridge Analytica as advisors on the use of social media, the DA leadership had rejected the proposal.

Cambridge Analytica gained notoriety worldwide for its manipulative use/abuse of mass personal profile data – psychologically profiling you based on your “likes”, re-posts and personality quizzes they’d acquired from Facebook – to micro-target political adver-



tising and social media postings. They had successfully applied these techniques to promoting Brexit in the UK and Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign in the USA.

I suggested Steenhuisen write to *Noseweek* about it. He never did.

Curious to know who had suggested Cambridge Analytica to Mr Maimane, I called him. No luck: Having left the party, Maimane refuses "as a matter of principle" to say anything about his time in the DA.

But *Noseweek* reader Gabriele Jansen was one step ahead of Mr Steenhuisen: he wrote to tell us we had every reason to suspect the DA in Cape Town might be up to something deviously manipulative on social media – on the advice of the likes of Cambridge Analytica! Gabriele had found an international political marketing company called IDEIA that, according to several analysts, appears to be the successor to Cambridge Analytica (see *Quartz Magazine*, August 2019).

In fact, pretty much as Cambridge Analytica was closing shop following world outrage about its devious political marketing techniques, IDEIA was setting up shop in Brazil with branch offices around the world.

Experts in the field revealed in the *Quartz Magazine* article, that on all critical points, IDEIA's promotional statement was verbatim the same as that of Cambridge Analytica, down to using the same bulk data personality assessment programme called OCEAN.

On page 44 of its long presentation found on the internet, IDEIA proudly lists its international clients, among them political parties such as the Democratic Party in the USA, various political parties in South America – and the Democratic Alliance in South Africa.

While IDEIA may or may not be involved in the management of City of Cape Town's political problems on social media, the fact that the DA has hired such a company's services shows how certain elements in the party are thinking.

To get the bigger picture, read the excellent article from *The Atlantic* on The Dark Psychology of Social Networks on page 29.

**The Editor**

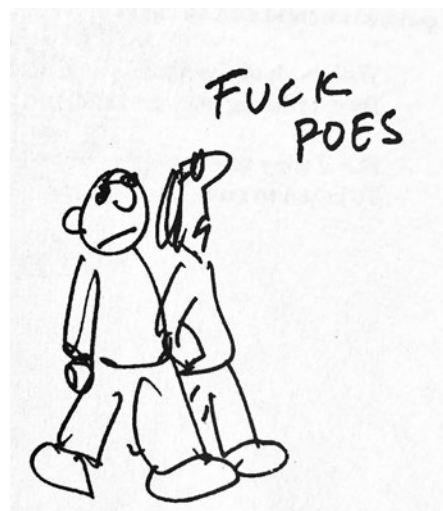
# An ultimate caesura

In memorium: Poet, cartoonist, pharmacist Gus Ferguson  
(1940–2020)



**W**E DEDICATE THIS ISSUE TO the memory of our friend Gus Ferguson, pharmacist, cyclist, cartoonist, poet and publisher (of other poets' poetry). Talented and self-deprecating; invariably kind and gently witty. He died on 27 December 2020, although his mind had gone to rest a good while earlier. Kalk Bay Books put up a chalk board outside their shop which simply read R.I.P Gus Ferguson. We immediately knew: That's a bookshop seriously worth a visit.

Gus provided this cartoon for the very first issue of *Noseweek* in July 1993:



*Shame, they can't even spell 'poets'.*

Most readers were caught off guard, then laughed. It was in his nature to disarm the offensive.

But the SA Reserve Bank immediately cancelled its subscription to *Noseweek*. Gus had a bigger reach than we had imagined!

In his memory, this from a collection of his poems and cartoons titled *Arse Poetica*:

## Light verse at the end of the tunnel

The perfect poet lies in bed,  
In vain he tries to sleep.  
He counts and counts inside his head  
In syllables, not sheep.

His haiku all have seventeen,  
His tankas thirty-one.  
His prosody has always been  
More regular than Donne.

With fourteen lines and seven rhymes  
His sonnets are precise –  
How cleverly the music chimes,  
How literally nice.

His every pulse is metrical,  
Mechanical and neat.  
His heart flub-dubs iambical  
And never skips a beat.

His ECG scans perfectly  
De dum, de dum, de dum  
And measures ineluctably  
Each moment's tedium.

His heart's a clock inside a box  
That ticks each beat and rhyme  
And only Death can spring the lock  
To break the spell of time.

But death does not the poem end  
(of this I can't be surer),  
It is, as mystics all contend,  
An ultimate caesura. ■

---

# Time bomb

*“The guaranteed shelf life for shells and pyrotechnics is 10 years and for small arms ammunition 20 years but 90% of the SANDF ammunition is however older than 20 years.”* – 2004 report of the portfolio committee of defence about the 23,000 tonnes of ammunition stored at 97 Ammunition Depot outside De Aar

**N**OTHING MUCH HAS CHANGED AT 97 Ammunition Depot since 2004.

A cataclysmic event, even bigger than the explosion that flattened parts of Beirut last year, could be waiting to happen at the largest military ammunition depot in the southern hemisphere outside De Aar in the Northern Cape Province.

The lightning conductors have not been certified for years and the electric circuit of the security fence as well as the locking mechanisms at some of the gates do not work, which means the sophisticated biometric security system, designed for the base at a cost of several million rand, is in disuse. The runway – previously monitored by security cameras and permanently guarded – is currently only watched during the day by army personnel.

97 Ammunition Depot consists of 175 ammunition warehouses and covers an area the size of 29 rugby fields. It has a 49-kilometre railway network but the defence force has not renewed the maintenance contract since 2015. What makes the situation worse is a shortage of technical staff able to act in accordance with regulations and monitor the stored ammunition; millions of obsolete and surplus heavy calibre projectiles, aircraft bombs, cannon rounds and missiles, stockpiled for more than 30 years.

The nitroglycerin tonnage of the ammunition is more than ten times the quantity of the ammonium nitrate that caused the Beirut blast, killing at least 180 people and injuring 6,000. Nitroglycerin’s explosive power is also much greater than that of ammonium nitrate and will be much more devastating.

Experts have been warning for some time that the highly specialized security system at the depot is no longer working and was last used before the contract with the private company, LS Turnkey of Port Elizabeth, expired

six years ago. LS Turnkey designed the security system at the depot in 1993, upgraded it over the years and managed it until 2015.

The company’s CEO, Rudolph de Beer, told *Noseweek* near the end of last year that there were no vehicles available at the depot to transport staff to the bunkers to do maintenance.

**“The nitroglycerin tonnage of the ammunition is more than ten times the quantity of the ammonium nitrate that caused the Beirut blast, killing at least 180 people”**

“Staff must be picked up and dropped off again. One cannot smoke or eat or use a cell phone near the magazines because it will without doubt result in a violent explosion. But no one wants to take responsibility,” he said.

“An explosion in one of the magazines will shake the earth and as a result other unstable bombs will in all

likelihood explode as well. It’s nothing but a giant time bomb!” says another expert, who prefers to remain anonymous. He claims that Russian specialists, brought in to advise the defense force in 2019, were apparently clear in their findings that “it was too late, as some of the ammunition was already leaking.”

The leader of the Freedom Front Plus, Dr Pieter Groenewald, is a specialist in heavy calibre ammunition. He held a senior position for 10 years at Naschem, a subsidiary of Armscor, before entering politics. Naschem designed and manufactured artillery ammunition and bombs for the Army, Air Force and Navy during the 1980s. He believes the greatest danger is the instability of the bombs whose shelf life of between ten and twenty years has long since expired.

“When they are old, they will all go off,” he says. “Bombs from the seventies and eighties that are stored for too long form crystals and even the static electricity caused by human clothes can cause them to explode. The stuff is terribly sensitive and the risk is huge if people do not know how to act in the vicinity of this type of explosive.”

In answer to Groenewald’s questions in parliament, the minister of defence and military veterans, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, admitted in a written reply that most of the ammunition at the depot is old but not unstable. She said ammunition’s life cycle is not given in years and that it cannot be predetermined when it will expire.

“Annual inspections and testing are executed against specifications, designed for each type and configuration of ammunition to ensure functioning as well as safety,” she said. “Unsafe ammunition is destroyed or sold back to the manufacturer before it becomes unstable. Unserviceable ammunition does not function within specification, but is still safe for



handling, transport and storage, which is done according to internationally approved categories and methods.”

Mapise-Nqakula also admitted that the lightning conductors are currently not certified. According to her a process to rectify these requirements started in April 2019 when the scope of work and the motivation were submitted to the procurement board. Service providers were invited to give quotation in 2020 and they have been approved and appointed.

Groenewald called the minister’s answers vague regarding the ammunition that was no longer useful and said the fact that the lightning conductors are not certified was unacceptable. “Because in effect this means that they are not in a proper working condition, which creates danger. The same goes for the fence that makes access by unwanted people possible.”

## OLD REPORTS

According to a 2004 report by the portfolio committee of defence, obsolete ammunition was simply dumped in the ocean until 1995 when international conventions and agreements prohibited such practices as well as the transportation of hazardous material over national borders.

A 2003 report by the same committee referred to 141,000 tonnes of ammunition with an average age of 17 years that were stored at military bases in the country and had to be destroyed. “Of these 67,000 tonnes had expired, were obsolete, redundant or un-serviceable while the warranties of 90% had expired,” according to the report. It also stated that a large amount of ammunition stored at Jan Kempdorp had been partially transferred to De Aar.

“The manufacturer does not guarantee the safety of this ammunition and using conventional ways of disposal would take 34 years,” stated the report.”

It noted that to properly dispose of ammunition, the department required an ammunition disposal plant, which would drop the disposal period to seven years. A request to acquire such a plant was sent to the industry on 4 July 2003 and responses were expected by end Aug 2003. The project would have cost R100 million per

year, with a total cost of R500 to R600 million.

It is clear from the committee’s next report, compiled a year later in 2004, that the department of defence was at the time still investigating the feasibility of erecting such a plant. “The depot is approximately 7km from the town and 400m from a farm fence, which raise noise pollution, safety and health concerns,” the report said. “The open burning and open detonation methods, as well as the incinerator used at De Aar are environmentally unfriendly, labour intensive, expensive and a danger, not only to the personnel who are not trained disposal professionals, but also the neighbouring community.”

The 2004 report specifically referred to 23,000 tonnes of ammunition stored in the magazines at the 97 Ammunition Depot at De Aar. “The guaranteed shelf life for shells and pyrotechnics is 10 years and for small arms ammunition 20 years, but 90% of the SANDF ammunition is older than 20 years.

As far as *Noseweek* was able to establish this project never materialised.

According to the minister’s parliamentary answers given last year the net explosive content of the un-serviceable ammunition at the depot is 8,000 tonnes, measured in the explosive weight, but the tonnage changes on a daily basis due to it being sold or

destroyed.

Defence force spokesperson, Simphiwe Dlamini said SANDF had disposed of a thousand tonnes of ammunition per year since 2009. This was by means of conventional disposal, the inert deforming facilities, the sales through Armscor and a contract that provides for the disposal of small ammunition by the original manufacturers.

Like the minister he also said the electric security fence, the locking mechanisms, and the biometric security system were in the process of being upgraded. “When the upgrade is complete, the process of appointing a new contractor will begin.”

Ironically, this is almost literally the same answer that BGen Xolani Mabanga gave the media in 2016 when he was questioned about the lack of security at the De Aar depot. “The SANDF is negotiating a new security contract,” he said.

According to *Noseweek*’s sources the upgrade has not happened yet and currently only one of about a hundred security lights at the depot is working. “The area is in darkness at night, the razor wire is overgrown, the security is compromised and nothing is done to improve the situation.”

Kobus Marais, the DA shadow minister of defence told *Noseweek* that his party is very worried about the informal settlement whose residents are moving closer to the depot. —Susan Puren ■



# Fishrot whistleblower tells all

A Namibian lawyer who has been in hiding in South Africa since the beginning of last year, is set to be a state witness in the fraud and corruption case that has shaken Namibia's fishing industry since 2019

**T**HIRTY THOUSAND CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS published by Wikileaks in 2019 – and dubbed “Fishrot” – exposed how Iceland's Samherji's seafood company had allegedly bribed several senior individuals in the Namibian government to procure fishing quotas worth billions of rands.

The scandal was covered internationally by the media and Al Jazeera TV news channel aired a documentary, *The Anatomy of a Bribe: A Deep Dive into the Underworld of Corruption*, showing high-ranking politicians and officials of Namibia's ruling Swapo negotiating to receive bribes of millions of Namibian dollars.

The then Namibian minister of fisheries, Bernhard Esau and Sacky Shanghala, who was the minister of justice, are currently facing charges of money laundering, corruption, bribery and fraud. Co-accused include Mike Nghipunya, the former CEO of state-owned Fishcor, and James Hatuikulipi, formerly the chairman of Fishcor's board and head of Investec bank in Namibia. All of them have been in custody for more than a year.

Windhoek Attorney Marén de Klerk admits his role in the scandal in a 76-page affidavit that was signed in Stellenbosch in April last year and was recently leaked to the media.

In his whistleblower statement, which *Noseweek* has seen, De Klerk describes who the role players were, for which companies he acted, and how his attorney's trust account was allegedly used to move money around for some of the accused who are currently awaiting trial. He also calls for indemnity from prosecution on nine possible charges related to tax fraud, theft and money laundering.

De Klerk mentions ten key people he allegedly got to deal with since 2016 when he became involved in the fishing industry. These include the sacked Esau, Shanghala, Hatuikulipi

and Nghipunya as well as Namibia's president, Hage Geingob, whom he believes was the “big boss” to whom the role players often referred.

Adriaan Louw and the South African, Johannes Breed, appear third and fourth on De Klerk's list. Louw is described as a successful and wealthy businessman whose family is deeply involved in the business world in Southern Africa. He calls Breed an important player in the fishing industry in Angola and Namibia, as well as Louw's right hand man and financial adviser to Louw's many companies. Both Louw and Breed have since denied any involvement



**Residents fear that harbour fish factory will stink out Mossel Bay**

in the alleged criminal conspiracy in Namibia (see below).

*Noseweek* reported in 2019 about a controversial fishmeal factory planned for Mossel Bay (*nose239*: “Fears fish factory might stink out Mossel Bay”). Breed is a director and shareholder. He has refused to identify the foreign funder of the project. *Noseweek* also noted that Breed is the managing director of the Angolan-registered company, African Selection Trust (AST) and has served on the boards of eight South African companies in the

fishing industry since 2018.

In 2019 Elsa Wessels, an independent Mossel Bay journalist and the owner of an online news platform, was taken to court by Breed after she wrote about the ties between him and the fishing industries in Angola, Namibia and South Africa. Judge Siraj Desai however, dismissed Breed's urgent application to silence Wessels' newspaper in the Cape high court and ordered Breed to pay her legal costs.

## A MEETING IN LANGEBAAN

De Klerk explains at length in his whistleblower statement how Louw invited him to an urgent meeting in Langebaan in December 2016 while he was on holiday in the Western Cape. Shanghala and Hatuikulipi were also at the meeting. He had previously done legal work for Louw and knew Shanghala as the Attorney General of Namibia, the post Shanghala held before he became Minister of Justice. He met Hatuikulipi for the first time at the meeting.

The three allegedly explained to him that their plan was to start a joint venture in the Namibian fishing industry that would be approved by Shanghala under the guise of his duties as the country's attorney general. All those involved would make a lot of money, De Klerk was told.

“I am embarrassed to acknowledge that I realized at that time that what Shanghala was explaining to me, was to participate in an unlawful corruption scheme. Shanghala was going to abuse his office (as the attorney general) to sign off agreements which would be to the benefit of Louw, and ultimately me,” says De Klerk, who previously served on the ethics committee of the Namibian law society.

He claims he got the impression during the meeting that Louw had entered into some secret agreement with Esau and Shanghala to ensure



that fishing rights were given to him. Louw apparently also explained to De Klerk that the role players were members of Swapo, that he would get shares in their companies and that he would become a director of Louw's Angolan company, African Selection Trust (AST), the same company of which Breed is the managing director.

Once back in Namibia De Klerk had to continuously protect Louw's interests and ensure that competitors did not find out what was going on. All questions regarding the business had to be sent to Breed who then answered them. De Klerk says the wording of the emails and the fact that copies had to be sent to Nghipunya, Louw and Breed is proof that they were all fully aware of the conspiracy to obtain a fish quota for their joint venture, Seaflower Pelagic Processing (SPP).

Within a few months Esau changed the laws surrounding the granting of fish quotas, apparently to implement the corrupt agreement. It then became mandatory to do the processing of fish in factories on Namibian land and no longer on the high seas.

Two years later and a few months before the Fishrot scandal broke, Seaflower Pelagic commissioned a fish factory worth almost R540 million to be built in Walvis Bay and according to media reports at the time, the company was allocated a quota of 50 metric tonnes of mackerel with an estimated

value of R120 million per year for 15 years by Fishcor.

### **LOUW AND BREED RESPOND:**

Both Louw and Breed say they became aware of De Klerk's affidavit for the first time on 15 January 2021.

They claim the content is incorrect and that De Klerk is confusing the Fishrot scandal with their project, Seaflower that was approved by the entire Namibian cabinet.

Louw said in a press statement:

"Seaflower was launched with Fishcor to further the objectives of the national development plan. The aim of the project was at all times to create more jobs by setting up a land-based pelagic fishing factory, rather than processing fish on boats on the open sea. Land-based factories employ seven times more workers and N\$700 million has been invested in the project.

"The Seaflower project was presented to three potential partners before African Selection Trust (AST) was approached to become a partner.

"Since the partnership was formed the largest pelagic fish plant south of the Sahara has been built in Walvis Bay.

"Breed is an accountant who by the nature of his expertise serves on the board of various companies. He received copies of emails and questions to answer because he was the financial planner of the Seaflower project.

"An independent forensic audit was conducted and the report unconditionally acquitted Louw and African Selection Trust (AST) of any offence.

"Louw only became aware in January 2020 that De Klerk had used Celex without his knowledge or permission when the media reported on it. He immediately distanced himself from the company."

### **● LATE UPDATE**

As *Noseweek* went to press, the chairperson of the Namibian fishing corporation, Fishcor, Mihe Gaomab, announced that the corporation will terminate its agreement with African Selection Trust, and its participation in Seaflower Pelagic Processing because of "a lack of accountability and transparency" in the way fishing quotas allocated to Seaflower had been used by the majority shareholders.

Fishcor had a 40% share in the Seaflower joint venture. Gaomab said that Fishcor was also in the dark about the proceeds of sales and execution of Horse mackerel quotas allocated to Seaflower, despite being the entity that brought all the quotas into the joint venture.

This has immediately raised questions about where the pelagic fish will come from for the planned fishmeal factory in Mossel Bay, now that its directors and majority shareholders have lost their allegedly illegally acquired Namibian quotas. – Susan Puren ■

## **Shareholding**

**T**HE SHAREHOLDING AGREEMENT IN THE joint venture, Seaflower Pelagic Processing (SPP), was signed a month after the alleged first meeting in Langebaan. African Selection Trust's new Namibian subsidiary, African Selection Fishing (ASF) acquired 60% and the state-owned Fishcor 40% of the shares. Marén de Klerk, Adriaan Louw and Johannes Breed were appointed as directors together with James Hatuikulipi and Mike Nghipunya, who represented Fishcor.

Allegedly on Louw's recommendation 25% of ASF's 60% shareholding was placed in a shelf company, Celex Investments Number One, which De Klerk controlled. Says De Klerk: "The creation of Celex Investments gave birth

to a second component of the corrupt scheme."

He later realized that the Celex shares were either owned, or at least controlled, by Shanghala, Hatuikulipi and Nghipunya, who then still held their official government positions. De Klerk states that in 2017 – without Louw's knowledge – Shanghala and Hatuikulipi started to pay huge sums of money meant for Celex Investments into his law firm's trust account. Among other things it allegedly went towards a money-laundering project that would benefit Swapo. He admits that it was possibly stolen money; media reports estimate that it was as much as 75 million Namibian dollars.

De Klerk says Louw was furious with Shanghala and Hatuikulipi when the

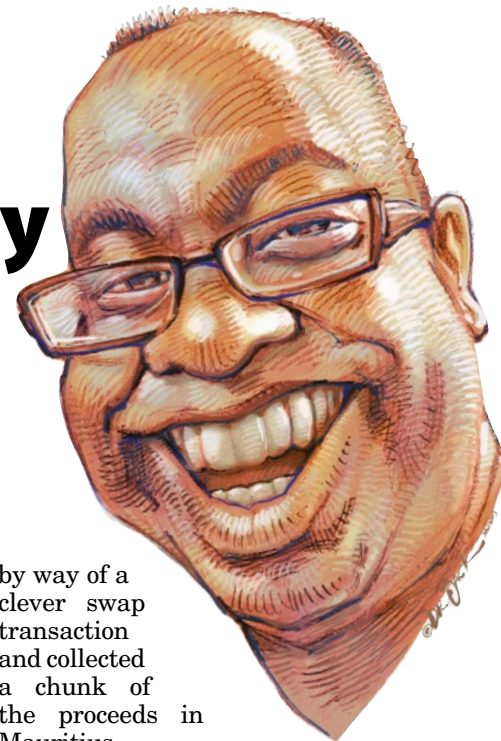
Fishrot investigation came to light and he ordered that a portion of the Celex shares be transferred to him, only to decide soon after that the shares must be transferred back again. He and Louw later consulted with a senior advocate at the Namibian Bar who "unequivocally confirmed" that their involvement with Seaflower was not a basis to tie the two of them to the bribery and corruption allegations leveled against Fishcor, and moreover that the quota agreement and the shareholders' subscription agreement were similarly unaffected.

"Obviously, neither I nor Louw explained the events detailed in this affidavit, which started with the meeting held in December 2016," De Klerk says in his witness statement. ■

You've met Brett Keble and Glenn Agliotti and Radovan Krejcir on these pages. Now meet ...

# Dr Mahendren Munsamy

## Jo'burg's latest celebrity crook



**M**ANY PEOPLE KNOW DR Mahendren Munsamy as a smart, even charming Wits-qualified medical doctor turned big-time oil trader and property mogul. His glamorous medical doctor wife, Prof. Leegale Adonis, once drove a R1.8-million Porsche Panamera, is National Manager Public Enterprises for Life Hospitals and a professor at Wits University – in the department of Public Health, no less.

The couple and their two smart children live in a R30-million-or-so high-walled mansion in Hyde Park, Johannesburg.

In short, they are by all appearances a picture of the success that can be achieved with ambition and dedication in sunny South Africa.

But pull back the curtain, and you get another picture entirely of how, too often, material success is achieved with bribery and corruption in sunny South Africa.

Ask the people at Sasol. Ask his erstwhile bankers FNB and any number of unhappy investors and they will tell you that Mahen Munsamy is a big-time, amazingly successful professional crook. And his wife, it emerges, has for years been a willing front, supporter and joint beneficiary of her husband's crooked schemes. (More about her fake R6m "research project" in the next *Noseweek*.)

To sum up in more technical terms, in a recently brought criminal case Munsamy is charged with bribery, fraud, theft, money laundering and racketeering, the latter charge certified by the National Director of Public Prosecutions, Adv Shamila Bathoi herself.

Long-time *Noseweek* readers have known enough to be cautious of Dr Munsamy since February 2017, when they read Mandy Wiener's excellent expose in *nose208* of how in 2011 he successfully defrauded FNB of over R300-million.

How? In a nutshell, by handsomely bribing the bank's Hyde Park branch manager Pragasen "Preggy" Reddy into producing



fraudulent bank guarantees for that amount – which Munsamy then used to persuade Sasol to supply a company

called Lavela, officially directed by his wife, Leegale Adonis, but secretly controlled by him, with diesel to that value on credit and for which he ultimately never paid a cent. Lavela went into liquidation and RMB's insurers ended up paying the bill.

Munsamy sold the diesel offshore

by way of a clever swap transaction and collected a chunk of the proceeds in Mauritius.

FNB found, as revealed in high court papers, that at least R120 million of the offshore proceeds was brought back to South Africa and used by entities controlled by Munsamy to purchase luxury properties in areas such as Sandhurst, Hyde Park and Morningside.

That's just one abbreviated half of the story. Go to *Noseweek's* website and read Mandy's story in *nose208*. Munsamy has successfully evaded prosecution for that lark for the past ten years.

There is now plenty of additional evidence to show that Munsamy has been doing a professional job of crookery on many fronts for these past ten years or more, although his victims have only recently finally managed to mobilise the police and prosecutors to take action. (But at least one victim appears to have lost patience: days before *Noseweek* went to press, Munsamy was admitted to Morningside clinic with a broken eye socket and several broken ribs after being severely beaten up at the entrance to his Hyde Park residence.)

Among the cases *Noseweek* has managed to track down: Westville Durban CAS no 218/11/2019 (Munsamy arrested for fraud on 14 October 2020, released on bail); Sandton case no.491/10/2019 still under investigation; Sandton case



**Mahendren Munsamy with his wife Prof. Leegale Adonis (left) and his PA Tanya Weiner/Klein**



825/5/2019 re R8m fraud, status unknown; Villeria, Pretoria case 242/2/2019 R1m fraud, status unknown.

In the past, prosecutors dealing with the FNB/Sasol matter have had Director of Public Prosecutions, Andrew Chauke disparagingly suggesting they are “doing FNB’s debt collection”. Bank manager Preggy Reddy was arrested in the August of 2011 but the charges were later provisionally withdrawn against him.

It took until the 22 July 2020 for him to be arrested again, along with Munsamy and the doctor’s beloved PA Tania Weiner/Klein. (True to form, when the Hawks went to arrest Munsamy he gave them a fake Lancet letter claiming he’d had a COVID test and was awaiting the result.)

So, right now Munsamy appears to have run out of friends in the police and prosecution services. In recent months he has been arrested on three warrants related to three different cases. *Noseweek* has been assured that more are in the pipeline. As a result he’s fast on the way to becoming Jo’burg’s latest celebrity crook.

To make the point: In one of the more recent cases before the courts he was arrested and is co-accused with the already infamous – and murderous – Radovan Krejcir in the Palm Ridge Commercial Crimes Court, case no 2014/6962. The complainant in that case is the Central Bank of Swaziland.

All the current cases are about to unfold in the courts and will undoubtedly provide material for many issues of *Noseweek* to come. There is, however, one early case where, on re-examination, his style of operating was already well demonstrated and well recorded. But, as a particularly clever crook, he managed to manipulate the police and prosecuting authorities in that R4.5-million fraud and bribery case to escape himself being charged or sentenced, and for a surrogate to take the rap and collect the criminal record.

We propose telling that story here to set the scene for what is to come in forthcoming issues.

Dr Mahendren Munsamy, ID No 6709045725085, then aged 43, was arrested at OR Tambo airport on 17 February 2011 as he was about to board a plane to Maputo in Mozambique. The significance of that will emerge later.

He appeared the next day in the Germiston magistrate’s court for



**Masked and cuffed: Dr Munsamy (above) being arrested at the Palm Ridge Commercial Crimes Court on 14 October 2020 on a warrant issued in Pinetown, KZN; and (left) with his wife, Prof . Leegale Adonis**

remand and for his bail application to be heard.

At that first court appearance the State Prosecutor told the court that Munsamy had been arrested for the full deck: corruption, fraud, theft, money laundering, and participation in organised crime.

**Munsamy appears to have run out of friends in law enforcement. He has recently been arrested on three warrants related to three different cases**

The court instructed the Senior State Prosecutor to obtain a directive from the Director of Public Prosecutions, and postponed Munsamy’s bail application till 21 February 2011 . He remained in custody at the Germiston SAPS cells.

At his next appearance he was released on the small sum of R100,000 bail, considering that the proceeds of his alleged crimes (and cost to SARS) had been well over R4-million. Curiously that modest bail figure was at the suggestion of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

And, in the formal charge sheet where Dr Munsamy was named as the only accused, the charges had dwindled to a string of contraventions of the Customs and Excise Act

According to the charge sheet, in the period 17 December 2009 till 18 February 2010, customs officials at the Lebombo border post were paid a bribe “facilitated” by the accused, of R5,000 for each of 52 road tankers they allowed to cross into South Africa from Mozambique as empty, whereas they were in fact full of diesel fuel on which fuel levies totaling R4,257,490 should have been paid to SARS.

The facts, as admitted by Munsamy at the time were that he was the controlling shareholder and sole director of Gas 2 Liquids (Pty) Ltd, a

company specialising in the importation and wholesaling of petroleum products. It was importing diesel from Mozambique at the time.

An employee, Elliot Mahlopa informed Munsamy that he had been approached by three customs officials employed at the Lebombo border post with a suggestion that they could arrange for the tanker trucks transporting the diesel to enter South Africa without payment of duties and taxes, in exchange for payment of R30,000 per truck. Munsamy was interested and a meeting was arranged in Sandton, where he met Xolani Mamkeli, Bushy Ntimane and one Tony, who repeated their offer. Munsamy was tempted, but (sharp crook that he is) was reluctant to involve Gas 2 Liquids (directly) in such an illegal scheme. The customs men then indicated their willingness to cut their bribe to R5,000 per tanker. Even more tempting.

To solve his boss's problem, employee Elliot Mahlopa then found George Mzondi who was the sole member of a close corporation, Euroblitz cc. Mzondi was willing to let Munsamy use his company as a front for the importation of the diesel into South Africa, to avoid Gas 2 Liquids's name featuring in the corrupt scheme.

It was then agreed that Euroblitz would purchase the diesel in Mozambique from Gas 2 Liquids and import it as planned. His employee Elliot Mahlopa would attend on Gas 2 Liquids behalf to the illegal payments to the three customs men, in return for which he and George Mzondi would also receive the amount of R5,000 each per truckload.

During the period 16 December 2009 and 18 February 2010 Gas 2 Liquids represented by Munsamy made the agreed payments to Elliot Mahlopa who, in turn, paid the customs men. Fifty-two trucks loaded with diesel were allowed entry into South Africa without the payment of duties to SARS.

Section 83 of Act 91 of 1964 stipulates that "any person who deals or assists in dealing with any goods contrary to the provisions of this Act ... shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding R20,000 or treble the value of the goods involved, whichever is the greater, or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years, or both, and the goods shall be subject to forfeiture".

Munsamy had been arrested and charged with 52 counts of contravening that section of the Act over a two-month period.



**Finally arrested and charged:  
Dr Mahendren Munsamy**

In terms of the same Act, bribing a customs official to assist in breaking the law is an additional offence which is similarly punishable with a R20,000 fine and/or imprisonment for up to five years. He actively facilitated the payment of bribes 52 times as well over the two-month period. Those charges, too, were added to the charge sheet.

On the court return day, he was released on payment of R100,000 bail, pending the trial date.

Then something really strange happened. His arrest warrant was cancelled – literally had lines drawn through it – and his name was removed from the charge sheet. The name of his company, Gas 2 Liquids (Pty) Ltd, was substituted as the sole accused without any explanation being recorded. (Normally he and the company should have been jointly charged.)

At the next court appearance he happily pleaded guilty on the accused company's behalf (companies can't go to jail and he would personally have no criminal record, although he had undoubtedly been guilty of serious criminal misconduct). He then entered into a plea and sentence agreement with the state (having authorised himself to act on the company's behalf).

In reaching the settlement he admitted that the company, duly repre-

sented by himself and Elliot Mahlopa (in another case spelled Mashapa) had facilitated the offering of rewards to officers in the service of SARS in exchange for the non-performance of their duties.

Aggravating circumstances, when it came to determining an appropriate sentence, were that the crimes were well planned and were committed over a two-month period by a group of persons and entities acting in the execution of a common criminal purpose.

In mitigation of sentence it was submitted that due to fluctuation in the oil price and the rand-dollar exchange rate, Gas 2 Liquids had suffered losses, putting the company under financial pressure.

In addition the company's representatives, Munsamy and Mahlopa were willing to testify against the SARS officials they had bribed to commit the offences.

On the 52 charges of illegally importing diesel without paying the required duty, all the charges were taken as one and the company was fined a total of R20,000.

The charges of bribing three customs officials 52 times were taken as one charge and Gas 2 Liquids was fined another R20,000.

Total fines: just R40,000. (Keep in mind that Munsamy had been happy to pay his two stooges a total of R520,000 just for fronting in handing over the bribes to the customs officials.)

Dr Munsamy had got off scot-free: no charges, no criminal record, although he had been the central player in the criminal scheme.

SARS ended up collecting the duties it had been entitled to – R4.254-million plus interest and a levy making a total just short of R5.5-million.

No problem to Dr Munsamy! By that time (January to May 2011) he had just made off into Mozambique with over R310-million of diesel from Sasol that FNB (or rather its insurers) ended up having to pay for because Sasol had supplied the fuel on the strength of four false bank guarantees issued by FNB's Hyde Park bank manager Preggy Reddy (who Munsamy had bribed). Remember?

As previously mentioned, only ten years after the event, have Munsamy and two of his collaborators in that scheme finally been arrested and charged.

Watch this space. – Martin Welz



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# A troll by any other name

UCT Prof Lesley Green continues her investigation of the Facebook trolls set up to defend the DA-led City of Cape Town's policies related to water supply and sewage disposal, and deflect criticism of its obvious mismanagement of those vital services

**A** DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE POSTS of “Willie Cuthgart” and “Mia Taylor”, two prominent “trolls” – avatars or fake identities – on Facebook could fill an entire issue of *Noseweek*. From the hundreds of posts, it is evident that the public is being trolled by an official, likely an elected one, who has detailed insider knowledge of the DA-controlled City of Cape Town's Water and Sanitation department's policies and budgets; devises strategies – even dishonest ones – to defend its failures and deflect criticism; who test-runs communication of policy shifts, and tries to shape opinion by engaging in a way tailored to a particular audience – known in marketing circles as “retail politics”.

This person is arrogant, elitist, and, in the manner of a classic troll, enjoys baiting people but whines when disciplined (“I provide useful information at times too ...”). Given the similarities in sentence structure and keyboard habits, the balance of probability is that the person or persons behind the Willie Cuthgart profile is the same as the person or persons who previously used the Mia Taylor profile to lie about the desalination plant at the Waterfront having been paid for by hotels (i.e. rather than telling the truth that Cape Town ratepayers were not going to benefit, since it would only produce sufficient water for tourists at the Waterfront), and then, when the plant failed, to label it “a necessary and worthwhile experiment” (see *nose249*).

In the last issue we described how City of Cape Town (CoCT) Water and Sanitation division (W&S) set up contracts, during the water crisis, with a range of political marketing compa-

nies who encouraged the use of social media avatars. This appears to have spiralled into wider usage by political figures who have actively sought to put out fake news to justify poor decisions (like the decision to put a desalinator near a sewer outfall); obfuscate their bad science (the City's seawater pollution figures were – possibly intentionally – wrong); damage the reputation of companies who call them out (see *nose236*), and try to sway opinions with emotive and misleading information.

Is there a smoking gun linking social media trolls to the Democratic Alliance (DA)? Maybe, but more about that anon.

Does a real Mia Taylor exist? Checkmate.com yielded a Mia Taylor living in San Diego who has six aliases and ten different addresses in different states of the USA, all using the same

profile portrait as that used in the publication *TravelPulse* with those Waterfront hotel and water desalination stories that first introduced her in a South African context.

Whether or not there is a real Mia Taylor in San Diego, there is without question a Mia Taylor identity available for product and policy endorsement with a core website loosely linked to multiple blonde middle-aged avatars.

One is MiaTaylor55, who is based in Australia and works on encouraging good financial habits. Her profile leads to [miataylor.com](http://miataylor.com), which is the same URL listed by Mia Taylor Bulletproof360 on LinkedIn, who works in Seattle and is a “Celebrity and Brand Social Media Marketing voice ... always ... gleaning actionable insights from analytics, evolving content for optimized performance within various audience segments, and building brand credibility and evangelism.”

On [blog.cheapism.com](http://blog.cheapism.com), her bio is much the same as the *TravelPulse* version, but links to a different website where the link for email goes to [MiaTaylorMail@yahoo.com](mailto:MiaTaylorMail@yahoo.com).

On Twitter, @MiaTaylor has a website, [miataylor.com](http://miataylor.com), which bills her, once again, as a celebrity social media brand manager and describes her work as “you have to spend a lot of time adapting your voice to fit the voice of the brand or the person that you're representing on social media.”

On Facebook, using the same photograph that was associated with her fake journalism about hotels supposedly funding Cape Town's Waterfront desalination plant, she goes under the name of MiaTaylorJournalist.

A google of the email address given

**This person is  
arrogant, elitist,  
and, in the manner  
of a classic troll,  
enjoys baiting people  
but whines when  
disciplined**



**Will the real Mia Taylor please stand up: the picture above is as likely as the one to the left to be an accurate representation of 'Mia Taylor'**

for Mia Taylor popped up a prize document. She is listed as a resource for the group whose online base is TransformMasterMind.com, which offers eye-popping advice on using client avatars (fake identities) to become “an Empire Creator”.

Clearly, the name “Mia Taylor” is available for hire to endorse products or opinions. However, Mia Taylor did not reply to our email requesting her assistance in our investigation.

Tom Brown, of the Paarl Water and Dams Report had, during the drought, published credible water information sourced from the City, including some images credited to “Mia Taylor”. *Noseweek* editor Martin Welz asked him who Mia Taylor was, and he said “everyone in the water sector” knew she was a fake and believed she was linked to CoCT’s Water and Sanitation department (W&S).

At a meeting with CoCT Water and Sanitation heads and local independent water researchers in early February, water researchers were asked not to engage CoCT via the media. But CoCT W&S, I responded, uses fake social media trolls! Executive Director Webster asked for a copy of

the last *Noseweek* article which he had not seen, and committed immediately to a forensic investigation. Mayoral Committee member for W&S Xanthea Limberg, however, said not a word. Perhaps she had an empty chair at the virtual meeting. Perhaps as the political leader of Water and Sanitation in Cape Town silence was the better option.

A week after the meeting, an official who requested anonymity confirmed that a forensic investigation within the City was under way.

**H**aving shown that Mia Taylor is an avatar available for marketing opinions, let’s turn our attention to the other suspicious character that took up on Facebook where she left off: a troll that assumed the name “Willie Cuthgart”.

Willie claims to be a UCT graduate. Needless to say, UCT’s registrar says no Cuthgart has ever been a UCT graduate. He does not work for the UN in London; and is not from “Capetown, California”. The number of photographs and day-to-day observations in Cape Town, give the lie to the claim that s/he lives and works in London.

Nonetheless, Willie is waiting for CoCT to sue the writer and publisher of the previous article, and dismisses the writer of these articles as a “very disgruntled academic” who is “aggrieved at being ignored (by CoCT)”. (As it happens the writer has regular valuable correspondence with the CoCT Water and Sanitation department.) The failed desalination plants that cost ratepayers about a billion rand, and CoCT’s persistence in charging extremely high water tariffs, despite plenty of rain and overflowing dams have left a lot of people very, very disgruntled.

What evidence is there that Willie is communicating inside information from CoCT to the public? A summary:

**Desalination:** When it was announced in June 2020 that the Strandfontein Desalination plant was to be decommissioned before the end of its contract, Willie told Facebookers that “It was always a temporary / emergency plant”. Asked if the Monwabisi desalination plant was still functioning, Willie offered information unavailable to the public: “around 10 MLD [mega-litres per day] has been coming from at



least one of the 2 plants every weekday for the last few months”.

Asked why the site was chosen, Willie replied, “The locations were chosen to supply the Cape Flats townships, while everyone else queued for water....”. The statement seems designed to distract by sowing contention.

Perhaps stung by the revelations in the last *Noseweek* about Mia Taylor’s lies, Willie now claims “Waterfront plant was initially to be a private one for their private consumption alone.” That was also a lie: CoCT records show that the contract was signed by CoCT in December 2017.

Asked “Does that mean CoCT didn’t pay for the infrastructure?” Willie responded vaguely “They may have paid for the “shed”... but not the desalination equipment.”

Told that CoCT had wasted taxpayer money, Willie replied “CoCT did no such thing...this tender company had no prior experience in desalinating sea water! It came to an end because they could not desalinate as their filter kept getting blocked! Company failed to undertake due diligence.” (But in a post in November 2020, Willie had defended the decision to allocate the contract to that company, QFS: “No other company was prepared to risk using “harbour” water,” he said then.)

Willie notes “CoCT now knows to forge ahead instead with GW (ground water).” Wonderful. A billion rand was wasted to learn a lesson that independent researchers, and the World Bank’s desalination advisor, had offered in advance, for free.

**Water tariffs:** Towards the end of 2020, Willie embarked on a bizarre messaging campaign: Capetonians should stop saving water. “CoCT have time and again stated that W&S needs a set revenue....thus if tariffs decrease then consumption needs to increase. CoCT would rather have the safety of having consumption start to rise FIRST” and elsewhere, “XL [Mayco member for Water and Sanitation, Xanthea Limberg] made it abundantly clear what is required in her media release late last week.... **START USING MORE MUNICIPAL POTABLE WATER!**”

Willie asked the rhetorical question “Why don’t CoCT drop water tariffs as daily water usage climbs now that it is mid-summer?” – and answered: “Current daily average is nearly 800MLD. CoCT’s 2020/21 tariffs

have been calculated on the basis of 650MLD usage. However, the current usage is simply the summer usage peak, and not the average usage for the budget year to date (July to June) which is still below 700MLD. ... Water tariffs are never going to reduce.”

Questioned by Rob Sigrist as to why the free 6,000l/month had been reduced to 1,000l, Willie responded, “Who paid for your free water...previously? Other high users...they have GW & rain tanks now.” Again, the strategy: use insider information and sow contention.

**Hangberg Evictions:** Given the loss of jobs, and family pressures associated with extended lockdown during Covid-19, many Capetonians have had no option but to set up shacks, and as a result, Cape Town’s informal settlements increased, as did the City’s violent evictions that have been condemned by the Human Rights Commission, the Courts, and Parliament. In Hangberg in the Hout Bay area in 2020, in winter, in the middle of the Covid pandemic, the City chose to proceed with evictions. Willie’s inflammatory comment: “Hout Bay is no longer quite as desirable for those that actually pay for their houses!!!”

“Why are CoCT’s actions in this matter [*considered*] indefensible?... they are removing illegally built structures... the locations, current weather conditions and/or it being winter currently and which granny or child (being disabled to assist in the sympathy vote) is to be belatedly housed is **IRRELEVANT!**”

He (or perhaps she) signed off with “It is going to be raining heavily from Thursday again ... good ... and it will be cold too ...”.

**A**s we move into Municipal elections between August and November this year, is it acceptable for what in all probability are publicly-funded officials to make misleading, divisive and emotive statements under a fake profile that shields them from accountability? Is it ok for ratepayer money to be spent on companies that market contentiousness or emotion-based “behaviour change” techniques that change democratic outcomes? Is it ok for political parties to hire companies that work along the lines of Cambridge Analytica?

Now see the editorial on page 6. Then, dear reader, you be the judge. – **Lesley Green**

**STOP PRESS**

## SA cashes in on Yemen civil war

Worst humanitarian crisis in the world today

**A** NEW OPEN SECRETS REPORT, *Profiting from Misery: South Africa’s Complicity in War Crimes in Yemen*, reveals the South African arms companies that have cashed in on the sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), two central parties to the Yemeni conflict.

This in-depth investigative report shows that since the war in Yemen broke out, several South African arms companies, like part state owned enterprise Rheinmetall Denel Munition (RDM) and Hensoldt, joined many global arms companies in profiting from the devastation of war and the resulting misery of Yemenis. (16 million people in Yemen now do not have access to enough food or water.)

Both RDM and Hensoldt are majority owned by companies in Germany where there is a ban on weapons sales to Saudi Arabia. Yet, their South African subsidiaries continue to export, providing a neat conduit for German weapons to continue to fuel the war in Yemen – R8-billion-worth since 2014.

Yemen is the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. The National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC) is South Africa’s regulator of the weapons trade. It is legally required to prevent the export of weapons that will contribute to human rights violations or worsen conflicts. The investigation shows that it has failed to do so for many years.

The investigation shows that Saudi and UAE have become the most important clients of SA arms industries, since civil war broke out in Yemen. UN reports indicate that the conduct of these states may amount to war crimes. – [www.opensecrets.org.za](http://www.opensecrets.org.za)



The church auditorium at Kwasizabantu

## Kwasizabantu and News24

Did News24 editor-in-chief Adriaan Basson go on a mission of his own?

**N**ews24's seven-month investigation into the Kwasizabantu Mission, where a thousand rural people live and work, and many more thousands regularly attend religious services, produced a string of shocking allegations by a few disgruntled former members who accused the mission's leaders of money laundering and operating a religious cult.

For additional impact, six women described incidents of physical and sexual abuse that they had allegedly suffered at the mission's headquarters near Kranskop in rural KwaZulu-Natal at one time or another in the past 30 years.

The allegations were repeatedly published online and in a dramatised documentary video, *Exodus*, which was released in September last year.

News24 editor-in-chief, Adriaan Basson, went as far as asking his

readers to boycott the mission's popular and hugely profitable bottled water, aQuelle, in order to "stop supporting a cult". Several big retail groups responded by immediately removing aQuelle from their shelves and cancelling their orders for tonnes of the mission's fresh produce.

Which prompted us to ask these questions: what were the possible motives of the media group's sources? How much of News24 report and dramatised video was based on psychologically driven fantasy, hearsay or accounts of poorly remembered incidents that took place decades ago? Was the evidence sufficient to justify putting the economic survival of a thousand rural families at risk – quite apart from passing judgement on and then damning the religious beliefs of many more thousands of people?

Kwasizabantu (KSB) says its good name has been destroyed by

"unfounded allegations", which News24 and various other news platforms published over several months. It claims to have lost hundreds of millions of Rands in income and says the reputational damage to the aQuelle bottled water brand and the mission's companies Ekhamanzi Springs (Pty) Ltd and Emseni Farming (Pty) Ltd, has had a devastating financial impact on the mission's community projects and endangered the livelihoods of thousands of people.

Production lines at the mission's various factories were severely affected, which in turn resulted in reduced working hours and loss of income for the companies' more than a thousand rural employees who depend on the work to support their extended families.

To tell its story, News24 highlighted the alleged experiences of people who hadn't a good word to say about the



mission. Some used pseudonyms or remained anonymous and in the *Exodus* video the faces of a number of complainants were blurred.

“Very little information was supplied about the backgrounds of these so-called whistleblowers or why they had joined the mission in the first place. Did News24 investigate that as well?” asks KSB spokesperson, Dirk Combrink. “No, they just seized upon these sensational claims and vindictive testimonies which had one goal in common, namely to destroy the mission. None of these allegations would ever survive serious cross examination in a court of law.”

Yves Vanderhaegen, editor of *The Witness*, the KZN daily newspaper closest to the scene of the action cautions *Noseweek* to keep in mind that: “Many of those that have found refuge at the mission have reached the end of the road: they have run out of options.”

Challenged by Combrink’s question and Vanderhaegen’s observation, *Noseweek* decided to dig into a few of the most disturbing allegations that News24 had tabled against the mission and to cross check the evidence they relied upon.

Were the dramatic revelations made in front of the News24 cameras just possibly attention-seeking distortions of the truth or even outright lies, as the mission suggests? Are the whistleblowers in fact pawns in a hostile bid for control of a mega-rich enterprise? Or is this a bitter family feud between members of the extended Stegen clan who were the founding members of Mission Kwasizabantu more than fifty years ago? What might the reasons be for people who have been part and parcel of Kwasizabantu for decades to now suddenly drive a mudslinging campaign against the mission?

### THE VERY BEGINNING

The Kwasizabantu unhappiness started months before News24 became involved, when two theologians, Peet Botha and Koos Greeff, made their doubts publicly known about the gospel preached at Kwasizabantu and how the mission was running its finances. Both men are former missionaries who lived and worked at Kwasizabantu for many years but are

no longer connected to its operations.

Peet Botha has a doctorate in New Testament Ethics and Hermeneutics from North West University in Potchefstroom. He and his wife left Kwasizabantu in 2019 after spending more than 20-years at the mission where Botha had served as a co-worker, minister and lecturer. His embittered opinion about the mission has been spread in no uncertain terms on his blog, *The Missionary*. One of his allegations against KSB is that it has no pension fund and medical aid for its employees and that the missionaries – such as himself – are not compensated for years of work spreading the word of God.

The second aggrieved theologian, Koos Greeff joined Kwasizabantu 40 years ago and played a pivotal role in its operations. He and his family left in 1994 and currently live in Klaver in the Western Cape where Greeff is a part time pastor of the Reformed Church.

He is the son-in-law of Friedel Stegen, an older brother of Kwasizabantu’s main founder-leader, Erlo Stegen. Friedel, along with his son Arno, his brother Erlo, Lydia Dube and Eunice Ngcamu served until recently as trustees of Mission Kwasizabantu, a public benefit organisation (PBO) that oversees all the outreach work and commercial busi-



**Andra & Peet Botha**

ness of the mission. The trustees are the leaders of the mission and Lydia Dube is one of two people left who were there from the time the mission was founded in 1966. She is closely allied to 85-year old leader, Erlo Stegen.

Friedel and his son Arno Stegen also held directorships at Emseni Farming and Ekhamanzi Springs, the companies that produce fresh produce and aQuelle-bottled water, but both men recently resigned from all their positions at Kwasizabantu and left the mission.

Documents in *Noseweek*’s possession show that Friedel had become



**Rev Koos Greeff: Sorry, sorry, I forgot**



**Private Investigator Mike Bolhuis**

increasingly worried about the finances of the companies and, shortly after his 92nd birthday in June 2019, gave special power of attorney to his theologian son-in-law, Greeff. This allowed Greeff to act as trustee and director, and to endeavour to find the answers to the questions that were nagging his father-in-law.

One of the first things Greeff did was to obtain the company's financial records from its previous auditors. Thirteen days later he announced that he had proof that R136 million had been stolen from the mission over a four-year period starting in 2015, and that KSB trustees Lydia Dube and Eunice Ngcamu were well aware of the theft and had manipulated the ageing founder Erlo Stegen into co-signing false resolutions consenting to the alleged theft.

He went on to describe Dube and Ngcamu, as "corrupted leaders" who were linked to and involved with "witch doctors, drug dealers and hired assassins".

Greeff told *Noseweek* that he had obtained financial support to hire Private Investigator Mike Bolhuis's Specialised Security Services (SSS) to conduct a private investigation into the lost millions.

"It cost a lot of money to get Mike Bolhuis's team to help us and within weeks we were able to release a report saying this is what we found."

Bolhuis posted the findings on social media claiming his team had identified another suspect known as Moses Ndlela, but whose real name is apparently Canaan Ndlovu. The mission's leaders, so Bolhuis declared, had arranged for the missing millions to be delivered to this new suspect, Ndlovu in tranches of cash, which were dropped off at isolated places under cover of darkness.

Bolhuis also stated specifically that Ndlovu had "cooperated" with the investigation, to the extent that he "revealed that he operated under the direct instruction of Lydia Dube". Bolhuis promised his more than 12,000 Facebook-followers that the completed investigation would be presented at "police ministerial level" for a task team to deal exclusively with the case in conjunction with the Bolhuis squad and predicted "arrests should follow shortly thereafter".

This Facebook post was picked up by the mainstream media and republished widely – but more than a year later no arrests had been made. Instead, both trustees Lydia Dube and Eunice Ngcamu have laid charges of crimen injuria (criminal defamation) against Greeff and Botha for accusing them of being involved with witch doctors, drug dealers and hired assassins.

When *Noseweek* asked Bolhuis in December last year for the final report of his findings he referred us to his investigator, Vaughan Schwartz, who, he said, worked on the case. Contradicting Bolhuis's 2019 Facebook post that the suspect Ndlovu had "cooperated" with the investigation, Schwartz now told *Noseweek* that Ndlovu was in fact "not talking yet" and that he (Schwartz) had been unable to gain entry into the place where Ndlovu lived because the security guard would never allow him in without a warrant.

Both the disaffected theologians, Botha and Greeff had claimed in separate on-the-record interviews with *Noseweek* that the Bolhuis team did interview Ndlovu.

Greeff went as far as asserting that Ndlovu had "declared under oath" to the Bolhuis team that his instructions had come from mission trustee Lydia Dube. Greeff also claimed that the Bolhuis team has an audio recording where Ndlovu states that he was allowed to keep 10% of the allegedly misappropriated R136 million, and the remainder went to Lydia Dube.

But, when told that investigator Schwartz had told *Noseweek* that he had never been able to interview Ndlovu, Greeff was profuse in his apologies.

"No, no sorry," he said "someone said it, I cannot remember now. Sorry, sorry!"

Schwartz later confirmed that he had no recording of a discussion with Ndlovu and had not personally confronted him. He said nobody from Mike Bolhuis's company had interviewed Ndlovu and that they were "leaving that for the Hawks".

Regardless of this admission and the pending criminal defamation cases initiated by mission trustees Dube and Ngcamu against Greeff and Botha, Schwartz was still adamant that Dube had been directly involved in the deal. "She controlled Ndlovu, where and how he collected the money. She was pulling the strings," he assured *Noseweek*.

KSB spokesperson, Dirk Combrink's response: "This is a clear example of how Greeff and the Bolhuis team concocted a story to suit their version and, even today, they still do not distinguish between what's fake and what's fact."



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“The media just repeated these so-called findings of Bolhuis and Schwartz without conducting their own research and the unsubstantiated Bolhuis version has just snowballed, even on European news.”

### FOLLOW THE MONEY

According to Schwartz, Dube and Ngcamu had taken the mission’s money and transferred it to the bank account of a supermarket that is connected to the mission.

They then collected that same amount in cash from the store and handed it over to Ndlovu who apparently went from being a person without a cent to his name to someone with an estate worth around R15 million, businesses in the townships and a house valued at R4.5 million in an up-market estate.

“They were clearly converting traceable money to untraceable money. We call it money laundering,” said Schwartz. “They were just paying out money left right and centre and [while this] might not be the proceeds of crime but [it is] either tax evasion or theft.”

KSB spokesperson Combrink denied the money was the proceeds

of crime or that the leaders were laundering money. He said it was a loan and that the cash was collected from the mission’s own businesses and handed over to the man they knew as Moses Ndlela.

“The mission assisted Ndlela (who had lived on the mission with his family for some time) after he approached the mission and indicated – like so many sinners who come to the mission – that he wanted to correct the wrongs he had done in his past, which included paying restitution where possible to people he had hurt. This allegedly involved terrible crimes like political murders,” he told *Noseweek*.

To expose his crimes and recover the evidence, Ndlela/Ndlovu allegedly told the KSB leaders he needed to involve specialised people to assist him. He also told them that his life was in danger as a result of him exposing his crimes and as such he continually needed financial assistance for security arrangements.

“The mission may have been conned by this man, but he gave us good reasons why he needed the money in cash. And after all, the mission’s money is used for the benefit and upliftment of society,” Combrink said.



**Friedel Stegen: left worried about the finances**

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**KSB spokesman Dirk Combrink**

Kwasizabantu has since laid a charge of fraud against Ndlela/Ndlovu with the Hawks.

The obvious question is what has happened to the 90% of the money that Ndlovu, according to Bolhuis allegedly paid to Lydia Dube? Neither Bolhuis, Schwartz, Botha nor Greeff are able to answer that question because according to their own investigations they could find no evidence that, mission leader Dube had come into money.

Declared Schwartz: “We checked all the obvious places; everything is fine, and her lifestyle is very mundane. We actually did a lifestyle audit and there is nothing untoward, her lifestyle is very humble, there is absolutely no evidence of money going that way.”

Even though the investigation found no trace of the money, Dube’s accusers are not willing to give up on what the alleged crook, Ndlovu, may or may not have told someone about her involvement in the missing millions. Bolhuis’s investigator Schwartz clings to the Boys’ Own fantasy that the cash was “stashed away in a place that’s almost like a treasure on an island or put into offshore investments or something to that effect”.

## **TURN TO THE MEDIA**

Not getting the results Greeff had hoped for from the Bolhuis team and the many other institutions like SARS, the Human Rights Commission, the Hawks and the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) where he submitted his complaints, it was time to turn to the media. Greeff admitted to *Noseweek* that he had contacted

News24 editor-in-chief, Adriaan Basson and made an effort to find disgruntled former members of the mission who would tell Basson’s team of their bad experiences at the mission, some dating back 25 years or more.

Soon after, a completely different storyline emerged suggesting that Kwasizabantu was a cult that involved sexual and physical abuse.

“This was even though hundreds, if not thousands, of former and current members of Kwasizabantu were willing to share their positive experience at the mission with the media group,” says Combrink. “But their stories were completely ignored.”

He referred *Noseweek* to the mission’s website where there are many testimonies from people who have lived and worked on the mission, were educated at the mission’s school, attended the restoration centre and turned their lives around after years of drugs, alcohol dependency, gangsterism and crime.

## **REPORTS OF RAPE**

The media started reporting about alleged atrocities at KSB with an article in *Rapport* on 29 December 2019 under the headline “Isolated, raped – then she had to pray”. The victim was a 29-year old former volunteer at Kwasizabantu who was not identified by name in the story. She claimed she was accused of being a Satanist and locked up in a room at the KSB-hospital where a man – a teacher and senior member of the mission – “raped her to release her from her sins”. Afterwards he was said to have read to her from the bible.

Four months after *Rapport* published the story, Cecile Schneider, the alleged rape victim’s former mentor at Kwasizabantu, received a WhatsApp message from her in which she apologised for what she had told the newspaper, claiming she had “listened to people who wanted to take the mission down”. In two further emails she referred to the people who had left Kwasizabantu who told her the mission’s co-workers would kill her, “...and that to help other people I must tell everyone I was raped and when I did they took that statement and gave it to the newspaper.” She went on to explain that she actually

had a dream that she was raped and that Peet Botha’s wife, Andra, had convinced her that it really happened and wasn’t a dream.

“They talked to me until I gave in and went to the police. I know now I listened to the devil and I am sorry. Please forgive me. I was told if I ever told the truth I will be killed.”

Despite this apology and admitting that she had lied to both the police and *Rapport*, this same woman later appeared in News24’s *Exodus* documentary about the alleged horrors that were happening at Kwasizabantu. With her face blurred and using the pseudonym “Amanda” she repeated parts of the same story that had been widely published in *Rapport* and on other media platforms.

*Noseweek* has tracked “Amanda” down in Pretoria shortly after she was recently released from the Weskoppies psychiatric hospital where she had undergone treatment. While she confirmed that Koos Greeff had given her affidavit to *Rapport* she denied having written the two emails that were sent to her former mentor. She claimed her email address was different to the one from where the emails were sent. *Noseweek* found that the very same email address was used to create a profile for “Amanda” in her real name on the LinkedIn website. It has her picture and the information about her hometown and school is identical to her Facebook profile, which she herself has created. Under skills she mentioned “I love being a missionary”. However, “Amanda” claimed to have no knowledge of the LinkedIn profile or even the LinkedIn website.

*Noseweek* also established that “Amanda” has in fact a history of claims about being raped. Under her real name she has opened four different rape cases with the police since 2016: in Bronkhorstspuit, Pietermaritzburg, Jeffreys Bay and Pretoria. The four cases are not related; they reportedly happened at different places across the country and four different men were named as suspects. The Pretoria case was opened as recently as June 2020, shortly before News24’s *Exodus* documentary was screened.

When confronted with these anomalies, “Amanda” could not provide straight answers but admitted that



she had indeed opened four rape cases since 2016. She claimed that she had told News 24's senior journalist, Tammy Petersen, about the other rape cases she had opened, but the information was omitted because the story "was about Kwasizabantu".

Petersen, the lead writer of the *Exodus* documentary, was not prepared to discuss why this information was omitted from the documentary and if she knew about the emails and "Amanda's" other reported rape cases when she produced the programme. Referring to the rape allegations in the documentary Petersen said: "These allegations were of a serious nature and we took various steps to verify their authenticity before publication, including insisting on sworn affidavits about sexual abuse before publication."

Peet Botha, who knows "Amanda" very well, told *Noseweek* that he and his wife only recently learned about the emails from an independent panel that was set up by Kwasizabantu to investigate the allegations against them. He admitted to knowing about her other rape cases but said he has doubts about her credibility and cautioned *Noseweek* that she was "a broken person with many issues, who tends to manipulate people". It is not clear if he had offered the same advice to News24.

*Noseweek* is in possession of a typed document that purports to be an affidavit made by "Amanda", under her real name. She describes a horrific rape, which she says happened to her while she was hospitalised at the mission. While the "affidavit" is typed on a police letterhead and signed by her, the name of the person who took down the statement is not given and a commissioner of oaths did not verify the document.

It is most probably this document that Koos Greeff peddled to *Rapport* and News24 while, by his own admission, he has never met "Amanda" in person and only spoke to her on the phone once or twice. He told *Noseweek*: "I only reacted on the grounds of the information I receive from my sources."

*Noseweek* also investigated two other allegations of rape that were highlighted by News24. One of them is the case of Greeff's own daughter who has since made her true identity

known on Twitter. Now in her thirties, and a medical doctor in the Western Cape, she used the name "Nelda" in the documentary where she told of her rape at the mission when she was 5-years old.

"Nelda" said a man "known to prey on little girls" had sodomized her at the KSB main campus some 30-years ago. He had offered her a red cool drink and asked if she wanted to go for a walk with him.

"What I remember clearly is that he stuck his tongue in my ear and pressed my face flat into the ground, into the grass. I thought I was dying. The rest I can't give details about. What I remember is that after that, my panty was soiled," she said to News24.

This happened in the late 1980s and "Nelda" said she built up the courage only twenty years later to report the crime that was committed against her, which means she was around 25-years old at the time. Where she had reported it is not clear from her video-interview but she also mentioned that she had told her parents when, at the age of 16, she "was finally able to put into words what exactly had happened to her".

By then the Greeff family had broken ties with the mission but, she told News24, her father nevertheless reported it to the mission leadership and they called her attacker in. Nelda said as far as she knew there were no repercussions for the perpetrator who apparently admitted what he did to her and could not believe that she still remembered the incident.

In the News24 interview "Nelda" also remembered that before her rape

at the age of five she was "thinking badly of children who this had happened to". She could not recall a specific incident where she was told they were immoral. "But I know I was given the impression that they were slutty and had relationships," she said.

In the *Exodus* documentary "Nelda's" father, Koos Greeff, said he "knew of a large number" of women who were raped at Kwasizabantu, "stretching from the 80s till last year". He claimed these women had gone to him for counselling. "If I know of so many, how many are there really? What is the real number? I've got no idea," he is recorded telling News24.

But when *Noseweek* asked him if he had known about any rapes before he learned about "Amanda's" case in 2019 he answered as follows:

"No, no, I did not know about rapes, 'Amanda' was the first one I know of."

When reminded that one of the victims was in fact his own daughter he replied: "Yes, yes, sorry, I have forgotten of that. Yes, she was sodomised, yes, yes. Sorry, yes, I knew about it, sorry, I knew, yes."

When asked how long after the incident took place he had heard about it, Greeff gave *Noseweek* a detailed but radically different version to the one offered by his daughter: the rape, he said, only became known when his daughter suffered from severe depression after the birth of her first child in 2012 and she started to remember while under deep hypnosis as part of psychological treatment.

They did inform Kwasizabantu in 2012 but by then the alleged perpetrator had died. Greeff told *Noseweek* he had spoken to two specific people at the mission; one being his father-in-law, Friedel Stegen who was still a trustee at the time. He said he did not tell Kwasizabantu's leader, Erlo Stegen.

"Nelda" told News24 that she wanted to lay a formal charge but the police said the rape had happened too long ago. [*The alleged perpetrator might just also already have died, if her father is to be believed.* – Ed.]

The third alleged rape highlighted by News24 was the claim of a relative of the Stegen family, Chantal Engelbrecht, whose identity was revealed in the articles and the documentary. In the documentary video



Lydia Dube, founder-trustee

Engelbrecht's husband, David, spoke on her behalf. Both of them made affidavits and Chantal laid a charge of rape with the police 35 years after the alleged crime. According to News24 journalist Tammy Petersen, this was one of the requirements to appear in the News24 documentary.

Now around fifty years old, Chantal stated in her affidavit that she had not yet turned 16 when a distant relative raped her in a sugar-cane field not on the mission, but on her grandfather's farm some 70km from Kwasizabantu. She claimed to have reported the rape to her uncle, mission founder Erlo Stegen, shortly after it happened and, according to her affidavit, he called her names and told her not to tell her parents.

In her testimony before the independent panel that investigated the claims against the mission, Chantal said she allowed her alleged rapist to have sex with her on a number of occasions thereafter, but could not recall whether it continued over years or just months.

Omitted from her story as recounted by News24 is the fact that both Chantal and her alleged rapist lived outside of the mission and the farm where the rape allegedly happened is not part of Kwasizabantu.

Her alleged rapist subsequently appeared before the independent investigating panel and told them that he and Chantal were in a relationship from 1983 to 1986. It started when she was 13 and he was 20 but only became intimate in 1986. Contrary to Chantal's evidence he said he reported it to Erlo Stegen,

who called them both in but denied that the sex continued afterwards.

In their report the independent panel noted that the alleged rapist tried to present himself as having been the passive party in the relationship and that Chantal was the one who was actively pursuing him. "We found it unlikely that this was the case," they said.

**"Nelda" told News 24 that she wanted to lay a formal charge but the police said the rape had happened too long ago.**

They also stated their difficulties with Chantal's version of events and the contradictions between the story she had told them, her story to News24 and her affidavit.

"It is clear that Chantal and David also answered the clarion call from Mr. Greeff for anyone to come forward to the media with allegations about

the mission. We find it reprehensible that such a serious matter should be used in a ping-pong squabble about the Mission's finances. To use the alleged victims' experiences in this manner only tends to re-victimise them. It does not get them the help and the justice they need and deserve."

- The independent panel consisted of Adv. Kumbu Shazi, of the Durban Bar and Mr. Peter Le Mottée a Johannesburg attorney. Mr Le Mottée was member of the Methodist Church arbitration panel from 2003 to 2011 and is currently chairperson for the Scripture Union Regional Executive. Hearings were held in various places outside the mission. In their report released in November last year, the Panel found the mission is not a cult, but congregants follow the church leaders with blind faith. It also found no credible evidence of money laundering or of physical and sexual abuse.

- Another investigation by the Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights Commission has not yet been completed.

- Hawks spokesperson, Col Katlego Mogale said the police unit's Kwasizabantu investigation is continuing.

- *Noseweek's* investigation, too, is continuing. The evidence of the remaining three women who appeared in the broadcast video will be further investigated. And a lot more still needs to be explained about what became of the missing millions – possibly involving some important players that have not yet been mentioned. – **Susan Puren** ■

## Kwasizabantu in a nutshell

- Founded in 1966 by Erlo Stegen in an abandoned cowshed where he preached to worshippers.

- The first building and farming projects were started to accommodate and feed worshippers that arrived at Stegen's services.

- Numerous projects have since been implemented to provide the financial means to sustain the mission's many outreach programs and feed around 1300 people per day.

- The projects include vegetable farming, honey, a dairy, butchery, bakery and a pasta factory.

- Thousands of households benefit from these projects and several communities are provided with employment, training, skills development, seeds and water.

- The mission's Domino Servite School, established in 1986, caters free of charge for children of all races from grade RRR to grade 12. Umalusi accredited the school in 2013.

- The aQuelle water bottling plant was built after a natural water source was discovered on the farm in 1997. The plant covers 18,000m<sup>2</sup> and a new state of the art plant is currently

under construction.

- Volunteers from across the world built the ten thousand-seat auditorium in one year after the previous one was destroyed by fire in 2008.

- Thousands have received treatment for alcohol and drug addictions at no charge at the mission's CYPASA restoration centre over the last 10 years.

- Youth conferences are held twice a year and attended by thousands of young people who are accommodated at no charge for the duration of the conferences. ■



# Life savings lost to crypto fraud?

Said to have been executed by a KZN fraudster on the laptop of an unwitting West Coast estate agent

**I**N JUNE 2015 SPORT CO-ORDINATOR Petrofski Williams and his wife Denelle decided to invest their life savings in purchasing a house in Langebaan Country Estate that had been introduced to them by the local Seeff estate agent, Marelize Huysamen.

They planned to rent the house out for the first few years, using the income to pay for their daughter's university fees, and thereafter to retire there.

They were required to pay the R900,000 deposit into the trust account of the transferring attorneys, Smith Tabatha Buchanan Boyes (STBB) when it was ready for transfer.

Their story, as related in court papers:

At midday on 8 July they received an email from the attorneys advising them to pay this amount by EFT into the firm's trust account held at Absa. The account number was provided. 28 minutes later they received another email, this one from the estate agent, Marelize Huysamen, saying that the account number provided by STBB "had been audited" and that they should rather pay the deposit into a Nedbank account, with another account number. Confused, they telephoned Marelize to question the change and she confirmed that they should deposit the money in the Nedbank account stipulated in her email.

Which they then did, shortly after 4pm that afternoon and forwarded proof of payment to Marelize minutes later. She acknowledged receipt and said she had forwarded it to STBB, the transfer attorneys.

At 11am next morning STBB emailed both the purchasers and Marelize informing them that the account into which the deposit had been paid did not belong to STBB.

Greatly concerned about what might have happened to their entire life savings, they rushed to telephone Marelize to confirm that the Nedbank account was the one she had specified. She replied immediately: "You paid into the correct trust account which they sent to me."

But next day she sent an email to Mr and Mrs Williams and to STBB attorneys, alerting them to fraud and the possibility that her laptop had been hacked. It soon emerged that the Nedbank account was held in KZN and that the funds had been misappropriated, whereabouts currently unknown.



Mr and Mrs Williams have issued summons against the relevant Seeff franchise holder, who trades as Seeff Boland Winelands, and its agent Marelize Huysamen for payment of R900,000 plus interest and legal costs.

In summary they argue that Marelize was negligent when she confirmed the Nedbank account number after they queried it, and was slow in alerting them to fraud, giving the fraudster time to clear the bank account. They

further argue that they suffered the loss because of her failure to adopt or implement information technology infrastructure or have sufficient security in place to prevent hacking and protect clients.

In the plea filed by the defendants, they deny that Marelize sent the email advising of a change in the bank account into which the R900,000 was to be deposited. In addition, while they admit that the Williamses telephoned Marelize, they deny that she confirmed the Nedbank account details.

And, while they confirm that the relevant email was sent from her email address, they deny that she was its author, or that she sent it.

They allege that it was authored and sent by an unknown third party who unlawfully gained access to her email account without her knowledge or permission.

Seeff Boland Winelands in addition claim that Marelize was not an employee but an independent contractor, so they cannot be held vicariously liable for her allegedly negligent actions.

The case is set down for trial in the Western Cape high court in May.

Criminal charges were laid with the police under case number 601/07/2015. The investigating officer is a Captain Marx. The criminal case has been assigned for prosecution to Adv Billy Downer SC under DPP ref 9/2/12-528/15 ... but we guess Adv Downer has had a few rather more pressing cases to attend to of late.

● Nedbank refused to disclose the identity of their account holder who unlawfully managed to pocket the R900,000. Why not, we wonder.

For unexplained reasons, the parties assumed crypto-fraud, rather than what appears more likely to have been an "insider-assisted job". What do readers think? ■

# Should you take Ivermectin for Covid? Probably, but maybe not

Israeli mini-trial and analysis of available evidence finds  
Ivermectin appears to work, but...

**W**HEN A STUDY IS DONE ON 90 people, that's a phase-one trial. You need a few thousand people to see the effects of the drug. Even in Israel, Ivermectin isn't part of the arsenal of medication and isn't being used to treat COVID-19."

That said, GP Dr Paul Freinkel goes on to argue that there's little downside to using the drug, and probable benefit. "If it doesn't work, we've lost little other than hope," he says. "If it does, we've saved a life and, in some cases, a lifetime of disability."

Freinkel recognises that the data generated so far by smaller trials is incomplete but maintains that very few trials show that Ivermectin doesn't work, and they are generally underdosed. "Even though there are no large-scale trials, what's the chance of all the [pre-] trials [using adequate dosing] all showing a benefit to using Ivermectin?" he asks.

"Andrew Hill, a senior researcher at Liverpool University, reports that the chance of an error in his meta-analysis [of the small trial studies] is only one in 5,000. In other words, the chance of his assertion that Ivermectin appears to work is wrong is only one in 5,000. There's only one in 5,000 chance that it doesn't decrease the risk of people dying," Freinkel says. "As my patients get sicker, I wonder about the downside to using it versus the 4,999 in 5,000 chance that it does have a benefit. Must I watch a patient die knowing there is so little downside of her taking a drug that may cure her? The law says so."

Ivermectin has been hailed by many since last year as a potential wonder drug in the fight against COVID-19. Merck, the drug's original manufacturer, has said that too little data exists to support the use of the drug on COVID-19 patients. The company is clearly not prepared to face the risk of damages claims should it not be as

effective as several mini-trials have indicated.

But, in the face of mounting pressure, the SA Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) announced last month that it had authorised a limited "compassionate and controlled-access programme" for Ivermectin to be used to treat COVID-19. Still, it stressed that only medical practitioners who applied to use the drug would be considered on a case-by-case basis, and wider access could be discussed only after large-scale testing and peer-review data became available.

The Israeli trial – like the others in South America, Bangladesh, and Egypt – was conducted in a small-scale programme. Professor Eli Schwartz, the director of the Center for Geographic Medicine at Sheba Medical Center in Tel-Hashomer, is excited with the findings. "Ivermectin is an excellent drug that has changed many aspects of dealing with infections caused by parasites," he says. "In many Western countries, they aren't especially familiar with it, it's not registered, and thus doctors are hesitant to use it."

Schwartz shared the results of the test carried out last year for the first time on the webinar. They haven't yet been reviewed.

"Our study looked at Ivermectin versus a placebo, using mild, non-hospitalised patients who had the virus," he says. "Our objective was to reduce the viral shedding time and evaluate the drug's efficacy in preventing progression."

In a double-blind test, drug doses were determined according to the weight of each patient, and were given regularly over three days. A total of 90 patients were involved (45 in each arm of the study).

"With Ivermectin, the viral load was lowered much faster," Schwartz says. "On day four, 57% of those who had received it were negative as opposed to

31% in the placebo group.

"From day six, more people on Ivermectin were negative, much more than in the placebo. It continued into day eight and 10. Ivermectin really had an impact, and patients quickly became negative or non-infectious."

He also noted that some of the patients were over 60 or had risk factors, yet none of those who had taken the drug deteriorated or required hospitalisation.

Schwartz believes that the results are promising, and suggests that patients can overcome the disease faster with Ivermectin, reducing the amount of isolation required while populations wait for vaccines.

"It could prevent clinical deterioration and the need for hospitalisation," he says. "If it proves antiviral, it can be used as a prophylactic. We should do more studies on these aspects." He stresses, however, that the drug is no substitute for vaccination.

"I'm not taking or prescribing Ivermectin at the moment," says Dr Sheri Fanaroff. "It may well be effective, but the formulations currently available in South Africa aren't regulated and thus not reliable or safe. "If I prescribed Ivermectin and my patient developed a neurological side effect, I wouldn't have any legal defence."

"The Israeli study didn't use people who are hospitalised or patients with severe disease," says pulmonologist Anton Meyberg. "In our hospital, we had eight patients that started with mild disease, all took Ivermectin in high doses, and they all demised. They all had pulmonary and neurological manifestations, and were extremely ill. "We have to be very careful with these small studies," Meyberg says. – **Jordan Moshe**

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# Texas freeze-up: How the Bush Family turned off the Lights



Last month an arctic storm swept south into Texas. The state's entire unprotected electricity system froze to a standstill, leaving citizens without light, heating, sanitation and water for four days

**W**HAT HAPPENED WAS ENTIRELY predictable," power distribution expert attorney Beth Emory said of the Texas blackouts. She told me this twenty years ago, after the first blackouts in Texas and California, following the cruel experiment called "deregulation" of the power industry.

Until 1992, the USA [like South Africa] had just about the lowest electricity prices in the world and the most reliable system.

For a century, power companies had been limited by law to recovering their provable costs plus a "reasonable," i.e. small, profit. But in 1992, George H. W. Bush, in the last gasps of his failed presidency, began to deregulate the industry.

Deregulation's principal promoters were Milton Friedman and George Stigler, who claimed that the problem

with regulated and publicly-owned systems was that they were too reliable. Utilities, which could only charge what they spent, were supposedly "gold plating" their systems – i.e. investing too much into making sure lights stayed on. That "problem" has been fixed.

"Deregulate?" is a misnomer. "Decriminalize" describes it best. With the "free market" supposedly setting the price of power, Texas-based Enron was freed to use such techniques as "Ricochet" and "Get Shorty" to blow prices through the roof when weather shut down power plants. (This week was not the first game of Texas Gouge'm.)

Enron was not the only Lone Star power pirate. Houston Power & Light was "ramping" plants up and down at



George W Bush

odd hours which whistleblowers said was deliberate.

Bush's son, Texas Gov. George W. Bush, signed a law in 1999 forcing the state's hapless customers to accept any price the "free" market dictated. Enron's CEO showed his appreciation by becoming number one donor for Dubya's presidential ambitions.

In February, wholesale electric prices in Texas, normally \$50 per megawatt-hour, busted over \$9,000/MWHR. Again. It happens with every cold snap and heat wave.

Every state in America interconnects their power lines to provide back-up in case of emergencies. Except Texas.

The federal government, can only

police utilities that are connected to the national grid. So, Texas literally cut itself off from the rest of the USA's electric system.

Neighbouring California is sitting on massive excess power capacity. With 80,000 megawatts of capacity, the Golden State often gives away power free to other states. This week, the sun is shining here in LA – and our solar, wind and hydro generators could easily un-thaw Texas if it wasn't for the Bushes.

Of course, the rulers of Texas, the beneficiaries of freezer-burn pricing, know this. This week, former Texas Gov. Rick Perry, Trump's first Energy Secretary, said, "Texans would happily be without electricity for longer than three days to keep the federal government out of their [Enron's?] business." I didn't need a crystal ball in 1998 when

I predicted that California, Texas, Oregon and Rio de Janeiro would go dark and cold if they deregulated their power markets.

In a series of lectures at Cambridge, the London School of Economics and the University of Sao Paulo, I said the screamingly obvious: There is no such thing as a "free" market in electricity. Electricity isn't a bagel. You can't skip it in the morning when the price goes berserk nor shop at another electricity store.

The alternative to blackouts and price gouging is Democracy. Regulation is merely the enforcement of publicly voted rules to protect the public from economic overlords.

This alternative to free market mania was first applied by the man who electrified America, President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Listen to FDR in Portland, Oregon, in 1932:

*To the people of the country I have but one answer on this subject. Judge me by the enemies I have made. Judge me by the selfish purposes of these utility leaders. My friends, my policy is as radical as the Constitution of the United States. I promise you this: Never shall the Federal Government part with its sovereignty or with its control of its power resources while I'm President of the United States.*

So, the solution to the deadly darkness is obvious: More Roosevelt, less Bush. – **Greg Palast**

[*Food for thought for those promoting wholesale privatisation of Eskom – Ed.*]

● **Greg Palast is the author of *The New York Times* bestsellers, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* and *Billionaires & Ballot Bandits* ■**

# The Dark Psychology of Social Networks

Why it feels like everything is going haywire, thanks to Facebook and Twitter



US Founding Father James Madison  
1751 – 1836

**T**HE U.S. CONSTITUTION WAS AN exercise in intelligent design. America's Founding Fathers [and, much later, the drafters of South Africa's constitution] knew that many democracies had been unstable and short-lived. But they were excellent psychologists, and they strove to create institutions and procedures that would work with human nature to resist the forces that had torn apart so many other attempts at self-governance.

For example, James Madison (1751-1836) wrote (in *Federalist No.10*) about his fear of the power of "faction," by which he meant strong partisanship or group interest that "inflamed [men] with mutual animosity" and made them forget about the common good. He thought that the vastness of the United States might offer some protection from the ravages of factionalism, because it would be hard for anyone to spread outrage over such a large distance. Madison presumed that factious or divisive leaders "may kindle a flame within their particular States, but will be unable to spread a general conflagration through the

other States." The US Constitution they designed included mechanisms to slow things down, let passions cool, and encourage reflection and deliberation.

Madison's design has proved durable. But what would happen to American democracy if, one day in the early 21st century, a technology appeared that – over the course of a decade – changed several fundamental parameters of social and political life? What if this technology greatly increased the amount of "mutual animosity" and the speed at which outrage spread? Think Trump and Twitter. America is going through such a time right now.

## WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA CHANGED

Facebook's early mission was "to make the world more open and connected". Many people assumed that a huge global increase in connectivity would be good for democracy. As social media has aged, however, optimism has faded: Online political discussions (often among anonymous strangers) are experienced as angrier and less civil than those in real life; networks



of partisans co-create worldviews that can become more and more extreme; disinformation campaigns flourish; violent ideologies lure recruits.

The problem may not be connectivity itself but rather the way social media turns so much communication into a public performance.

The social psychologist Mark Leary coined the term sociometer to describe the inner mental gauge that tells us, moment by moment, how we're doing in the eyes of others. We don't really need self-esteem, Leary argued; rather, the evolutionary imperative is to get others to see us as desirable partners for various kinds of relationships. Social media, with its displays of likes, friends, followers, and retweets, has pulled our sociometers out of our private thoughts and posted them for all to see.

If you constantly express anger in your private conversations, your friends will likely find you tiresome, but when there's an audience, the payoffs are different – outrage can boost your status. A 2017 study by William J Brady and other researchers at NYU measured the reach of half a million tweets and found that each moral or emotional word used in a tweet increased its virality by 20 percent, on average. Another 2017 study, by the Pew Research Center, showed that posts exhibiting “indignant disagreement” received nearly twice as much engagement – including likes and shares – as other types of content on Facebook.

The philosophers Justin Tosi and Brandon Warmke have proposed the useful phrase moral grandstanding to describe what happens when people use moral talk to enhance their prestige in a public forum. Each person strives to outdo previous speakers, leading to some common patterns. Grandstanders tend to “trump up moral charges, pile on in cases of public shaming, announce that anyone who disagrees with them is obviously wrong, or exaggerate emotional displays.”

Nuance and truth are casualties in this competition to gain the approval of the audience. Grandstanders scrutinize every word spoken by their opponents – and sometimes even their friends – for the potential to evoke public outrage. Context collapses. The

speaker's intent is ignored.

Human beings evolved to gossip, preen, manipulate, and ostracize. We are easily lured into this new gladiatorial circus, even when we know that it can make us cruel and shallow. As the Yale psychologist Molly Crockett has argued, the normal forces that might stop us from joining an outrage mob – such as time to reflect and cool off, or feelings of empathy for a person being humiliated – are attenuated when we can't see the person's face, and when we are asked, many times a day, to take a side by publicly “liking” the condemnation.

In other words, social media turns many of our most politically engaged citizens into Madison's nightmare: arsonists who compete to create the most inflammatory posts and images, which they can distribute across the country in an instant while their public sociometer displays how far their creations have traveled.

### UPGRADING THE OUTRAGE MACHINE

At its inception, social media felt very different than it does today. Friendster, Myspace, and Facebook all appeared between 2002 and 2004, offering tools that helped users connect with friends. The sites encouraged people to post highly curated versions of their lives, but they offered no way to spark contagious outrage. This changed with a series of small steps, designed to improve user experience, that collectively altered the way news and anger spread through society. In order to fix social media – and reduce its harm to democracy – we must try to understand this evolution.

When Twitter arrived in 2006, its primary innovation was the timeline: a constant stream of 140-character updates that users could view on their phone. The timeline was a new way of consuming information – an unending stream of content that, to many, felt like drinking from a fire hose.

Later that year, Facebook launched its own version, called the News Feed. In 2009, it added the “Like” button, for the first time creating a public metric for the popularity of content. Then it added another transformative innovation: an algorithm that determined which posts a user would see, based on predicted “engagement” – the likeli-

hood of an individual interacting with a given post, figuring in the user's previous likes. This innovation tamed the fire hose, turning it into a curated stream.

The News Feed's algorithmic ordering of content flattened the hierarchy of credibility. Any post by any producer could stick to the top of our feeds as long as it generated engagement. “Fake news” would later flourish in this environment, as a personal blog post was given the same look and feel as a story from *The New York Times*.

Twitter also made a key change in 2009, adding the “Retweet” button. Until then, users had to copy and paste older tweets into their status updates, a small obstacle that required a few seconds of thought and attention. The Retweet button essentially enabled the frictionless spread of content. A single click could pass someone else's tweet on to all of your followers—and let you share in the credit for contagious content. In 2012, Facebook offered its own version of the retweet, the “Share” button, to its fastest-growing audience: smartphone users.

Chris Wetherell, one of the engineers

**Citizens are now  
more connected  
to one another, on  
platforms that have  
been designed to make  
outrage contagious**

who created the Retweet button for Twitter, admitted to BuzzFeed earlier this year: “We might have just handed a 4-year-old a loaded weapon.”

The coup de grâce came in 2012 and 2013, when Upworthy and other sites began to capitalize on this new feature

set, pioneering the art of testing headlines across dozens of variations to find the version that generated the highest click-through rate.

This was the beginning of “You won’t believe ...” articles and their ilk, paired with images tested and selected to make us click impulsively. These articles were not usually intended to cause outrage (the founders of Upworthy were more interested in uplift). But the strategy’s success ensured the spread of headline testing, and with it emotional story-packaging, through new and old media alike. The next year, Russia’s Internet Research Agency began mobilizing its network of fake accounts, across every major social-media platform – exploiting the new outrage machine in order to inflame partisan divisions and advance Russian goals.

The internet, of course, does not bear sole responsibility for the pitch of political anger today. The media have been fomenting division since Madison’s time. A multiplicity of forces are pushing America – and the rest of the world – toward greater polarization. But social media in the years since 2013 has become a powerful accelerant for anyone who wants to start a fire.

### THE DECLINE OF WISDOM

Even if social media could be cured of its outrage-enhancing effects, it would still raise problems for the stability of democracy. One such problem is the degree to which the ideas and conflicts of the present moment dominate and displace older ideas and the lessons of the past.

As children grow up in America, rivers of information flow continually into their eyes and ears. Suppose we could capture and quantify three streams in particular: information that is new (created within the past month), middle-aged (created 10 to 50 years ago, by the generations that include the child’s parents and grandparents), and old (created more than 100 years ago).

Whatever the balance of these categories was in the 18th century, the balance in the 20th century surely shifted toward the new as radios and television sets became common. And that shift almost certainly became still

more pronounced, and quickly so, in the 21st century. When the majority of Americans began using social media regularly, around 2012, they hyper-connected themselves to one another in a way that massively increased their consumption of new information – entertainment and celebrity gossip, yes, but also daily or hourly political outrages and hot takes on current events – while reducing the share of older information. What might the effect of that shift be?

In 1790, the Anglo-Irish philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke wrote, “We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages.” Thanks to social media, we are embarking on a global experiment that will test whether Burke’s fear is valid. Social media pushes people of all ages toward a focus on the scandal, joke, or conflict of the day, but the effect may be particularly profound for younger generations, who have had less opportunity to acquire older ideas and information before plugging themselves into the social-media stream.

Our cultural ancestors were probably no wiser than us, on average, but the ideas we inherit from them have undergone a filtration process. We mostly learn of ideas that a succession of generations thought were worth passing on. That doesn’t mean these ideas are always right, but it does mean that they are more likely to be valuable, in the long run, than most content generated within the past month. Even though they have unprecedented access to all that has ever been written and digitized, members of Gen Z (those born after 1995 or so) may find themselves less familiar with the accumulated wisdom of humanity than any recent generation, and therefore more prone to embrace ideas that bring social prestige within their immediate network yet are ultimately misguided.

For example, a few right-wing social-media platforms have enabled the most reviled ideology of the 20th century to draw in young men hungry for a sense of meaning and belonging

and willing to give Nazism a second chance. Left-leaning young adults, in contrast, seem to be embracing socialism and even, in some cases, communism with an enthusiasm that at times seems detached from the history of the 20th century. And polling suggests that young people across the political spectrum are losing faith in democracy.

### IS THERE ANY WAY BACK?

Social media has changed the lives of millions of Americans with a suddenness and force that few expected. The question is whether those changes might invalidate assumptions made by Madison and the other Founders as they designed a system of self-governance. Compared with people in the 18th century – and even the late 20th century – citizens are now more connected to one another, in ways that increase public performance and foster moral grandstanding, on platforms that have been designed



Donald Trump in Jon McNaughton’s painting, *Respect the Flag* (2018)



to make outrage contagious, all while focusing people's minds on immediate conflicts and untested ideas, untethered from traditions, knowledge, and values that previously exerted a stabilizing effect. This, we believe, is why many Americans – and citizens of many other countries, too – experience democracy as a place where everything is going haywire.

It doesn't have to be this way. Social media is not intrinsically bad, and has the power to do good – as when it brings to light previously hidden harms and gives voice to previously powerless communities. Every new communication technology brings a range of constructive and destructive effects, and over time, ways are found to improve the balance. Many researchers, legislators, charitable foundations, and tech-industry insiders are now working together in search of such improvements. We suggest three types of reform that might help:

(1) Reduce the frequency and intensity of public performance. If social media creates incentives for moral grandstanding rather than authentic communication, then we should look for ways to reduce those incentives. One such approach already being evaluated by some platforms is “deme-rication,” the process of obscuring like and share counts so that individual pieces of content can be evaluated on their own merit, and so that social-media users are not subject to continual, public popularity contests.

(2) Reduce the reach of unverified accounts. Bad actors – trolls, foreign agents, and domestic provocateurs

– benefit the most from the current system, where anyone can create hundreds of fake accounts and use them to manipulate millions of people. Social media would immediately become far less toxic, and democracies less hackable, if the major platforms required basic identity verification before anyone could open an account. (Posting itself could remain anonymous, and registration would need to be done in a way that protected the information of users who live in countries where the government might punish dissent. For example, verification could be done in collaboration with an independent nonprofit organization.)

(3) Reduce the contagiousness of low-quality information

For example, just after a user submits a comment, AI can identify text that's similar to comments previously flagged as toxic and ask, “Are you sure you want to post this?” This extra step has been shown to help Instagram users rethink hurtful messages. The quality of information that is spread by recommendation algorithms could likewise be improved by giving groups of experts the ability to audit the algorithms for harms and biases.

Many Americans may think that the chaos of our time has been caused by the current occupant of the White House, and that things will return to normal whenever he leaves. But if our analysis is correct, this will not happen. Too many fundamental parameters of social life have changed. The effects of these changes were apparent by 2014, and these changes themselves facili-

tated the election of Donald Trump.

If we want our democracy to succeed – indeed, if we want the idea of democracy to regain respect in an age when dissatisfaction with democracies is rising – we'll need to understand the many ways in which today's social-media platforms create conditions that may be hostile to democracy's success. And then we'll have to take decisive action to improve social media. – **Jonathan Haidt** ■

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*Jonathan Haidt is a social psychologist at the New York University Stern School of Business. He is the author of The Righteous Mind and the co-author of The Coddling of the American Mind, which originated as a September 2015 Atlantic story.*



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## Clipping those vultures' wings

I'VE TOLD YOU BEFORE AND NOW I AM going to tell you again. Please, pretty please with sugar on top, listen this time. Do not be intimidated by lawyers going after you for debt collection.

Here's a success story from Barberton that I hope, or rather trust, will give you a bit of the fighting spirit you need to protect yourself from these vultures.

Now, a good friend calls me and says hey, I have a problem with a debt. OK, I say, what's up? who do you owe? and how much are they hitting you up for?

Well I owe for my child's school fees and the school has handed me over to lawyers, he says. OK, I say, if you owe you owe, now what is the problem? Well, he says, I agreed to settle but they had already instituted a debit order, so I said to them "here is a deposit of R2,000 and when the debit order goes through I will expect the R2,000 back." Yeah right!

Anyway, the amount my friend owed was R4,300, which if I may add he had no problem acknowledging. After all he did not want his kid thrown out of the school, thus the R2,000 deposit.

A short time later the debit order also goes through, now this vulture has a whopping R6,300 paid to her. Hey, says my friend! What about my R2,000 deposit to be refunded?

Typical legal vulture says that is going to costs. Anyway letters go back and forth with my friend "kindly" requesting the refund of the R2,000. And like the idiot he was being he says to me Bheki I am hoping this lawyer will see that I am respecting her as a colleague. I say colleague, you are an interpreter at the Magistrates Court she does not see you as a colleague and besides these lawyers in the debt collection business don't give a s\*\*t who you are.

I was tempted to say to him you are just a black s\*\*t that they can take advantage of. But then I reminded myself that these guys don't care if you are black, white, green, purple or

blue; all you are to them is easy pickings.

And why are you easy pickings? Because chances are you have failed to educate yourselves about the basic protections that are afforded to debtors.

Yes, the courts and parliament are your best friends regarding these debt matters. Now please, pretty please, get a hold of the "Schedule of Particulars", this is a document provided by the Department of Justice (DOJ) which prescribes what costs these vultures can add on to your debt: phone calls, emails, sms's etc. This is how they balloon your debt.

Then also look at parliament's "Debt Collectors Amendment Bill of 2016", that too will tell you how you can protect yourself from being overcharged for costs. Look, if you owe you owe, but it does not mean you need to get ripped off.

Back to my friend. I advised him to hit this so-called colleague with a letter of demand. He did, and

according to an SMS he sent me after delivering the letter the legal "vulture" immediately paid the R2,000 into his e-wallet. But threatened to come after him for services rendered. I said what services? To hell with her.

Sorry about the curses, but in a situation like this all kindness and proper language goes out the window. I mean after all, do you really think the American Joint Chiefs of Staff said "hey these guys hit us let's hit back" after 9/11 in New York City. No way I went to a military college in the States, they probably said,... Well, you can guess the words they used.

In closing, If you are in debt, fine, make means to pay your debt, but do not allow yourself to be taken advantage of. Once again, remember the Schedule of Particulars from the DOJ and the Debt Collectors Amendment Bill of 2016. Download them and remember the Magistrates in your local courts are your friends, they know about these regulations and the shady practices of debt collectors. ■



*"I'm having an out-of-money experience."*

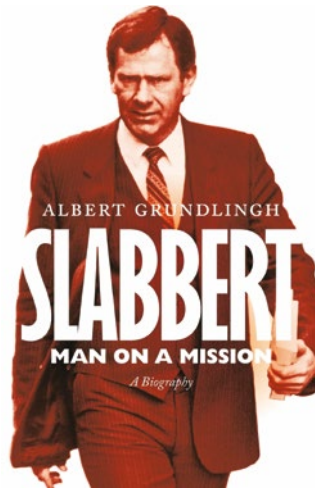




## A man of honesty, resolution and character

**A**LBERT GRUNDLINGH'S LAUDATORY but enjoyable biography provides a timely reminder of the considerable role Frederick van Zyl Slabbert played on the South African political stage in the 1970's and 80's, when his main mission was to broaden democracy and facilitate negotiations between white South Africans – the Afrikaners in particular – and black South Africans, the exiled ANC in particular.

Slabbert and his twin sister, Marcia, were conceived by a young unmarried couple in 1939. Petrus and Barbara engaged in what Slabbert has described as an indiscriminate night of passion and the two were born on 2 March 1940. Petrus, aged 22, enlisted and barely a week before the twins were born was sent off to fight in the Second World War leaving his two children in the care of their 19-year-old mother who, on occasion, drank too much. After the war, Petrus returned to Pretoria and secured employment in the civil service. Petrus and Barbara were married some years after the twins were born but divorced soon afterwards. Barbara came to despise her former husband. At the insistence of her father she gave custody of her children to their grandfather who then sent them off to live with their aunt and uncle in Linden, Johannesburg. For high school they returned to Pretoria, where any social awkwardness occasioned by his unstable family and their political allegiance – they were United Party supporters – was overcome by his skill at rugby and his good looks. Slabbert started his university studies at Wits University. After a year there, he moved to Stellenbosch where he had hoped to study to become a dominee. He eventually abandoned the idea and turned to sociology instead. Having graduated with distinction in 1963 and with a PhD in 1967 he started an academic career which took him to Rhodes in Grahamstown and then to Wits in Johannesburg.



**SLABBERT: MAN ON A MISSION**  
by Albert Grundlingh  
(Jonathan Ball)

In the early 1970's the Progressive Party, in an attempt to broaden its support base, sought the backing of prominent Afrikaners and Slabbert was recruited and agreed to be the party candidate in Rondebosch in the 1974 general election. He won with a majority of 1568 votes. Gerald Shaw wrote in the *Cape Times* that Slabbert was a young Afrikaner of unusual intellectual brilliance who never puts a political foot wrong and answers trick questions like a seasoned campaigner. He comes across, wrote Shaw, as a man of honesty, resolution and strength of character. He is the most remarkable newcomer in politics for some considerable time.

As an academic turned politician, Slabbert brought unusual intellectual rigour to Parliament when elected in 1974 and transformed the modest Progressive Party into a force that challenged the National Party government. As Eglin faltered over an issue involving foreign affairs it became clear Slabbert was

his obvious successor – which came about at a party executive meeting held in July 1979. Slabbert became the youngest official leader of the opposition in the history of the South African Parliament. He shone in this role and quickly became popular in the Press and in opposition circles. After cementing his position locally it became clear he had to widen his horizons and he met with leaders of the ANC in Lusaka in October 1985. He was duly impressed with Thabo Mbeki and other high ranking members of their executive, coming to the conclusion they were leaders of substance.

He soon realised he could not achieve his objectives by remaining in Parliament. Disillusioned by the paralysis of formal white politics, and by the growing polarisation of South African society – and to the consternation and disappointment of all, myself included – he resigned at the end of the 'no-confidence debate' in February 1986 causing upheaval in the ranks of the Progressive Federal Party. Slabbert's purpose was to explore democratic alternatives to the impasse into which the country had been led under apartheid. Eglin was re-elected leader but the party had been dealt a mortal blow and soon went into decline. To pursue his objective of broadening democracy Slabbert established IDASA – the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa – which led to the group of leading Afrikaners that travelled to Dakar in 1987 to meet the exiled ANC. Many saw the trek as a breakthrough, while others felt he had been taken in, yet his reputation – for honesty, integrity, wit and courage – still towers above many of his contemporaries. Slabbert was always different. A worthwhile read.

■ Peter Soal was a PFP MP from 1982 to 1994.

*F Van Zyl Slabbert was a member of Noseweek's board of directors for many years and helped secure funding for its first major expansion. – Ed.*



## So close and yet so far

**W**HO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT that power outages on the East Rand would bring the community so much closer to each other during lockdown? And that, amongst the chaos and confusion, order would erupt? Certainly not me that day I joined the queue to pay my final notice fee.

Traditionally, 'standing in line' at the Ekurhuleni municipality consists of bundling together as close as you can to the door. 'Social distancing' means elbowing others out of the way, the old and infirm first. This time, I was surprised to see a formation, not entirely unlinear, extending from the entrance to the corner. A man, I am guessing a builder or architect, had become so annoyed at the lack of COVID discipline in the queue that he took charge. Masks were not enough. He went to his car to fetch his builder's pouch with chalk and started marking out 1.5m intervals on the pavement. The queue became twice as long, forcing us halfway around the block and into that cold shady section in front of the Pakistani's cell phone shop. The mob bristled. The moment Bob-the-builder walked around the corner, we shuffled closer to the entrance, only to take two steps back when he returned to check on us. We were a COVID concertina, line-dancing in and out, to great amusement of the car guards – and the Pakistani.

Once you pass through the doors – 'poof!' New rules. Whatever tenuous bonds of fear, duty or chalk marks held the crowd in a semi-orderly configuration outside, now split into three parts: 'queries,' 'payments' and 'reconnections.' Plus, there were new forces

of nature to contend with – the tellers. Newton might tell you that every action has an equal and opposite reaction, but he was not from Germiston. If he was, he would have known to shut the hell up as everyone knows that a teller/counter clerk will push back three times harder for every inch you gain. You in a hurry? They'll slow right down. You are on their clock, in their universe. The time-space continuum will warp for you, as it did for Bob-the-Builder.



Here his Quixotic tilts to keep people 1.5 metres apart quickly hit a brick wall. The line for 'queries' was much longer than the other two. He had to double the line back on itself, winding its way through the room like an anaconda.

In the meantime, a splinter group had formed at counters 9 and 10; the 'reconnections' group. These were the people who had survived 'queries' and somehow could afford 'payments.' They considered themselves superior in a Darwinian sense. They made it clear that we should stay very far away from them as our queuing rules

did not apply there. Counters 9 and 10 thus formed two straight stripes. We had all become unwitting pieces in a giant snakes and ladders game, the board only visible to God and, maybe, Bob-the-Builder. Fate threw one more dice – it started raining outside. Security allowed a dozen more people to push through the door.

Kaboom! People who were technically last in line for 'queries' were now first in line for counter 9, and you can imagine how that pissed them off. The 'payments' queue, who previously had their back to the guys in 'queries', now faced the people lined up at counter 10 head-on. In an effort to stay socially distant from each other, we were the closest we had ever been. The tension was Newtonian. You dared not breathe, for more than one reason.

If you think that a butterfly flapping its wings in China could cause chaos, it is nothing compared to what that old man coughing up wet phlegm at counter 5 achieved that day. The room heaved and recoiled like a pinball machine on 'tilt.'

In the resulting chaos, Bob-the-Builder quickly marked a position for himself at the front of the 3 queues, did his business and vanished into a vacuum.

That left the rest of us with a Pascallian wager. Whether we paid our bills or not, chances were we would not have electricity anyway. The infrastructure in our area is falling apart. We have Schrödinger's electricity: Even when it is on, it is off. The mob shook itself like a bag of potatoes and re-assembled in pockets of adequate order. We settled in, gambling on the side of hope.

Someone offered the old man at Counter 5 their seat. And a handkerchief. ■



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