7 Conclusion: Paternal Despotism in Private and Public Life

‘You can’t have a democratic state without having a democratic family.’
Gloria Steinem, 1995

AUTHORITARIAN AND BRUTAL TREATMENT OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS

Before launching into an unflattering portrayal of white South Africans, it is necessary to emphasise that a small number of Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans have dedicated their lives to the struggle for racial justice in that country, and some of them have lost their lives for this cause. The simplistic portrayal of all white people as extreme racists and all black people as noble enemies of injustice is all too common outside of South Africa. Readers should bear this in mind as they read the following pages because it becomes too cumbersome to repeatedly refer to ‘many’, ‘most’ or ‘the vast majority’ of Afrikaners and/or English-speaking South Africans every time these groups are mentioned.

Although the authoritarian and brutal treatment of black people by Afrikaners has been voluminously documented, the fact that Afrikaners are more implicated in this behaviour than English-speaking South Africans is less widely known outside the country. While the vast majority of white South Africans have shared the desire to maintain white power and privilege, there have nevertheless been significant differences in the ideas of Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans about how to do this, as well as in the extremes to which they have been willing to go in attempting to perpetuate white interests.

The Afrikaner patriarchs held the reins of power in South Africa for more than 40 years. They believed that they were God’s chosen people whose divine mission was to establish control over the indigenous people, whom they viewed as inferior heathens ‘damned to servitude’ (Giliomee, 1979, p. 92; also see De Villiers, 1987, p. 310). ‘United by a belief in the
God-given nature of white supremacy over blacks', most Afrikaners 'viewed the state's monopoly of force and authority over the individual as a divine gift' (Danaher, 1984, p. 66). Whether or not these religious beliefs served to generate or to intensify Afrikaners' racism, or merely reflect their political interests, is an old debate that I am in no position to resolve. More importantly, religion and politics were so thoroughly integrated for Afrikaners that trying to separate them is a questionable enterprise.

Although sharing the Afrikaners' view of black people as inferior heathens who needed to be converted to Christianity, English-speaking South Africans have been far less inclined to draw on religion to justify their racial prejudices and politics. Perhaps their sense of superiority has been so firmly in place for such a long time that they did not feel the need to turn to the Bible for justification. Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that English-speaking South Africans have been significantly less fanatical in both their religious and their political beliefs.

While English-speaking South Africans have deplored the extreme manifestation of Afrikaner racial politics, they have nevertheless enjoyed the benefits of white privilege that the Afrikaners' policies preserved. While portraying themselves as blameless critics of apartheid, they relied on the Afrikaners to do the dirty work of maintaining white supremacy. It is obviously impossible to know whether English-speaking South Africans would have become more fanatical about their racial politics had they been the dominant force in the South African political scene after 1945.

Not only have Afrikaners been primarily responsible for maintaining white privilege and power in recent years by virtue of the fact that they governed the country from 1948 until 1994; they have also demonstrated a fervent sense of righteousness and devotion to this task. This has enabled them to feel justified in their heinous acts of exploitation and savage behaviour towards black South Africans.

The policy of apartheid that the Afrikaners devised is a unique manifestation of racism peculiar to South Africa. It is also the most extreme form of anti-black racism ever articulated and systematically implemented by white people in the twentieth century. Two examples of blatant racist statements made by representatives of Afrikanerdom over the years may help to convey their fanatical pro-apartheid and sexist mentality.

G. F. van Froneman, Nationalist Party Member of Parliament who later became the Deputy Minister of Justice, Mines and Planning, said in 1969:

This African labour force [in the 'white' areas] must not be burdened with superfluous appendages such as wives, children and dependents who could not provide service. (Bernstein, 1975, p. 12)