

Right back at ya! – Zuma’s Reflective Blaming

Welcome to the Back-talk Café. Wait for the maître D to seat you, she is always dressed in nice African fashions. The cooks at the back are these Indian brothers, who love it spicy. They even have South African passports now. The waiters are mostly black with a few quota whites and coloureds. The Owner sits at his own table in the shadows, he is the one with the shiny shaved head. His table is near the back door. He slips out if any clients arrive in full dress uniform.

Meanwhile, the waiters are trained to talk back. They are as sassy as the food is spicy. And this is not just banter, they are sharp when it comes to political retorts. They must peruse the headlines at the News Stand down the street before coming to work each morning. Because they know how to tow the party line and how to keep customers in their place.

Only occasionally when those former waiters who lost their jobs come in, wearing red overalls, do they fall silent. But those guys never come in alone, they always take up a whole booth. Strength in numbers. No one talks back to them, they are too populist.

The décor of this place is one attraction – it was redecorated after the last Owner went out of business. The clientele is also attractive – mixing people from all walks of life, speaking many languages. The menu is good – spicy Indian fare. But the coup de grace here is the Back-talk. These waiters are like Rosanne herself, they always get the last word. So there is a lot of laughter, and they expect huge tips. If you don’t tip heavily, they will blacklist you. Next time you come for a meal, the talk-back will get nasty and personal. They can cross the line from policy banter to crimen injuria. They can play the man, not the ball. And the Owner is not a Referee – if anything, he is their Coach.

This is my allegorical name for Parliament – the Back-talk Café. The ruling party operates with this ethos that psychologists call “reflective blaming” or sometimes “reflective transference”.

So the Tax Collector’s retort to the Public Protector’s State of Capture report is the approval of a tax rebate of millions to the Guptas. When challenged about this and other ironies, he says that the State must pay for his legal fees. This is quintessential back-talk.

You should hear the howlings, the caustic remarks of the power brokers, the allegations that they fire back! You would recognize it all as what psychologists call “abuserese.” Do they take us for invertebrates? We need to show them some backbone.

In the excuses of these power brokers, we see a tactic that is very commonly used by abusers. It has become standard fare under the rubric of “ANC unity”. On the street they call it “blame-shifting”, but on the psychologist’s sofa it is called “reflective transference”. Watch how it works! Bullies must be confronted and told that their abusive attitudes are exposed and rejected. But no matter how many examples you can cite, they may not listen. Abusers must be confronted. They must be called out from the “culture of silence” that wraps around them like a blanket of protection.

This is when it gets ironic. The very same allegation that is made against them, they reflect back: "Well, you say that we are abusers, but you are abusing us by saying so." It's like speaking in an echo chamber - everything you say comes back at you. We see this in children: "Well you do it too!" Of course the abuser is using this tactic to remove at least half of the blame from himself and put it back on you.

When this reflective blaming hits you, how do you respond? If you are not careful, it can do its intended damage by making it look like you accept the blame. Look the abuser in the eye and say "I reject everything you say. Don't attempt to remove guilt from yourself by deflecting it to me. I am not the guilty one. It is you." You can expect to hear more howling like: "No one has EVER spoken to me this way!" That is clever, because IT IS TRUE. But that "culture of silence" is a huge part of the problem.

Our guilty silence is certainly part of the problem. I liked that judge this week who said to the accused, who was pleading not-guilty for murder: "You are a liar". That is the kind of backbone that we need in politics too. *The cure for back-talk is backbone.*

Listen to the rallying cries as Zuma's day in court gets closer...

"There is no such thing as State Capture." Well then, where did the R100 billion go?

"No one captured the State." So how could the Gupta brothers offer the post of Finance Minister to Mcebisi Jonas for a bag full of money?

"I have done nothing wrong". You cannot be a player and a referee at the same time. Let the courts decide that and stop the back-talk.

The Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association, headed by the Deputy Minister of Defense and Military Veterans, Kebby Maphatsoe, has been confronted by five former MK veterans, headed by Omry Makgoale. They recently won a significant court victory – which points in the right direction. Stand up to the "reflective blaming" and stand your ground. Reject everything they say and don't let them try to deflect their transgressions onto you.

It is a pity that church leaders are among those vocalizing this reflective blaming. They should rather espouse the forgiveness of sins – predicated on Confession. Since when is the church into "reflective transference"? The solution that Christianity offers is scapegoating – piling those sins on Jesus, the lamb of God. Repent!

They are apostles of JZ, not of JC.