

POLITICS

ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA

Nic Borain tackles the impact of the World Cup on South Africa now that vuvuzela-fever has blown over

YOU ARE reading in some unimaginable future South Africa where the FIFA World Cup is over and Sepp Blatter and his merry gang have packed the money into shrink-wrapped bundles and headed off for new lands to bedazzle and conquer.

Here in the past, my ten-year-old son has just insisted I pay the full price for a clip-on flag for the car window outside Ultra Liquors in Green Point, Cape Town.

The tired Zimbabwean woman quickly plucks my country's flag from the rainbow of national colours in her bundle and thrusts it at my son.

It gives a proud snap in the faithful Cape Town wind as he fixes it to the car. 'It's awesome!' he cries and we both stand back to look, silly grins on our faces. Even the exhausted flag-seller gives the softest smile as she takes the money and moves on.

We drive into the sunny morning through a city transformed. To our left the stadium is like a great ship sailing among the beautiful new ribbons of highway between Table Mountain and the sea.

My son's face is luminous with joy; I have never felt this conflicted.

I track 'political' trends for a living. The kind that best reveal where we are going: unemployment, poverty, inequality, BEE, affirmative action, health and education outcomes, government performance, crime and the changing attitudes of our citizens.

My clients are professional investors who have to be especially cautious because they invest other peoples' savings and pensions.

There's nothing to suggest that big investors won't make loads of money in South Africa but many of the social/political indicators I follow are either stubbornly negative or are heading decisively downwards – below the symbolically important levels of the 1994 baseline.

We have the highest levels of unemployment of the 62 countries tracked by Bloomberg; every way you slice and dice the numbers, 50 per cent of South Africans live below a most basic poverty line and we have the highest levels of inequality of any country that collects the data.

In and of itself this would be scary, but it is the failure of leadership that is most stark. We imagined in the early '90s that we had the finest politicians in the world. I cannot think when more promise has been attached to a group of men and women than the leaders of the African National



When Nic Borain isn't blowing on his vuvuzela, he analyses politics and puts finger to keyboard for his blog nicborain.wordpress.com

Congress emerging from prison and exile and their various preparations to govern. They negotiated the country away from its path of self-destruction.

It seems impossible to think of our leaders as part of even the much diminished lineage of those names that were chanted at illegal gatherings throughout the '70s and '80s: Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela, Joe Slovo, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathadra – the titular heroes of the revolution.

The advantages we enjoyed in 1994 – of overwhelming popular mandate, clear-eyed leaders with the burning idealism to transform the conditions of life of the poorest and the trust and support of the world – seem to have been squandered in venality and mediocrity.

Now, in our darkest hour, they bring us the 2010 FIFA World Cup and the nations of the world to celebrate our place in it.

I know it is bread and circuses but I seem unable to resist the thrumming of the vuvuzelas and my excitement is threatening to send me into the streets to embrace the young guidebook-clutching Germans who are gathering to nod approvingly at the various stadiums.

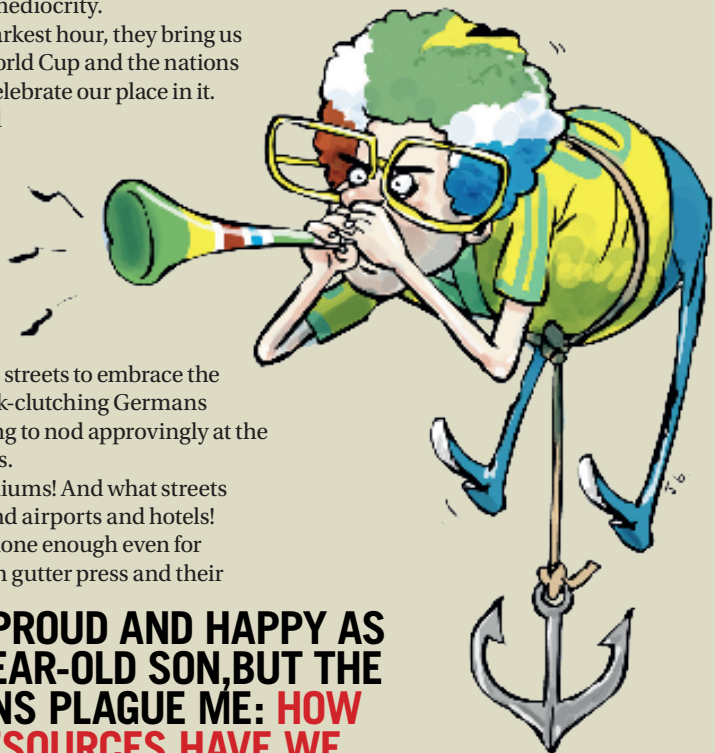
And what stadiums! And what streets and highways and airports and hotels! Surely we have done enough even for the racist English gutter press and their

predictions of ravaging bands of machete wielding tribesmen?

I am as proud and happy as my 10-year-old son, but the questions plague me. How many resources have we diverted to make this happen? Or would those resources just have been squandered or stolen like so much else since 1994? Should we then think of this as money better spent and some advantage locked in?

These are weighty questions and I cannot now seem to find adequate answers. So, I am just going to have to go with my heart and let myself join the happy throng. But with one proviso: I am going to keep an eye on the bad guys. And that will be easy. At every ceremonial moment and on every television screen they will be the ones over there, in suits with the gleaming smiles, handing each other compliments and bits of paper and brass and platitudes and pompous handshakes.

We will be the ones over here, blowing the vuvuzelas, partaking in the mysteries of universal human brotherhood and glorying in the beautiful game in my beautiful country. And ne'er the twain shall meet. **GQ**



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