

*Is It Just Me Or Is Everything Kak? The Whinger's Guide to South Africa From AA to JZ.*  
by Tim Richman and Grant Schreiber. (Two Dogs) R97  
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Well, the title says it all, or almost all: this is a bad-tempered, foul-mouthed, unconstructive review of the State of the Rainbow Nation a few years on. The AA of the sub-title, you will not be surprised to hear, is neither the Automobile Association nor Alcoholics Anonymous, but Affirmative Action. As for JZ – well, you've guessed it. Two Dogs publishers specialise in books for that near-extinct species, the South African Male. Previous titles include *Defending the Caveman* and *Modern Man is a Wimp ... Long Live Real Men!* This new title is right in there with the boys, because whereas no doubt women also do whinge, they don't whinge in just this language about just these things. Admittedly, some of the whinges are non-genderspecific – our Minister of Health, for instance, pisses everyone off (except of course, our President), across all boundaries of race, class and gender. In a special sense, she may be said to have done more than Madiba to unite the nation. Paris Hilton, too, sets on edge the teeth of everyone over the age of thirteen. And everybody who doesn't actually own Crocs detests them. So on some issues there could be a communal whinge.

But only men, and real men at that, go homicidal in the presence of the Braai Meddler, 'the guy who steals the tongs when you're not looking, pokes the coals indiscriminately, pricks the boerie without asking.' And if you don't know what a boerie is, you're probably not who this book was meant for.

Richman and Schreiber, in short, are not in touch with their feminine side, though it's not something you'd want to tell them in the pub. Not that you'd have the opportunity -- they'd be too busy whingeing about Kobus Wiese (and if you don't know who he is ...), vuvuzelas, André Markgraaff and Wayne Rooney to listen to your analysis of what's wrong with them. Besides, they're probably not interested in hearing what's wrong with them: in spite of the implied disclaimer in the title (*Is It Just Me?*), they clearly feel that Everything's Kak because everybody else is. Indeed, on "Other people" their entry is brutally to the point: "They really are terrible. And they smell."

I may be giving the impression that Richman/Schreiber are specimens of the kind of South African Male that crowds you off the road in his SUV, shouts insults at the ref, and hasn't yet caught up on post-apartheid racial attitudes.

This is not the case. If many of their targets (Mbeki, Manto, Nqakula, Yengeni and of course JZ) are black, that is because they are whingeing about bad governance, and the government happens to be overwhelmingly black. True, they whinge about "The race card", but only to explain that theirs is in fact the anti-racist stand: "It is not wrong to call a black man an asshole if that's what he is. After all, assholes come in a variety of colours. As do racists."

Indeed, one might say that their most frequent term of abuse – asshole – is truly non-racist and non-sexist, and applied as such: "In case you've ever sat waiting behind a Sandton mommy in her Pajero while she's yakking on her phone, or had a Russian bouncer-type driving right up your backside in an X5, and suspected that most SUV drivers are assholes who don't know how to drive, various auto-industry reports will confirm your suspicions." . That, extract, incidentally, comes from a long entry on

“Hummers”, which also manages to dispose of Americans (“It’s like they intentionally set out to make the rest of the world hate them.”)

And if Richman/Schreiber whinge a lot, they certainly do not imply that things used to be better. They reserve particular scorn for “the bitter expat [who] loves nothing more than harping on about how terrible South Africa has become since ‘they’ took over.” As they say: “You’ve chosen to move on. Now get over it, you big wet bags.”

In short: if you’ve recently emigrated to Perth, drive an SUV, wear Crocs, are a Sharks fan, or heaven forbid, a Paris Hilton fan, speak on a cellphone in the cinema, go cycling in pink Lycra budgie-smugglers and/or prick the boerie, this book is not for you – unless, indeed, you are exactly who it’s for. If you’re none of these, buy the book anyway: you’re bound to find a whinge or two to share. I was delighted to find, for instance, that other people (well, some other people) share my detestation of leaf blowers, those pointless machines that blow the leaves from one end of the garden to the other and sound like a Boeing taking off: “the god among kak inventions,” according to our authors.

This, then, is the ideal book for that Season of Enforced Good Cheer, as an antidote to the carols and the grandchildren. It will reinforce your prejudices, reassure you that it’s Other People’s fault – but also perhaps make you wonder whether you’re not one of the Other People. So you’ll enjoy it *and* it will be good for you – which is an odd but welcome effect of all that whingeing.