

Cup brings out our true colours

THIS World Cup has once again demonstrated that there are two South Africas.

The one South Africa is bitter, cynical, dismissive and angry. No matter what goes right in the country, it points out the wrong. No matter how successful the World Cup, it sees only incompetence and demise.

These are mainly, though not exclusively, white South Africans. They carry hurts — some of them were pained through crime, and sit comfortably in Australia or other white-dominant states, but take every opportunity to rant about things down in Southern Africa.

Others cannot afford to leave and simply sit here spewing anger and filth at anything suggesting that the country is turning the corner on the economy or at home affairs.

Their greatest fear is that it will go well with this post-apartheid state, and that their sometimes outright racist obsessions will prove their nonsense wrong: that black

It reveals a country divided into heroes and pessimists

people cannot run decent governments.

This is the South Africa of the bloggers, those faceless, idle cowards who wait up through the night for the next columnist to attack for daring to suggest things might be going better in parts of the country. In their twisted logic, they see a seamless connection between Mugabe, Aids, climate change and teenage pregnancy.

These spoilers are also black. They are the cynical opportunists who work at Eskom, who see an opportunity to embarrass the country by launching strikes at the height of the World Cup.

They care about nothing else but their own pockets. It is a small group of people who would step on anyone to enrich themselves. They use the "r" word recklessly ('you are a racist') to position themselves for greater advantage.

But there is another South Africa. This is, I would like to believe, the majority in the population. These are South Africans who recognise that you cannot undo 350 years of colonialism and apartheid over a weekend. They recognise our problems.

But they also acknowledge and celebrate our progress as a nation, whether it is the turnaround at Sars and home affairs, or the immaculate management of the World Cup. This group remains stubbornly hopeful, retaining faith in ordinary South Africans to make this country work, with or without the morally impoverished political classes.

I heard these hundreds of voices on call-in radio stations this past week as several hosts invited people to comment on the World Cup.

The callers praised the management capacity of our leaders, the

improvements in roads and transportation, the mass movement of crowds, the efficiency of justice through the special courts.

Many of them talked about how home affairs had raised its game since the start of the soccer tournament. These are not mindless Pollyannas, but hopeful citizens who want us to broaden and retain the quality of these services beyond the World Cup.

I saw these people in Soweto, black and white, coming together around the two final games of the Bulls in the Super 14. I read these people on my Facebook page, mainly students, who revel in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness the soccer extravaganza.

I observed this spirit of optimism among the thousands of volunteers giving of their time and energy.

So, with due respect to former President Thabo Mbeki, we do have

two nations, but I prefer to divide our world into the cynics and the optimists, the bitter and the hopeful, the opportunists and the true patriots, the racists and the nation-builders.

I got a call the day before the France versus South Africa match in Bloemfontein. It was from one of the most fearless commentators on South African public life, based in Cape Town. She said that she wanted to donate her ticket for that match to one of my students.

"But give it to the poorest of the poor!" was her instruction. I called such a student to say that the ticket would arrive by overnight courier from Cape Town. The joy of the young man was unbelievable.

The generosity of the giver was truly moving. I know of people who sacrificed their World Cup tickets and gave them to the gardener or the domestic. This is the South Africa I wish to commend today.

Into which South Africa do you fall?